

## The Other Side of the Tracks

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Not long ago, I stopped and gave pause to the phrase “the other side of the tracks”, and then to a similar term “the wrong side of the tracks.” It would seem that those terms go back to a time when towns and villages were divided by railroad tracks that ran through them. Of course, no one wanted to live near the noisy pollution of the soot-billowing trains. Perhaps the prevailing winds determined which side of the railroad tracks was the better location for a residence, safer too from the fiery sparks that billowed forth from the smoke stack of passing trains. The finer sort of people would have created the demand for property, both for residence and commerce, on the “right” side of the tracks. Those less fortunate would naturally find themselves living in conditions less hospitable, but more affordable. Soon the tracks would have become the demarcation line of rich and poor, and between “good” and “evil.” Close by the tracks would have been some of those who followed the railroad, while the track was being laid. The drinking establishments and the red-light district would have been as close to the workmen as possible. Perhaps the red-light district gets its name from the red lights used by the railroad. Some of these dens of iniquity would have remained as towns formed along the train’s route.

Churches, schools, and homes were established on one side of the track, and every evil influence coupled with poverty and hardship the other. In the south, the railroad tracks would also have divided the blacks from the whites; an added stimulus to social inequality. This demarcation line became an idiom in the American vocabulary. Today these clear-cut lines are gone. The railroad no longer divides towns and villages with smoke stacks and soot, and the wicked are no longer so easily placed. Right and wrong are often mixed together with the broad brush of “tolerance” and political correctness. Lost is the clear command of Scripture to come out from among them and be ye separate (II Corinthians 6:17). Jazz; rhythm and blues, and rock and roll which were once on the wrong side of the tracks have become “contemporary Christian music”; only slightly different from that played on a top 40 radio station. Standards of dress that once clearly defined both gender and moral ethos, have been lost in today’s more “casual and comfortable” churches. Dress standards are even more eroded in the home and school, where there is no pretense of moral standards.

There was a time when unwed motherhood and divorce were things found only in the lost world. Today churches promote groups for the “Single Parent” or “Parents without Partners.” Gone is the “*Young People's Society of Christian Endeavour*” or the Endeavor Societies of whom Sheldon wrote (In His Steps). They too have morphed into something else more marketable. Many churches have poorly organized or moderated “Singles Groups” that bring a harvest of sin and divorce; as the focus is more on “fun” than on Christ. Sorrow of soul has replaced a “joy unspeakable” in many Christian lives. We are to be an example to a lost and dying world.

Where are the tracks? How I long for a time of clear lines of attitude and behavior. I believe with all my heart that the young both need and want such clear immovable lines as well. The problem lies in our seminaries and Bible colleges, our Sunday schools, and our pulpits. The solution is repentance, revival, and spiritual renewal. As David cried out to God in Psalm 51 “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” God still hears, and He is waiting. Are we willing?

