

Should Christians watch Movies?

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Let us turn again to Revelation chapter 18 and verse four.

“And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”¹

It is deeply alarming to hear of young people in our denomination regularly going to the cinema and watching the most worldly of films. I would like to give eight reasons from the Bible to try and dissuade from this habit and practice. And it may be that there are people here who are saying, “Well, I don’t do that.”

Well, much of what will be said can equally be applied to the watching of television and the playing of certain computer games.

The first reason I would set before you is the precedent of the psalmist. The example of the godly writer of the psalms which we take upon our lips when we come to worship. We sang together, for example, in Psalm number one.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.²

Can this psalm truly be sung by a frequent cinema goer in sincerity? When it speaks of meditating on the law of God this includes this Seventh Commandment. We read, for example in the Larger Catechism, “What sins are forbidden in the Seventh Commandment?” And the answer given, “The sins forbidden in the Seventh Commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required,” and then a number are listed in a long answer, but it includes all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes and affections, all corrupt or filthy communications or listening there unto. It goes on to say and speak of the entanglement of lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays

¹ Revelation 18:4.

² Psalm 1:1-2.

and all other provocations to or acts of uncleanness either in ourselves or others. And can, we say, we delight in the law of God and then do what is forbidden by it?

We also sang together in Psalm 26.

Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth. I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked.

I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD.³

And then in Psalm 101.

“I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.”⁴

Oh, say some, that is just Old Testament Legalism. Well, what about Paul, the great preacher of the grace of God? What did he say?

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”⁵

So we have biblical precedent. If we claim to be followers of the Bible this is the pattern to follow.

Secondly, there is the power of the eye. Bunyan spoke of it, didn't he, as the eye gate. He also spoke of the ear gate, the two gates that the devil usually attacks through. And he based this on words we find in the words of our Lord in Matthew six. He said:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!⁶

What is the psalmist saying here? He is saying whatever has your eye, has you. It has your thought. It has your affection. It has your imagination. It has your time. It has your money. Whatever has your eye has you.

³ Psalm 26:2-6.

⁴ Psalm 101:3.

⁵ Philippians 4:8.

⁶ Matthew 6:21-23.

What has your eye? What is pouring through your eye when you watch such things? Is it light or is it darkness? And if it is darkness, what is the Lord saying? If you let darkness in, the whole person is darkness.

Think of the influence of 15, 30 second adverts. What do companies pay millions of pounds a year for 15 second flashes, 30 second flashes on television? Because they know how powerful the eye is. These are people who don't read the Bible. They have just got common sense. They know if they can get the eye, they have got you. And if 15 and 30 second adverts can have such a power, what about a 120 minute film? What a power that has, the power of the eye. If the light hat is in you be darkness, how great is the darkness. Whatever has your eye, has you.

Think, thirdly, of the perverting of behavior. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:33:

“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”⁷

How many times have we heard it? I can watch these things and be unaffected. I can hear that music and be unaffected. I can read such things and be unaffected. What does the apostle say? Be not deceived. You are just fooling yourself. It is an utter fact. Evil communications corrupt, they pervert and they twist good manners. They ruin what is good.

What is Paul saying? He is saying, “You watch ungodliness and you will become ungodly. You watch sensual images and you will become lustful.”

Young women here, how can you go out with someone who will sit and watch such scenes on a screen? What do you think is going through his mind? Is that a safe person to be associated with, someone who can sit comfortably and watch women being treated in such a way as just objects for another person's pleasure? Is that not going to corrupt his view of you? Of course it is. If you watch gratuitous violence, you will become callous, hard hearted and insensitive to the sufferings of others. If you watch evil, you will distance yourself from good and from God. Can you really say when you come out of such a place or watch such a film you find it easy to pray? If you watch the devil's view of relationships it will destroy God's view of relationships in your life. It will pervert your view of men. It will pervert your view of women. It will pervert your view of marriage. It will pervert your view of work. It will pervert your view of leisure. It will pervert everything. Evil communications corrupt good manners.

One of the early Church fathers, Tertullian, he lived in 140 AD. That was when he was born. He wrote a book called *The Shows*. This is not a new problem. It was a different form then. It was a sort of theater. It is the same principle. He wrote this book called *The Shows* and he says this. “The father who carefully protects and guards his virgin daughter's ears from every polluting word takes her to the theater, exposing her to all its

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:33.

vile language and attitudes. How can it be right to look at the things that are wrong to do? How can those things which defile a man when they go out of his mouth not defile him when going in through his eyes and ears?" It is impossible, isn't it? These things pervert behavior.

