

Editor's note: Our modern media bombards us with immoral thoughts and images. Our minds are polluted with the evil things we see and hear. But the problem is not a new one. Consider these words from long ago:

Wounded at the Theatre

– by John Chrysostom (AD 349-407)

If you see a shameless woman in the theater, who treads the stage with uncovered head and bold attitudes dressed in garments adorned with gold, flaunting her soft sensuality, singing immoral songs, throwing her limbs about in the dance, and making shameless speeches . . . do you still dare to say nothing human happens to you then? Long after the theater is closed and everyone is gone away, those images still float before your soul - their words, their conduct, their glances, their walk, their positions, their excitement, their unchaste limbs - and as for you, you go home covered with a thousand wounds! But not alone - the shameless woman goes with you - although not openly and visibly but in your heart, and in your conscience, and there within you she kindles the Babylonian furnace in which the peace of your home, the purity of your heart, and the happiness of your marriage will be burnt up!

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8)

Influence

A woman asked, "How can I win my husband to Christ?" "You can't," was the surprising answer from the preacher. "You never attend worship regularly. If your husband wants to go for a drive on Sunday, you neglect the Lord and go with him. And if you don't have a way to come to church, you never call some other member to come for you. You will never win your husband unless you let him know, and all those about you, that your religion means more to you than anything else under heaven. This alone is the kind of influence that wins souls."

- via "Great Plainness of Speech"

"Troublers in Israel"

"Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord" (1 Kings 18:17). No, Elijah was no "troubler," but as in his day, there are many that trouble God's people today.

Did you ever hear a factious man confess his sin? An old priest claimed in his confessional, he had heard every sin confessed – except covetousness. I add that in my years, I never heard a troubler confess his sin - his own "besetting sin" - his contention and factiousness.

Did you ever see a factious man - a troubler quit? The church is filled with drunks who quit - fornicators who quit - homosexuals who quit - liars who quit - cheats who quit. People have quit just about every sin to serve Jesus. You can easily point to them. Who do you point to as a troubler who quit his troubling? Mostly, I think, they quit when they die!

Paul instructs: "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned" (Tit.3:10). "Reject" seems the anticipated and fixed end to this matter - after admonishing him twice. Little or no hope is extended for restoring him. Cut your losses! Damage control! Is this one of those "impossible" to "renew them to repentance" situations? (Heb.6:4). It sounds like it! - final and scary possibility!

A troubler of Israel may not see himself as contentious or factious - brethren may not identify the scoundrel as their problem, but God does! He will surely "...repay with tribulation those who trouble you" (2 Thes.1:6). Don't dare dabble with becoming a troubler in Israel!

- by Joe Fitch

An Observation . . .

"People seldom change towards being more conservative or more strict in adherence to the Scripture. It seems they are ten times more afraid of being narrow than they are of being unscriptural. They are more afraid of being out of step with the crowds than out of step with Christ."

- Gardner S. Hall

"Hey, That's My Seat!"

From time to time you hear stories about visitors being rudely told they were sitting in a member's 'usual seat.' That kind of behavior has no place among God's people. A visitor should never feel unwelcome because someone decided that a particular pew somehow belongs to them.

However, there is another side to the subject of 'our seats' that deserves some thought. There is a real benefit to sitting in the same general area from week to week. It has nothing to do with ownership but is more to do with aiding us in accountability and encouragement. When you are in your spot, your presence strengthens the group. People notice you. They draw something positive from your steady participation. Faithfulness has a way of doing that.

On the other hand, if you are unexpectedly absent, someone is more likely to see it. That is a good thing, too. It allows others to notice your absence quickly and to check on you without delay. Jonathan once told David, "Your seat will be empty, you will be missed" (1 Samuel 20:18). That line captures a principle that still matters. An empty seat where you normally sit signals something. It gives the rest of us a chance to reach out, check in, and offer help if it is needed.

No one owns a pew. We must never treat a visitor poorly because they happened to sit where we usually sit. At the same time, there is value in consistency. While 'your pew' is not a possession, it provides an opportunity to encourage others, to show faithfulness, and to help us watch for one another. When your seat is filled, you strengthen us. When it is empty, we notice because you honestly matter to us all. Think!

- by Greg Gwin