

Is The TV Your Shepherd?

Condoning Worldly Entertainment

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Most people watch TV to veg out and relax, but do not realize the coma into which it puts them. It is a totally different feeling from ending work on a hobby or coming in after working hard in the yard, in the garden, or maybe doing some physical activity like a sport or something like that. Totally different feeling that you get from sitting and vegging in front of the TV.

According to the A.C. Nielsen Company, you are all familiar with the Nielsen ratings, the average American watches 3 hours and 46 minutes of TV each day, more than 52 days of nonstop TV watching per year. Now you have heard some of these statistics before, but it does set the mood for the sermonette.

By age 65, the average American will have spent nearly 9 years glued to the tube. What a waste. The TV is on in the average US home 7 hours and 12 minutes per day. By age 18, the average American child sees 200,000 violent acts on TV. By age 18, the average American child has witnessed 16,000 murders. On TV, 80% of Hollywood executives believe there is a link between TV violence and real life violence. Those are the ones producing these things.

Backing that, 91% of children polled said they felt upset or scared by violence on television. I use statistics on violence primarily because there are very few statistics compared to the number on violence on TV. There are very few statistics that have to do with sexual immorality or homosexuality or some of these other perversions in society. It is interesting that when the world focuses on the ills of TV, they focus almost entirely on violence. Alan Jacobs, an English professor at Wheaton College, writes about this attraction to violence in an essay entitled, "In on the Kill." He makes the following point in regards to our society's fascination with predatory nature shows, but I think his comments can be applied also to almost all television and movies. He says,

People can justify participating in the most dreadful deeds if they do not directly and physically carry out the acts themselves.

Most people do not notice when they are being caught up in a chain of events over which they have no control. And the reason they think this is because they are neither initiators of the act, nor are they the executioners. They are just vicariously watching it. We justify our absorption of TV violence by believing that we are neither the ones who kill nor the ones who film the killing. We are merely innocent bystanders with no moral stake in the events we watch.

But by continuing to watch such programs, are we endorsing, are we affirming what happens in them? Do we come to bear a certain responsibility for them? By watching, we support the continuation of such shows and consequently the acts represented in them. And I am not totally down on TV because there are some very rewarding and good shows and learning mechanisms on TV, but I am talking about the perversions that are shown on TV.

The screen is a strange thing. It takes our minds and turns them from active filters into passive absorbers. When the music swells, the tears well up in our eyes. Most people's eyes widen and their pulses quicken when they see some sexual act about to be performed or some kissing or something like that on there. We have all excused our participation in modern entertainment, maybe by calling it an art form or by saying that they are just acting. I think that is the most common thing that people use as an excuse, but to call it simply acting is to slip into a form of dualism similar to that taught by some religions. A denial that what bodies do, no matter what the context, has no effect on the mind of the actors or those who watch them. We deny that viewing pretend sex and pretend violence affects us in the same way that the real thing does.

We use the same logic that the US Supreme Court recently ruled and used to legalize computer simulated child pornography. They reasoned in their ruling that it is not real children, therefore it is not harmful. But the human mind is sensitive and easily impressed, and the cliché "garbage in, garbage out" is absolutely true when it comes to TV. The basic impact of many visual

images on the mind is constant. Whether the images are real or fake, whether we acknowledge them or not, they still are a constant influence to our minds. Our underlying attitude seems to be that because we are Christians, we are immune to the seductions of this society.

But even though we are being redeemed by Christ, our sinful tendencies are not totally gone, and I think everyone in here realizes that. If anything, Satan will target us more aggressively, the more Christ-like we become. And you are familiar with the many scriptures that have to do with that aspect. We are still going to be attracted to the things that we are instructed to guard our eyes against, and the entertainment being produced by the society is generally designed to appeal to our more base nature. In fact, our more perverted or more, as the world puts it, our more animal nature. And I only use that word animal just to refer to the beastly acts that they are when they are committed.

