

Just What is the Salt-and-Light Argument?

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In reading the account of Lot, it is easy to see how his *close and constant proximity* to the culture of Sodom affected his judgment. Just like Lot and his family were negatively affected by the culture of sin in Sodom, so too will kids from Christian homes be negatively affected by the public school's ungodly culture. Environment is a huge influencer of thoughts. Thoughts produce actions, both of which have consequences, many of them eternal ones.

The essence of the salt-and-light argument of Matt. 5:13-16 is to teach that Christians need to *interact* with the world to shine the light of Christ to it. Jesus teaches this by denouncing the negative. That is, He teaches *against* us *hiding* our light, because that light is the very reflection of Himself. Many well-meaning believers send their children to public schools believing they are following our Lord's teaching on this matter. Some even chastise those that do not as shirking their biblical responsibility on this point. What is the accurate application of the principle Jesus taught?

While Jesus' enemies *claimed* he was a friend of sinners and tax collectors, Jesus made it crystal clear that only those who keep His commands can be His friends. Jesus was *willing* to be their friends and so reached out to them. But repentant belief was a necessary prerequisite. In Jesus' appeal to sinners, and through His association with sinners, *He did not participate in any* of their sin. He did not join their team in order to save them. Rather, He went *into* their proximity to bid them to *come out* and join His.

Regrettably, it is not so with kids being sent to public schools ostensibly as "salt-and-light." Unlike Jesus, they become, unwittingly, *active participants* in the evil of this system and so suffer from its corrupting influence. This is so because they are *trained by* the system they are supposed to be a light to, and so, in time, begin to produce its bad fruit. Separation from the essence and practice of the world is not possible for Christian children in public schools because that system exists as a *fundamental building process* that literally shapes a child's very being. This is what education is supposed to do. This formative aspect is missed by otherwise well-intentioned parents and pastors. The system deliberately and persistently *inculcates students into* the system. The educational process is fundamental because it is the primary means of building the child's understanding of the world, the universe, and of their place in it providing the child with the foundational building blocks of understanding. It also comprises the formative aspects of the child's relationship forming years. Bad company *still* corrupts good character. Christian kids joining a public school is the *exact antithesis* of the salt-and-light argument.

Embedded within the salt-and-light text, Jesus also speaks of a “city on a hill.” Thus, any application of being “light” must be understood in this context. A city “on a hill,” is clearly *separate from*, and therefore *distinctly different* than, the culture it exists within. This is so in three key aspects: in **location**, in **elevation**, and in **illumination**. Because of these, the city is able to be both *protected* and *observed* by others *as attractive*.

Cities are unique, having borders and boundaries with names and **locations** that are *distinct* from other cities by which they are thus *distinguished and identified*. This city is “on a hill,” a *separated* and *tactically superior* location, that is, protected yet visible to all. It is *separated, but not isolated*. Due to its **elevation**, it is the first to receive the morning light, and the last to part with it in the evening. After dark, light from the city itself **illuminates** its surroundings. This provides the ability for *others to see* thus distinguishing both its *distinct* presence and *unique quality*.

City residents are in clear view of, but not squarely in the midst of, the culture in order to be seen by that culture as different and attractive, all the while avoiding the corrupting influence of that same culture. To go down off the hill and into the culture is to completely miss the analogy Jesus uses. Doing this would remove all of the city’s advantages, effectively allowing the culture to block its radiance, obscure its light, essentially placing it “under a bowl,” the very thing Jesus said to avoid. It is only by remaining on a hill, that is, separate and elevated, that the city “cannot be hidden.”

Joining the public school system then is actually a *participation in* the culture’s damaging institutions, methods, and philosophies, the effect of which *diminishes* the light and *dilutes* the salt, often to the point of eliminating them altogether. How can a student let his/her light shine when the institution itself prohibits students from using that light, that is, the light of God’s Word and Jesus’ own name ?

Instead, Scripture commands that we *not participate in* the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather calls us to *expose* them. Indeed, we are commanded to *demolish* arguments and speculations (Gk. *logismos* – “logic/arguments”) and literally “every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” and we are to “take every thought captive” in obedience to Christ.

It is not only *very possible* to avoid the public school *and still associate with, and witness to, those within it*; but it is actually better suited to the text of Jesus’ salt-and-light analogy. In other words, choosing Christian alternatives to public school *is the model* Jesus is presenting as it applies to education. This means that kids from Christian homes would be acting in *obedience* to the salt-and-light directive Jesus articulated *by avoiding* the public school for far better *Christian*

educational options, in order to be both protected and to show the light to the kids within the public system.