

## Different, or Not So Different?

It has become increasingly alarming to me how “gray” the line has become between being “of the world” and being “in the world”. Things used to be more black and white, more cut and dry, or so it seemed. It used to be that those who professed to be Christians could be picked out in a crowd by a quick glance or from the words peppering their speech. Every aspect of their lives was different and could be seen as such, from the clothes they wore, to the places they were found on Friday nights. Why is it seemingly more difficult in the world today to find Christians who truly stand out as different? Why are we blending in with the darkness around us instead of being the light of the world that cannot be hidden? (Matthew 5). Why are we so afraid of being different?

## Different in our Dress

In the society in which we live, we, as unique individuals, are encouraged to express ourselves in many different ways. All you have to do is turn on your television or stroll through your local mall to see what the world would call individuality and creativity. From adolescents to teens to adults, the media and the public sector would have each of believe that whatever our unique style might be, that it is okay and perfectly acceptable to express that style. After all, we do enjoy freedom of speech in this great country, and our clothing is just another way to express that freedom. In the world, we would expect to see a wide array of fashion for young and old alike, defined as “style” and “individual expression”. But, in the church, it should be different, right? Shouldn’t there be a noticeable difference in the clothes that are worn by those in the world and by those who

wear the name Christian? Yet, all too often, I have passed by young girls in the very halls of a church building who are dressed immodestly. Amazingly, mothers will be following close behind wearing something just as inappropriate.

Therein lies the problem. As parents, this simply is one of the easiest things we do for our children. From the time our little ones are born into this world, we dress them and groom them appropriately, laying a foundation of what is and what is not acceptable. These standards should not change, as they grow older. God's standards do not change with fashion and trends. I will grant that as young children grow into adolescence and become more independent, their need to express themselves and their individuality increases.

However, a lot of parents seem to take this opportunity to develop a "hands off" attitude by allowing their children to make their own decisions in all areas of their lives.

Shouldn't we strive to protect their innocence at all costs? Shouldn't we lead by example and demonstrate that we are to stand out from the world. It is our God-given responsibility to provide our children with the proper guidance and instruction that will prevent them from forming bad habits that in essence could turn sinful in later years. Our children might not fully understand the reasons behind these decisions now, but we as parents do. We must guard the souls of our children, even if it means compromising the latest styles.

#### Different in our Discipline

In a world that shouts political correctness at every turn, we have allowed our minds to become clouded about what is proper in the realm of disciplining our children. We have

put our trust in the “experts” and their advice, and in doing so have deserted the first principles outlined in the original parenting guide, the Bible. While there is no controversy that children need discipline in order to drive away the foolishness bound up in their hearts (Proverbs 22:15), the question has arisen of how that discipline should be administered appropriately. The underlying purpose for discipline as outlined in the scriptures is that of training or teaching. In fact, Proverbs 23:14 informs parents that correcting a child with a “rod” will deliver his soul from hell. While it is not the intention of this writer to discuss spanking our children, I would suggest that the physical act of spanking is a biblical concept and is referred to many times throughout Scripture by the word or phrase “rod” or “rod of correction”. What is this “rod of correction”? The word used there generally refers to a stick or limb of a tree. Notice in many verses that the word “rod” is used alongside words like reproof, correction, discipline, and love (Proverbs 13:24; 23:13-14; 29:15). Love? Yes, if we love our children, we will correct them according to the examples given in Scripture. Hand in hand, these things work together to promote wisdom and understanding in our children, and ultimately deliver them from hell (23:14). We are to be their parents first, and their friends later.

#### Different in our Entertainment Choices

There are many things that the world offers us all in the name of entertainment. We are constantly bombarded with new movies, restaurants, music, games, the Internet, and the list goes on, all of which are supposed to improve our quality of life. The immense number of these entertaining activities has led many children to believe that their sole purpose on Earth is to be entertained. It is overwhelming to the point of absurdity the

countless number of extracurricular activities that are offered to our children on a daily basis. Just glance through the latest “Parents” magazine. Parents find themselves fatigued to the point of exhaustion as they leave one activity only to hurry on to the next one. Children are increasingly over stimulated and blasted with a barrage of choices, which could very well explain why many find it hard to concentrate and pay attention. This desire for constant entertainment is unhealthy, as many children will shun any serious type of work ethic in favor of a leisurely life. They want to simply melt into the joys of the world. Have you ever considered that our children don’t need these things in order to have a quality of life? In fact, what they truly need are loving parents that spend time demonstrating their love for them - setting an example of the life skills they will need when they mature. While the thought may not be a popular one, I would even go out on a limb and say that children can grow up to be happy and productive members of society without watching the latest blockbuster (filled with garbage), playing the latest violent video game, or participating in six different after-school activities. What has happened to Christian's being different in our choices for entertainment?

In speaking of the “gray” line mentioned earlier, the area of entertainment is one that I think we are failing as Christian parents. The content of today’s PG rated movies warranted an R rating in years past. Television and the Internet are crawling with pornography and violence. Sin has not only become more acceptable, it has been invited into our homes and has become a fixture, just like that picture hanging over the mantle.

Our hearts and minds have softened to the point of tolerance. Our light that once shone so brightly has been put on a dimmer switch, and is slowly becoming a fading ember. We must reevaluate our choices and be stronger than ever in resisting Satan's temptations. We must remember that what the world has to offer is only temporary, and we must set our affections on things higher (1 John 2:15-16). We simply cannot blend in with the world around us (Romans 12:2). Yes, we might be ridiculed. Certainly, we will be accused of being radical. But we will be different, just as God commands us to be. Let's dare to be different!