

WHY ME? HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HURTING: FACTOR TWO

We Reap What We Sow – The Consequence/Appendix A: The Temptation of Isolation

For the Christian engaged in spiritual warfare, Satan's tactics aren't nearly as subtle. We are warned by Peter to "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). In light of this danger, direct as well as indirect, subtle as well as blatant, it is easy for the conscientious Christian to move away from it all, and in the direction of safe isolation. Yet that is exactly what the devil would want, resulting in fewer Christians on the frontline of spiritual warfare battlefields, with less damage being done to the devil's domain. The alternative approach, endorsed by our Savior in John 17, reflects a more balanced and pro-active posture, in harmony with His own lifestyle while here on earth. Jesus never sinned, yet He was a friend of sinners. So, as He is about to leave His disciples in the midst of all this worldly danger, He prays the following in John 17:14-18 –

"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

No one would label the above prayer as a request for safe isolation. Instead, these words reflect a fervent desire on the part of our Lord to have His disciples protected from the devil, even while they are being used by God to defeat him. This balanced perspective requires Christians to be *in* the world, without letting ourselves become *of* the world; involved *with* the world, without being tainted and corrupted *by* the world. Undoubtedly, this is a difficult and dangerous balance to maintain. Perhaps this is why the apostle who recorded the prayer in John 17, also wrote these words of encouragement in 1 John 4:4 –

"You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

The practical bottom-line? The committed and conscientious Christian can't be so fearful of experiencing the negative consequences of the reap/sow dynamic, that he or she also withdraws from engagement in the dangers of spiritual warfare. When we become guilty of such an anxious retreat, we are also in jeopardy of failing to fulfill God's purposes for our everyday lives in a world without Christ.

Where would the church of Jesus Christ be today if those first century disciples, for whom Christ prayed, had chosen the safe isolation of the upper room as a permanent place of residence?