

Oh Boy, It's Allowed!

How many times have new converts received sound instruction in Christian living, only to have the instructions nullified by the example of older members? A Canadian brother recently told me of his first trip south after his conversion. Struggling to overcome his tobacco habit -- because he had been taught that he ought to do so -- he watched with delight as the men of the "down south" congregation went out between Bible study and worship to enjoy their cigarettes. "O boy!" was his immediate reaction, "It's allowed!" The same happens in other areas of teaching. "Attend every service," new converts are told, but Brother Smith only attends the 11:00 a.m. service, and he is accepted as a faithful member. "One service a week must be sufficient," they say to themselves. "O boy! It's allowed!" "Study your Bible daily, and prepare for every Bible class," they are told. But they see little evidence of study on the part of others, and some of the comments in Bible classes definitely betray a lack of preparation. "Ignorance of God's word must not be too bad," they conclude. "O boy! It's allowed!"

"Modesty of dress is essential for Christians," they hear repeatedly. But then they hear of mixed swimming among the members and see Sister Jones wearing the tightest pants in town. "O boy!" they think, "It's allowed!" Older Christians ought to be constantly aware that they are being watched by newer converts who are looking to them for examples. What are they seeing and learning? How sobering to think that some new convert might have been discouraged and led astray by something he saw in my life!

Newer converts must learn that God's word is the standard of authority, not the conduct of other Christians (1 Corinthians 11:1). Loyalty in a kingdom is determined by loyalty to the king rather than to the subjects of the king. It is to Him that one pledges his allegiance when he becomes a Christian and must be faithful to Him whatever others around him may do or fail to do. One's "O boy! It's allowed!" then must be limited to those things which God allows in His word. But even then he would anticipate a certain reserve in one's expression, for the true Christian's greatest delight is not in some activity that just happens to be "allowed," but in serving the Lord (Romans 8:6).

--Adapted From Bill Hall