Fourthly, think of the power of memory. These films have the latest audio and visual technology behind them. Millions and millions of pounds invested into how to communicate sound and images most effectively. And they are good at their job. They are able to set forth scenes with the most incredible effects, sensational, stimulating, arousing images and sounds. It is so much so that when watched how long do they linger with you? There is somebody watching an immoral scene. What is happening? They are doing it vicariously themselves. That person might say, "Well, I am not doing these things." What is going through the young man, the young woman's mind as he watches, as she watches? Can they possibly watch without seeing themselves in it? Can you? Without feeling the excitement of the scene yourself? That is what it is intended to do. It is intended to give people the thrill by substitution, the excitement by stimulating every possibly sense without actually doing it. It has a powerful hold in the mind that the sounds and the scenes live on.

Somebody has done research that has shown that by the age of 30 the average child, the average person growing up sees 50 films at the cinema a year and watches an additional 50 in their home. That is astounding. And the result is researchers have shown that by the age of 30 there are three trillion video images imprinted on the mind. That is true. Everyone here, I am sure, can remember films that they saw when they were seven, eight, maybe very harmless films, the old kind of Walt Disney sort of thing, Charlie Chaplin or whatever. You remember them. Do you remember the sermons? You don't, do you? But the images, the sounds, the scenes. They are so vivid. They are there. It doesn't take much to provoke them again and bring them to the front of our memories. Sermons are so easy to forget. Video is virtually impossible and film makers know it. It make such a deep and lasting impression, because of the way it impacts so many of our senses.

And thus it is, sadly, that those who regularly go to such places and watch such things, they find that—we have heard this confessed—they find it harder and harder and harder to listen to sermons. How can you? If your diet is such sensational, such stimulating, such arousing sounds and scenes, what is a sermon? It is utterly boring. It cannot match. It cannot compare.

The teachers tell us that the concentration spans of children in school is getting shorter and shorter to oral teaching and to reading. They can't do it. Children who play computer games that concentration and memory of ordinary {?} is diminishing rapidly so that increasingly extraordinary means are having to be used to communicate information and to try to teach the very basics. Why is this? Because their minds and their hearts have got so used to color and stereo sound and quadrasonic sound and 3D images and everything. And then they come to a boring teacher or a boring preacher and they can't concentrate a minute. And you know it, don't you? You watch a film on a Saturday night and come to church on a sabbath. Can you remember a word of what you... can you get

your mind on it? You can't. What keeps popping up? Him, her, that scene, that film, that chase, that murder. Who can deny it?

And how many Christians are here who in their unconverted days went to such things and if they could, what they would give to blank these memories, to tear them out of their minds and never see them, think them, feel them, be polluted by them ever again. You may say, "Well, I am not a Christian. I can do these things. It is not wrong for me."

You are making it harder and harder for yourself to believe the gospel, to listen to sermons, to profit from simple reading of the Word. And you are storing up the most horrific disturbers of your peace in your waking, in your sleeping, in your worshiping, in your praying hours. How many of us are so full of regret over such utter folly?

The precedent of the psalmist, the power of the eye, the perverting of behavior, the polluting of the memory. Fifthly, the protection of others. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians eight:

For if any man see thee which hath knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?⁸

What does it say here? Well, in these days there was this tendency to take meat and drink and, as he says here, take it and offer it to idols. And Christians in these days would say, "We know these idols are nothing. They are just imaginary. That is not real. We can go and sit there and eat that food knowing that these are just fantasies."

But what was happening was younger Christians, weaker Christians were seeing these strong Christians sitting there in the table eating meat, they say, not sinning themselves. And they went along, well, we will do it, too. And in their weakness and in their immaturity, the pull of the idols begins to exert an influence on their heart. They begin to be drawn into the worship and the practices and the attitudes of the people round about them. And what happens here?

