

Thought for the Day 29th June - John Reed

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

As we all know, the COVID—19 pandemic has caused us to isolate and socially distance.

Sadly, as restrictions are being eased, we sometimes see the infection rate take off again. I read this morning that in Victoria there have been 49 new cases yesterday and 41 the day before – the highest number of cases in 12 weeks. And the state government is reportedly considering reimposing stay-at-home orders on virus hotspots.

It seems that many people are just not taking the risk seriously. We have seen thousands crowd city centres for protest marches, tennis players partying together in nightclubs, and crowds swarming to the beaches in southern England.

Part of the problem, it seems, is that in some quarters this is being spoken about as an issue of personal freedom rather than public health. When your focus is on your personal freedoms, you tend to say: “I can do what I want - what right does the government have to tell me not to go to a party, or to the beach?” Whereas, when you see it as a public health issue, you say: “What can I do to help keep myself and others safe?” We have to get the balance right.

When it comes to our spiritual health, we have to keep the balance right, too. We have been set free, but we must also do what is right for our own and others’ spiritual health. So Paul can write (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23) “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.”

For our spiritual health, we must practice the same kind of social distancing that we have been asked to observe for our physical health in recent times. We are told (Romans 12:2) “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ...” In order to avoid being shaped by the world around us, we need to distance ourselves from its influences.

Just as Israel in the Old Testament were told that they were God’s holy people, set apart from the rest of the peoples and their influence (Leviticus 20:26; Ezra 6:21, for example), the church in the New Testament is also described as a holy people (1 Peter 2:9) no longer belonging to the world (John 15:19; James 4:4).

Jesus doesn’t take us out of the world, but does want to keep us from being influenced by the evil one (John 17:15). It’s in that context that we are told (2 Corinthians 6:14): “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”

I have often heard this verse quoted with reference to marriage, suggesting that a Christian person ought not to be unequally yoked (i.e. married) to a non-Christian person. But, actually, if you look at this chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul is not specifically talking about marriage here. He is giving us a general principle that applies to all of life. It’s about the dangers of being tied to, and influenced by, the things of this world rather than the things of God.

In effect, it’s a call to spiritual social isolation.

What that means for each of us, in the various contexts and environments in which we live and work, is matter for us to work through for ourselves. But, unlike the crowds on the beach in Bournemouth the other day, we ought not to simply ignore the risks.