Now listen to this modern version of the 23rd Psalm in a form that describes how TV has replaced God. Some of you have heard this, I am sure, but it is entitled "The 23rd Channel." It is quite hard hitting actually.

The TV is my shepherd. I shall not want. It makes me lie down on the sofa. It leads me away from the scriptures. It destroys my soul. It leads me in the paths of sex and violence for the sponsor's sake. Yea, though I walk in the shadow of my spiritual responsibilities, there will be no interruption, for the TV is with me. It prepares a commercial before me in the presence of my worldliness. It anoints my head with humanism. My coveting runneth over. Surely laziness and ignorance shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of Satan forever. (author unknown)

It is amazing how hard hitting something like that can be. But it is definitely the god of so many in this nation.

Turn with me to Ephesians 5, verse 8. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians that it is disgraceful even to speak of the perversions people do in secret. How much more shameful is it to watch them? You are very familiar with this scripture. But we should read it so that it embeds in our mind even more firmly.

Ephesians 5:8-13 For you were once darkness [and many people watch TV in the dark. I think that is interesting.], but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful to even speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, and whatever makes manifest is light.

But most of this society's entertainment has long ago reached a spiritually unhealthy level of dishonesty and corruption and perversion. Much of it we should stay as far away from as possible, and the less we watch, the better equipped we are to actually see and avoid the perversions of this society. The less we watch, the better equipped we are. Familiarity does not always breed contempt as we are taught. A friend of the world, someone who is familiar with the entertainment of this world, ends up condoning it and approving it and worse, being warped by it.

Psalms 101:3-4 I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; . . . A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness.

It is something that we have to be determined to do. James says that pure religion is to keep oneself unspotted from the world. By keeping unspotted from the world, our patience and our kindness and our compassion towards all human beings will grow as we distance ourselves from how they are portrayed on the screen and the perversions that they are portrayed in.

Turn with me to Matthew 6, verse 22. God's way of life is not a pair of glasses we put on to filter the world through. It requires a complete change in our minds. Christ is in us and when He is competing with a constant influx of worldly entertainment, He has to use more dramatic and painful ways to change us. That is the result of our own free will not being controlled, and that is why He instructs us to repent and draw near to Him. Carefully monitoring what we watch is one way of doing just that.

Matthew 6:22-23 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good [it is interesting that the margin says here clear or healthy], your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad [again, the margin says evil or unhealthy], your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Verses 22 and 23 elaborate on the duty we have of setting our interests and our love on heavenly things, on the things from above. And Jesus illustrates this by a reference to the eye. When the eye is directed steadily toward an object and is healthy or is focused on one object, everything is clear and plain. If it vibrates, moves back and forth to different objects, is set on many things, or is diseased, nothing is seen clearly. Everything is dim and confused. Anyone who has worn glasses or contacts knows that very fact. If I were to take off my glasses right now, those of you in the back row would be blurry and indistinguishable; not totally, but somewhat.

So we have to focus on the good things—the example of Jesus Christ.

As a result, the person is unsteady, the one that is not focused. The eye regulates the motion of our bodies. To have an object distinctly in view is necessary in order to correct and regulate our action. For example, if a person is crossing a stream on a log and he looks across steadily at some object across the stream, he will be more stable and surefooted. But if he looks down on the moving stream, he will probably become disoriented, dizzy, and fall, and I am sure many of you have done that very thing while walking through the woods.

This is what Jesus is expressing here in Matthew 6:22-23. So that our conduct is right, it is important to set our eyes on the Kingdom of heaven, on the example of Jesus Christ. Having our interests there, having our eye on faith, steady on the Father and Jesus Christ, our conduct will correspond to what our eyes see and what our eyes focus on. Now if we are focused on the example of Jesus Christ, our actions will follow His examples. If we are

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focused on the entertainment of Satan, this world, and human nature, our actions will show we are friends of the world. And so I present to you that the choice is ours.

Choose to have a good eye so that your whole body will be full of light.