And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.⁹

There is somebody, perhaps, a young person, maybe, and they say, "Well, I can watch these things. I am a Christian. The Lord can keep me. I am strong. I go along. I can walk out. I am not affected in these ways." And then there is another young Christian or maybe an unconverted person sees that habit and says, "Well, if he can, if she can do it, so can I." And they go along and the Christian sits there and says, "Oh, that is all just fancy. Just make believe. You don't need to get involved in it."

⁸ 1 Corinthians 8:10-11.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 8:11-12.

But along comes this weak Christian and sees a scene or hears a blasphemy and they are drawn and they are enticed. Their attitudes and the values of the films begin to invade them. Faith begins to shrivel and that Christian life, if it is there at all is worth next to nothing.

How many young people does it take to ruin all young people in a group? One. It takes one alone. And another comes along and then maybe there are others who are there and they would never go to such a film. Well, if they are all doing it and they are all Christians, then it must be ok. I don't want to be left out.

What does Paul say?

“Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”¹⁰

If there is the slightest risk, you see, of a young precious soul being destroyed by liberty, by my felt strength and immunity, I will not do it while the world stands. The protection of others. Where is your love for the brethren when you do such things?

I think, sixthly, of the passing of time. The apostle Paul says in Romans 13:

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.¹¹

How much time, how much money is wasted? The night is far spent. We must go on.

Think, seventhly, the puzzle of separation. What do I mean by this? Well, this is what puzzles. What does separation from the world mean if it doesn't mean this? What is separation from the world mean if it doesn't mean separation from vile images, from violent scenes, from blasphemy and profanity? What does it ... John says:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.¹²

What can it possibly mean, love not the world, if it doesn't mean this? Separation from the cinema. What is left? Is there anything left? Think of the words we have here.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 8:13.

¹¹ Romans 13:11-12.

¹² 1 John 2:15-16.

“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”¹³

What does this mean if it doesn't mean this? What does this mean, Romans 12:9?

“Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.”¹⁴

What does it mean if it doesn't mean what the psalmist said? Turn not away my sight and eyes from viewing vanity. That is the puzzle. I am sure every Christian believes in separation from the world. I mean, you can't deny that in Scripture. What does it mean if it doesn't mean I will not watch immorality? I will not choose to spend time and money listening to Christ's name being taken in vain. I will not sit and watch murder and mayhem for nothing.

Lastly, the poverty of excuses that are given to defend this behavior. What have we heard? We have heard things like this. Well, I am just relaxing. I am just, you know, winding down after a busy week studying, working. It is just my way of relaxing.

Can you relax as a Christian in the presence of adultery? Can you relax while human are being slashed and stabbed? Is that relaxing? Strange heart that relaxes like that.

There are many hobbies, many pass times that can be engaged in that can relax and that can refresh without doing this.

Then somebody says, “Well, it doesn't affect me.” Three things you can say to that. How selfish. It is saying, “I don't care about the impact on others.” Secondly, I would say usually that is an utter lie. And, thirdly, if it is true, I am terrified for you. If that is true, if you can sit there, watch and listen to that and be unaffected, you are not converted. You do not have the Spirit of Christ in you. He is there with you. You are making him watch it and listen to it. What fellowship, said Paul, has Belial with Christ? I will endure no wicked thing before mine eyes to be. I hate the work of those that turn aside. It shall not cleave to me. And somebody else says, “But I go to these things so I can engage in counter culture criticism.” Very fancy words. What does it mean? It means these people are saying, “Well, this is the world and Christians must engage with the world. And we must try and understand their world view, the world view of the non Christian so that we can criticize it and comment on it and show the hollowness and the emptiness of it.”

Well, you know, God has given us two very fruitful sources where we can find out infallibly the world view of the unconverted. We can find out the things that make them tick, the things they think, they things they want. One is the Bible. And other is {?}. Self examination, a knowledge of the wickedness and the evil that is in our own hearts. You can learn everything about the world by that. Everything. It is all in there. We don't need to add to it.

¹³ Revelation 18:4.

¹⁴ Romans 12:9.

And then someone says, “But, you know, if you don’t know about these things, how can you comment on them?” And people won’t take you seriously. You have to show that you are knowledgeable before anyone will listen to you.

So what does this mean? Romans 16:19.

“I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.”¹⁵

What is God saying? He is saying, “There is a certain ignorance, a certain simplicity which is desirable.” He is saying, “Be wise, be knowledgeable. Fill you mind with what is good. And be {?}, be laughed at, be thought a fool because you don’t know the latest film and all its details. And, anyway, we know enough.”

