

Isolation Is Not The Answer

It is natural to want to isolate ourselves from unpleasantness and disrespect. We want to avoid the depravity of this world. But isolation is not the answer.

Introduction

The world can be a scary place. Wars, riots, financial instability, and the moral breakdown of society can weigh on us heavily. False accusations and lies directed at you at work or school can wear you down to the point you just want to give in or walk away. There are no easy answers to encourage you during these times.

The same holds true for the Church, as well. Societal norms and values seem to be eroding all around us. The moral core of society and the general notion of being respectful and decent seem to have fallen away. Terms like tolerance and equity have been redefined to mean something almost completely different than what has been in the past.

What are we to do as individuals and as the Church? Isolation is not the answer in most situations.

Can't Stick Your Head in The Sand

For a long time, it was thought that ostriches would bury their heads in the sand when they were afraid. The thought was that if they cannot see what is about to attack them, they are safe. Zoologists and other experts have since dispelled this thought as a myth, but it has given us a great illustration.

Another illustration is a child and a blanket. Small children will often hide under a blanket thinking no one can see them. Again, the thought is if they can't see anyone, no one can see them.

As adults and as the Church we sometimes just want to go and hide. We do not want the focus to be on us. We look for ways to avoid unpleasant situations. We ignore the rude or unethical supervisor in hopes that he will leave us alone and we'll still be able to keep our job. We may try to avoid a bully or give in to them, hoping they will leave us alone when they really bully us all the more, and others too.

Hiding from our problems, whether we created them or someone else does, is rarely the answer. Sometimes short-term isolation is okay to regain a proper perspective.

Short Term Isolation is Okay

King Solomon gives us some very wise words in the book of Ecclesiastes. Let's read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

(1) There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: (2) a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, (3) a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, (4) a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, (5) a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, (6) a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, (7) a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, (8) a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.



There is a time to isolate ourselves from a situation so that we can regain perspective and there is also a time when the Lord will deliver us out of a situation completely, thereby saving us much pain and heartache.

There are also times that we are in situations we find ourselves in because of our own decisions or actions and we need to avoid them for a time so we can prepare and work out the solution. Often these are individual relationship issues that need a break so the individuals can focus on getting closer to the Lord. Then they can come out of their isolation to mend their relationship, whatever that relationship is (friends, siblings, spouses, etc.)

As the Church, and leaders in the Church, we often want to avoid the degradation of society and prevent anyone in our congregation or group from being negatively influenced by the degradation of society or another group. We start to gather together and become exclusive, not allowing outsiders in. Our perspective stops being focused on Jesus and his gospel and starts focusing on our own survival and comfort.

There are some stands we need to take as the Church against some of the ideas and changes that society around us is embracing. But we cannot completely isolate ourselves.

We are ambassadors for the Kingdom of Heaven while we are here on earth. Ambassadors do not isolate themselves from the people they are an ambassador to.

Lot and Sodom

Lot was Abraham's nephew and they separated because of conflicts between their shepherds. Both men arrived in the promised land very wealthy with large flocks. Their flocks were too large for them to occupy the same area so they went their separate ways. Lot settled near Sodom. Sodom and Gomorrah became the most sinful cities the world has ever known, and yet Lot survived in Sodom.

Some biblical scholars believe Lot compromised his ethics or righteousness by settling in Sodom. We believe no matter how Lot ended up living in this sinful city, he was focused on God. He was a witness for God in the city. We know this because when God decided that Sodom and Gomorrah were too sinful and needed to be destroyed, he sent two angels to rescue Lot and his family before he destroyed the cities. Let's read the beginning of this story found in Genesis 19:1-5.

Genesis 19:1-5

- (1) The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.
- (2) "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." (3) But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. (4) Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. (5) They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."



I think we can all agree that they were a wicked and perverse group that surrounded Lot's house. Lot must have stood out because the people of the city knew where to find the angels. They had to know that these angels would be with Lot, the righteous one and they all knew where he lived.

Lot was obviously salt and light in the city of Sodom. We need to be salt and light in the world, not isolate ourselves from the world. God will save us from the destruction that others intend for us.

Salt and Light

During Jesus' sermon on the mount in his early days of ministry he shared some great wisdom and instruction for us individually as believers, and collectively as the Church. One of the things he taught is for us to be salt and light to the world. Let's read Matthew 5:13-16.

Matthew 5:13-16

(13) "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. (14) "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Wherever we find ourselves we are to be salt and light to those around us. Salt adds to the flavor of food and light casts away darkness. Both are good. Jesus tells us that we *are* the salt of the earth. We *are* the light of the world. We cannot be salt and light to those around us if we isolate ourselves from the very people we are to be witnesses to and make disciples of.

You personally are salt and light to those you find yourself with. The rude and disrespectful supervisor right along with the bruised and broken neighbor will see your light when you do not isolate yourself. You can shine a light and dispel the darkness that surrounds a bully and take the bitter taste out of someone with the salt that you are to your neighbors, coworkers, and in some cases, family members.

As the Church, we are salt and light to this world, too. We cannot isolate ourselves into buildings and walled villages and cities not allowing anyone in. We have to live our lives out in the open, knowing the Lord will protect us, provide for us, and propel us forward. We may be beaten and bruised and we may pay a price, but we will gain and retain eternity in Heaven as co-heirs with Christ.

Conclusion

We cannot be witnesses of the love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ if we isolate ourselves from the very people, groups, and society that need it most. Isolation from the world will not save the world. It will only allow wickedness and depravity to worsen.

Be the salt and light God has made you to be. Don't lose your saltiness, nor hide your light. Show people the way to God through righteousness found in Christ and the strength, courage, and power from the Holy Spirit.

You are where you are for a reason. Do not isolate yourself. Isolation is not the answer.

