

## *Is there anything new under the sun?*

Solomon wrote in Eccl 1:9 that there is “nothing new under the sun”, but I never cease to be amazed at the things I’ve seen in social work. For the first few years that I lived here I worked with kids and their families trying to help resolve the problems that were getting these kids into trouble. This is a unique position to be in as you get to dig into the personal lives of people and find out why they think the way they do, in order to help get them out of the trouble they are in.

I remember one family I worked with where my client had a 25 year old sister that was telling me one day that she would like to open a “Christian bar”, yes, a Christian bar. She went on to say that she didn’t like all of the drunks and losers that hang out in most bars, but that a Christian bar would be nice. Her little brother (my client) said “Christians don’t drink”, and the sister said “they sure do”, “I know a lot of Christians that drink”. So, what do you think about this?

I had known this family about a year. They go to church on a semi-regular basis (Sunday morning only), to a couple of denominational churches around town. They consider themselves a Christian family, but they drink occasionally – they cuss quite a bit – and mom has a live-in boyfriend. The sad truth is there are a lot of people who live like this who think they are “Christians”. What is happening in our society today that people have gotten so far off base about what constitutes Christianity? What are churches teaching, or not teaching, that allows people to develop this kind of thinking? And what kind of reputations are “Christians” developing that some think we should start opening Christian bars? All I can say is that I hope we are not helping perpetuate this kind of thinking in the world today.

We have several parents in our congregation, so let me ask you, would you allow your 13 year old son to own a pornographic video, or drink hard liquor (on special occasions), or smoke cigarettes, or maybe even marijuana? Would you let your 13 year old daughter have a sexual relationship with a 17 year old boyfriend? Would you put her on birth-control pills so she couldn’t get pregnant? Now you may think that these are absurd questions, thinking you would never let these things go on in your own home, but the truth is, these kinds of things go on in “Christian” homes all over the country. Also, some of you may think that these things don’t happen here in our community, but you would be wrong.

Here is some more food for thought. Less than 10% of the families I worked with had both biological parents in the home, and in one instance mom's boyfriend lived in the home also. In homes with multiple children they often had different fathers. We had absent fathers, absent mothers, and some who didn't know who their fathers were. Several of these children were being raised by grandparents or other family members. More than 50% of the clients I worked with had been physically abused, and almost half of them had been sexually abused, often by a family member. Many of the parents abused drugs, both illegal and prescription, which is why many didn't have custody of their children. I had 3 different 12 year olds who had stolen cars, landing them in the juvenile court system. I had 15 and 16 year old boys and girls who were already parents, and you wouldn't believe the number of 5, 6 and 7 year olds who couldn't be controlled by their parents.

And yes, these were all families living right here in Cookeville and the surrounding communities. Now if you are thinking that these are extreme cases, I would agree that in some instances they were, however, how did these families get to this point? What has happened in our communities that these things can go on and are seemingly becoming the norm? Well, the short answer is **worldliness**. I John 2: 15-16 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father, but is of the world". More and more people are no longer following Christ, but are following their own hearts, their own desires, and it's getting them into terrible messes that they often don't know how to get out of.

So what can you and I do to help this situation? In the big picture, we know that we can't solve all of the problems of the world. And, we are not going to get any help from the religious world in general because they helped create this problem by not teaching the whole Truth. People don't want to hear what you can't do religiously, and they don't want to hear about sin, punishment or Hell. So, teaching has gotten soft in many churches. Preachers focus on a God of love and acceptance, minimizing sin and its consequences, a more social Gospel if you will. Churches have gone outside the boundaries of Gods teaching to allow people more freedom, more choices and greater love and acceptance for everyone.

How surprised many will be on judgment day when they find that all of their “good works” have not saved them. Matt 7: 21-23 says, “Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven, (22) Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? (23) And then I will declare unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness”. Just professing to be a Christian (calling on the name of the Lord) will not save us. Just being an active member in your church (doing good works) will not save you.

How can someone who thinks they are religious and is active in their church be lost? Because they acted lawlessly. They did things, accepted things and taught things outside the pattern of God’s teaching that is found in the New Testament. Many religious people are not convinced that there is a pattern in the Bible for the Lord’s Church and that it must be strictly followed. However, they may not believe it now, but they will on Judgment day, Rom 14:11.

Now, back to us. What can we do to help curb sin in the world? As Christians, we first need to get our own house in order. We need to recognize and correct the sin that is in our own lives. I John 1: 8 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the Truth is not in us”. How do we do this? Well, I John 1: 9 goes on to say, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”. If we are what and who we need to be (true Christians), we can impact those around us in a positive way.

Next, we need to be an active part of our local Church. God put into place a system that not only fulfills our obligations of worship toward Him, but also influences the community around us for good. In Acts 9: 26, Paul returned to Jerusalem and wanted to join the disciples there. This word join literally means to glue or cement. Paul wanted to be firmly joined to the other disciples. Is this what we want, or do we want to come and go as we please, not being accountable to anyone. The bottom line is, if we are the Christians we should be, the local Church will be the institution that it should be, and together we can influence the community around us. Read Acts chapter 8 about what happened when the Church was being persecuted by Saul, vs. 4 says, “They went everywhere preaching the Word”. When we read about the zeal and

conviction of those in the Bible, it should make us consider our own conviction.

Are we doing what we need to be doing to support the Church and spread the Gospel? It's a simple question, and our salvation may depend on it. If you need help in your Christian life, please ask for it. No one should struggle alone. In I Cor. 12:26 in reference to the spiritual body, the scripture says, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Let's all strive to be the kind of Christians we can read about in the New Testament. Nothing more, and nothing less.

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