

A Fortress Mentality

April 2004

There is a house that I pass on my morning walks that says something about the owner's attitude toward the world around him. The mailbox looks as if it was made by Brink's Security. Attached is a bright yellow warning that any tampering is a federal offense. The yard is immaculately manicured, and signs sternly suggest that pets should not be allowed to foul the fescue. The house proper is surrounded by a fence that makes Folsom Prison look like a McDonald's play area.

One certainly does not get a warm, fuzzy feeling when passing this fortress. All indications are that this man does not want to be bothered; he wishes to control the elements around him so that he is not inconvenienced in any way. Perhaps he thinks that if he can put up enough barriers that he will be protected from all unpleasantness.

Granted, it is bothersome if someone bashes your mailbox with a baseball bat, if people place advertising on your mailbox or if dogs leave deposits on the lawn. But what is the solution to these intrusions? Will he be successful in barricading himself behind enough signs and fences that his life will never be troubled by the undesirable?

And will we as Christians be able to live in a sterile bubble, untouched by the moral and spiritual pollution that pervades our society?

In correcting a problem at Corinth wherein the brethren maintained fellowship with a man who should have been disciplined, Paul made the following observation: *"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world"* (1 Cor 5:9-10).

To use such a passage to justify glad and willing association with that which is profane is to pervert its meaning. Paul does not say "seek evil out." Rather, existing in a fallen world means working, shopping, vacationing and living alongside sinful people.

One of the prominent criticisms against the Lord was that he ate with tax collectors and sinners (cf. Mt 9:9-13). Jesus did not answer that He enjoyed the party life but *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick ... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

There are plenty of things about our world and culture that we need to edit out, but we will not fulfill the Lord's purpose for us in living as recluses. Sometimes we need to just inoculate ourselves with godliness and go about our business, and in the process be *"the salt of the earth"* (Mt 5:13-16).

Further, it is difficult to teach and encourage people to be saved from behind closed doors. Our own salvation would not be possible if Jesus had a separatist mentality. God be thanked that He was willing to live among us, teach us and die for us.