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Viewpoints

Observing events in our modern world from the viewpoint of our ascended Savior.

Miley Cyrus, What Did You Do? ~ September 3, 2013

The social norming that toppled Miley Cyrus can topple us.

[Online Version & Archive](#)

Miley Cyrus was once a darling Disney actress. She starred in the Hannah Montana TV series that was nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Children's Program. But this wholesome Disney role model is no more-- especially since Ms. Cyrus' onstage appearance at the recent 2013 MTV Video Music Awards.

Although I've not watched her performance, I get the shocking picture from a growing trend of news streams employing descriptions like "half-naked" and "pornographic" and "worse than Lady Gaga." Why this dogpiling? No one is surprised by raunchy behavior coming from a burlesque dancer, but because Miley Cyrus was once a darling Disney star, befuddled people are asking, "Miley Cyrus, what did you do?"

Few can answer that question with authority. But you and I can, because we have Scripture and its insight on how Ms. Cyrus has been negatively conditioned by the polluted environment in which she works. "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Meghan Gurdon, a reviewer of children's books for the Wall Street Journal, alerts us to the fact that books classified as Young Adult (aimed at those between 12 and 18) have "become increasingly lurid, grotesque, profane, sexual and ugly." With agreement she cites a librarian who observed: "You are naïve if you think young people can read a dark and violent book that sits on the library shelves and not believe that the behavior must be condoned by the adults in their school lives" (emphasis mine). In the behavioral sciences this is called "social norming." It's the concept that if people believe a certain behavior is normal, they'll adopt that behavior.

Although the behavioral sciences "discovered" social norming in 1986 it's been taught in Scripture for centuries. Associating with fellow believers in a congregation is encouraged for reasons of positive social norming (Hebrews 10:24-25). Associating with the immoral is denounced (1 Corinthians 5:11). If a negative social norming is observed to happen through books in a school library, it can certainly happen through the power of video, music, TV and movies. In the case of Miley Cyrus, this negative social norming is being magnified by the powerful influences of Hollywood among whom she works. "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in way of sinners or sit in the seat of

mockers” (Psalm 1:1). Translation: negative social norming sucked Ms. Cyrus into the immobilizing morass of immorality.

But if we could ask Jesus about this whole Miley Cyrus thing, you know how he would respond? As he did [here \(Luke 13:1-3\)](#) and [here \(Luke 12:13-21\)](#), he would turn it around on us, making it personal with you and me. Jesus would challenge us to see if we aren’t more like Miley Cyrus than we want to admit. He would challenge us to see if we aren’t also becoming comfortable with behaviors that should be chaffing our souls. So, let me ask: are you too comfortable with watching, saying or doing things that you would abstain from, if Jesus was standing next to you?

Because of her fall into disgrace, the innocence of Miley Cyrus may be gone forever in the eyes of the general public. But if she comes to repentance and faith in Jesus, she will be innocent before God. *Really?* Yes, because God made Jesus to be our sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And this is good news for each of us who has become too comfortable with immorality: today’s a new beginning to celebrate our innocence before God through faith in his crucified and risen Son. *Really?* Yes, because everyone who “trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:15). You see, it’s not just Ms. Cyrus who needs God’ grace in Christ to justify the wicked, I also need God’s undeserved love. And so do you.

I see a trending social norm: people with a better-than-thou attitude asking with an attitude of superiority, “Miley Cyrus, what did you do?” But Christ’s norm leads us to see how there’s a Miley Cyrus inside each one of us, so that we confess, “There, but by the grace of God, go I.”

Source Material (Links may become inactive over time.)

The Case for Good Taste in Children’s Books, Meghan Cox Gurdon, [Imprimis](#), July/August 2013 (Hillsdale.edu)

[Why Miley Cyrus Matters](#) @National Review Online

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Blessings to you and your loved ones, Pastor Mike Nitz