People say, “Oh, well, you know, {?} then you are going to become a monk. You are going to be just... you will be totally separate from the world and you will have no impact upon it.” How can you possibly influence from a distance? What about being salt and light? Well, what about if the salt has lost its savor? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out into the street. And what, as Jesus also said, if the light that is in you be darkness? How great is that darkness?

Sure there is an example in the Bible of Lot. We read of God it says he “delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.)”¹⁶

Do you see what that said? In seeing and hearing. He wasn’t going to a stage shows, the plays. But he saw and he heard enough and we do as well without putting ourselves into the mess of the cesspool. We can pick up enough sadly by just ordinary living in the world, going to the workplace. You say, “Well, you go to the workplace. You come across adultery and blasphemy and profanity and all sorts of wicked things.” You go to cinema by choice. You work of necessity. There is no comparison between the two. Where is the spirit of Lot who was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, who vexed his righteous soul from day to day in what he saw and in what he heard?

And then somebody else says, “Yes, but we mustn’t be ignorant of Satan’s devices. Paul says that. So we have got to go and learn about Satan and about all his ideas.” Paul said, “Be not ignorant of Satan’s devices,” yes. That is why he said, “Come out from among them and be ye separate.” He didn’t say we are not ignorant of Satan’s devices, so let’s go out and watch the latest shows. Let’s go and watch people commit adultery. Let’s go and listen to God’s name being blasphemed. Let’s go and watch the gladiators being martyred in the coliseum. He said, “Come out from among them and be ye separate.”

And then perhaps the most pathetic excuse of all, “But there is murder in the Bible and there is immorality in the Bible and there is all...”

¹⁵ Romans 16:19.

¹⁶ 2 Peter 2: 7-8.

How dare anyone put the holy Word of God in the same breath as the latest films? Really. There is no comparison in the way the Bible presents the reality of life. It is so careful and it is so subdued. It is so non sensational. It is so non detailed. The exact opposite of what you see when you go to the cinema. It is blasphemy to compare the Bible with what goes on at the cinema. The poverty of excuses.

Christians, TV watchers, Christians, PC game players, Christians, film goers, surely there is sufficient biblical reason to say enough is enough. It is so easy. The devil doesn't usually come with an X certificate, it is an 18 film. He doesn't usually come to watch this piece of pornography. He doesn't come with the latest horror movie and say, "Look, start with this." He doesn't. He starts with something relatively tame and be completely tame. And gradually increases and gradually desensitizes, gradually entices. Well, there is only one swear. Two is not much more than one, is it? I mean, that scene it was necessary of the story line, after all, wasn't it? And so it goes on and on and the addiction grows. And you cannot live without it.

Look at these men here. These men and women who sought this great evil world with all its dainties and delicacies and beauties cast down and how could they react? Did they say, "Well, I am glad that is gone"? No, they say, "Alas, alas."

Ask yourself. Can you live without it? What are we? It has got you, hasn't it? You are in the vice. Who knows where it will end?

Is there hope? There is. There is mercy with God. There is forgiveness with him. We may never fully recover from the images and the sights and the sounds we have allowed to enter our minds. But pardon is possible and heaven, thankfully, will wipe it all clean and take it all away never to torment us again. Oh, friends, listen to the Word of God. Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, that ye receive not of her plagues. What would Jesus do? What did Jesus do? What did Jesus say? Really and truly and honestly ask yourself how much you have been taken in, you have been poisoned, you have been persuaded. And go to your knees tonight and say, "It is over by God's grace. Never again. I have been allured. I am in a snare. God, come and deliver me in thy mercy." And resolve with the psalmist. I will endure no wicked thing before mine eyes to be.

Young people, you are the future of this church. Our only hope is that you come firmly and solidly and squarely out of this world and stand for purity and holiness and godliness and build godly families and bring up children in these same ways. If you squander this the cause is lost. It is on your shoulders. It is your responsibility and it starts with that remote control.

Let us pray.

Lord, God, holy one, we wonder that we are not struck down from above. Forgive us for our unholy tolerance. Forgive us for how much we have been affected. Forgive us that we

are not only often spotted by this world, but absolutely covered in its mud. Oh, raise up godly men and women, young men and women who will be different for thy holy name's sake. Amen.