

Entertainment and the Christian

There is a place for entertainment in the Christian life. What are the principles to guide us in our choices of this entertainment? Pause and ponder.

1. Is there a place for entertainment in the life of a Christian? As Christians, we understand from the fourth commandment that our calling is to work - six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work. The Westminster Confession reminds us however, that the duties required in the sixth commandment include all lawful endeavours to preserve the life of ourselves and others, and in listing some of the means to this end, our forefathers have wisely mentioned recreation. Recreation is important for our welfare and Christ shows us the importance of it by his own example in Mark 6:31 where He calls His disciples aside so that they may have time to rest and eat. There is therefore a legitimate place for relaxation and recreation in the life of a Christian but we must be careful that it does not become our primary focus; that it does not become a god. Work must not become a means to an end - that end being our recreation; but rather, our relaxation and recreation should be a means to strengthen and renew us that we might better work and serve the Lord.

I have divided the remainder of this paper into two sections. Firstly, some general principles which ought to guide us in our choice of entertainment, and secondly, some consideration of specific things which we as Christians ought to avoid.

2. Some principles to guide us in our choice of and involvement in entertainment.

a) God's Glory. The very first catechism in the Westminster Standards, which are based upon various Scripture proofs including 1st Corinthians 10:31, reminds us that our chief aim in life should be to glorify God.

Everything we do, even if it is 'simply' eating, sleeping or drinking, we are to do to God's glory. This means that even the entertainment in which we are involved should be God glorifying. We can't take a holiday from God's service. We can't hope that God won't notice one evening of entertainment which is contrary to His Word. If a particular type of recreation or entertainment means doing that which is against God's Word then we cannot legitimately be involved in it. This flies in the face of worldly teaching which says "if it feels good, do it!" Don't forget that we are sinful creatures and, although we may as God's people be born again, that old man of sin still lives in us. Therefore everything that feels good to us is not necessarily good in God's eyes. We must therefore keep our entertainment within the boundaries of God's law (which I might add, is not at all restrictive, but holy, just, good and true). If we love the Lord, and our whole desire is to serve Him and glorify Him, can we really be involved in activities where His name is blasphemed and His commandments are broken? Would this be honouring to our God?

b) Our own welfare. Obviously, if we are doing that which glorifies God then it will be good for us but, obvious as that may be, it is important to remind ourselves that the converse is also true; that is, if it is not God glorifying, then it is not good for our spiritual welfare. We ought to avoid all activities which would endanger our physical or spiritual health. An entertainment which interferes with our walk with the Lord, stunts our prayer life, or endangers our morality, ought to be avoided at all costs. Do we rush through our devotions some nights because our favourite TV show is about to start? Are we unable to concentrate at worship on Sunday morning because we have been out "partying" too hard the night before? Our entertainment morning because we have been out "partying" too hard the night before? Our entertainment ought to be relaxing - it is no good if it leaves us so exhausted that we cannot do our work properly. (Psalm 127:2).

c) Our separation from the world. God calls us as His people to be separate from the world (1st Corinthians 6:14,15). We are in the world but we are not to be of the world (John 17:15). The world is no friend of God, and is in fact at enmity with God. Therefore all the entertainment produced by the world will be against God, as those who are not for Him are against Him (Matthew 12:30, James 4:4). There is no neutral ground. Beware of the world's literature, songs and movies. Some, we know are blatantly immoral and anti-Christian but others are more subtle in their humanistic philosophies and we are easily fooled into thinking that they are okay. They will have their effect on us, such as dulling our senses to the sinfulness of sin.

3. Some specific considerations for your own meditation. Do you really love Jesus? If you do, then you really won't need a long list of do's and don'ts, but rather you will naturally want to do those things which please Him and will seek to avoid that which brings Him dishonour. In saying that however, let us look at some specific issues where I believe our spiritual senses have become very dull. I might add here that these are my own thoughts on this matter, an issue with which I myself have been struggling for some time and in which I have certainly been no role model. I have found Philippians 4:8 to be one among many verses which is most profitable when considering the following issues.

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.

watching, the reading of secular material or the listening to of secular music, but rather, certain elements of these which ought to discourage us from involvement in them. I point out for your consideration three issues - sex, violence and blasphemy.

Sex is a gift of God (and therefore good) which has its rightful place in marriage. The sexual relationship between a husband and a wife is a private and personal activity, and does not belong to the public domain. When public nudity and public sexual activity (after the fall) is mentioned in the Bible, it is clear that it is a shameful and/or sinful thing (cf. Genesis 9:22-23, II Samuel 16:20-22 among others). Those of you who are married, what would you think if people were to set up their chairs in your bedroom and watch you and your spouse engage in sexual activity. I hope we (married or unmarried) are all shocked and embarrassed at the thought - then be shocked also at the thought of seating yourself in a theatre to watch the same or reading of such in books or magazines. Not only are such things portrayed upon the screen, written of and portrayed in literature, but even worse, it is usually an adulterous relationship. Many modern songs (and many old songs including opera) are full, if not of blatant sexual lyrics, at least of sexual innuendoes and suggestions. Is this how we are entertained? Is this how we glorify our Father in heaven? Is this how we serve Him? Think back to the verse in Philippians.

Violence. Here is another issue which is prolific in the cinema and literature. What does the scripture have to say regarding violence? Psalm 11:5, Proverbs 16:29. It is clear from these verses alone that violence is something that the Lord hates, something that is not good and I doubt whether any Christian would say that it is a good thing. However, as some would argue that it is crucial to the plot of a story, I in turn would ask of what benefit is it or what good does it do us to watch people shot, run over, blown up or even hacked to pieces? Does it do our souls good? Does it edify us? Does it relax us? Does it glorify God? Upon what does the verse in Philippians tell us to think?

Blasphemy. We know from God's Word (the third commandment) that blasphemy breaks the law of God. The profane misuse of the precious Names of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit is highly offensive in the extreme to Him and ought also be offensive to us as His people, and bring us great sorrow. It is as if we slap God in the face when we continue to read or watch something that is full of blasphemy. We are virtually saying that it really doesn't bother us - it's just a book/movie. What makes it worse however is that this blasphemy is not said in the heat of the moment (sinful as that is) but this blasphemy is scripted! It has been written down deliberately for you to read or for the actor to say. This is deliberate blasphemy against almighty God.

To conclude, let us be careful that we do not end up like the Pharisees - a bunch of hypocrites who sit in our pews on Sundays nodding our heads to the condemnation of all of the above sins, and then going out and entertaining ourselves with the same sins during the week. Let us rather seek other forms of recreation and entertainment which are more God glorifying and edifying to our hearts and souls.

by John Torlach

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