

Christians and Entertainment

By Gerry Watts

Humanity was made in the image of its Creator and therefore much that is natural and 'human' is, in fact, a partial representation of God, even though this representation is somewhat incomplete, as only Christ Himself is the full complement of God. Among the numerous gifts that have been inherently given to mankind is that of creative ability, whether this takes the form of music, art, dance, writing or various forms of expression in acting, etc, etc. The list could go on and on.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with any of these things in and of themselves, but it is inevitable that due to humanity's sin and corruption, these creative abilities can become tarnished and can be abused. But then the very weaknesses caused by the inherent corruption that lies within us all, and the common experiences of humanity throughout history (in the lusts and failings of the flesh); it is these human experiences that need to be expressed through creative works, thereby sharing the common thoughts and feelings of the race, no matter how degraded that may often be. We have all been tainted to some degree by sin, wickedness and death - some more so than others.

The Bible itself is full of such examples of human violence and wickedness, sexual immorality and degrading religious practices, along with all kinds of human temptation and deception. Some of the greatest men of God, such as King David, were far from being clean-cut, perfect gentlemen - and their mistakes and human weaknesses are recorded for our comfort! The real issue though has to do with the upright heart that has been changed by the Spirit of God; the heart of faith that seeks to view things from the Divine viewpoint - a man after God's own heart. God loves to choose and use the weak, 'sinful' ones so that no one can boast before Him. He's not primarily looking for self-righteous, religious types - though they can be changed too of course!

The modern technological world is full of that which is there to entertain us - theatre, movies, television, home videos, books, games, etc, etc. The world is becoming obsessed with leisure and pleasure. So where does the 'Christian' fit into all of this? Can a true spiritual follower of Christ enjoy any of these avenues of entertainment and creative ability, whether actively involved or as a spectator? There are many within 'the Church' who would say 'No, it is all sinful and of the devil!' Then there are others who would say, 'Yes, we can live it up and do what we like!' These are the extremes, but I believe that there is a balance that can be found for those seeking the spiritual walk.

Spiritual Principles

I wish to focus on movies in particular (especially as I have a web page devoted to some of my favourite films!) because they are a powerful medium of communication. The questions could be asked, "What kind of films can a spiritual

believer in Christ watch and even enjoy? Where do we draw the line concerning violence, sex, bad language, etc?"

Well, here are a few simple guidelines that I believe need to be observed in answering the above questions:

1. One man's food is another man's poison. What is OK for one may not be OK for another. So we must seek to respect another's viewpoint and not put any stumbling block in a fellow believer's way (Romans 14:13).
2. All is allowed us, but not all is beneficial (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). In this era of grace, there are no strict laws in this regard (Romans 7:6). We have the freedom to 'choose' but some things may not be beneficial to us at a given time, and may even be harmful.
3. Everything that is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23). If a believer's conscience is defiled because they believe that what they are doing is wrong or unscriptural (including watching a particular movie), then it is not of faith, so they would be better off not doing it.
4. We must seek to view things from God's vantage point of truth, love and righteousness - a spiritual filter so to speak - knowing that God, and His grace, is Supreme. To view things from Satan's vantage point will lead to fear and darkness.

Movies & TV

These are spiritual principles that are clearly revealed in Scripture. Now let us take an example. Included in my Movie List is the film *Highlander*. I'm using this film as an example because, even though there are much better ones that I could pick out, this one has a dark element to it that serves a better purpose for this article. Now this movie contains some scenes of violence via sword fighting; some bad language and some misuse of Christ's name; and also some mild sex scenes. Yet the movie also reveals much about love and also the lack of it, and the fight against evil. It also reveals something of the awfulness of life for many in this world, and that 'spiritual power' is a force for change. It also highlights the oneness of all living things with its Creator. (It is true to say that I don't need to watch this film to learn that these things are true, but this can apply to anything, whether it be a book, film, TV programme, etc).

Be that as it may, I have watched this film a number of times over the years and I have been greatly blessed by it for a number of reasons (although its initial impact has worn off a bit now). I have even been moved to tears during the scene where Connor's wife dies while the words are being sung 'Who wants to live forever when

love must die.' I can view every aspect of the film from a spiritual perspective and I can glean a lot from it all.

Of course, this is my life and walk, and that is my experience. I have the freedom to spend my time as I see fit (with consideration of my wife as well!), with my Father sat beside me. (And for those who are shut in a lot of the time due to illness, like myself, the 'Babylonian Idiot Box,' as I've heard the TV being called, can often be a window on the world, travelling the globe from your own front room and entering into another's experience of life).

Blasphemy & Sex

But I am fully aware that there may be other believers who would be offended by this movie for a number of reasons. I can totally understand why some would object to listening to blasphemy. I hate hearing it myself. But it is very difficult to avoid it in today's world. Most are ignorant of what they are saying and who's name it is that they are using so degradingly. But I also believe that one day they will come to realise their mistakes and ALL humanity will bow before, and acclaim, the One who died for them. The name of God and His Son, Christ Jesus, which they now misuse in ignorance, will be spoken of with great honour and respect in that future day. So as much as I don't like hearing blasphemy, I see it that truth is being spoken out in the name of God and His Son - but those misusing that name don't yet realise their foolishness. If someone says "God Almighty," in my heart I'm saying "Yes He is" - and sometimes I'll say it out loud! In the light of the cross, all will be justified. I'm not condoning it, just seeking to turn it into good in spirit.

I certainly do not condone pornographic images, and the use of sex in acting is often just an excuse to indulge the lusts of the flesh, but I personally do not have a problem with a sex scene in a movie that is done tastefully. If I did have a problem with it, I would try and avoid watching it. Have I ever watched porn? Like most men, yes I have, but it's a dangerous place to go and only defiles the spirit. I have certainly not been innocent in this regard in my past! (I say this openly and honestly, as I am aware that there are many religious people out there who outwardly strongly protest at 'such filth' and yet they secretly indulge in watching it - or worse still, living an immoral, even perverted, life! Let us be real!).

Yet nakedness and sex is a natural part of human existence (though it is usually degraded and often has nothing to do with real love) and I have to say that I don't get all wound up about seeing nakedness or a 'love scene' in a movie! I'm not saying that I agree with acting out explicit love scenes, and if I was an actor I wouldn't do it, but that's a whole other issue!

But there is this religious notion among many, which has its roots in the medieval Church and the Victorian era, that normal sexuality is somehow bad. There are many who are burdened with guilt about 'sexual problems' and their feelings, who think that seeing the image of a naked body will dirty them! But for the spiritually mature one, who is aware that they are justified before God, and secure in their identity in Christ, these things should not be a major problem. God created the human body, and male and female, and the beauty of sex, and He also understands the weaknesses of the flesh. Although we may be influenced from without, the seed of sin is already within; that is, we are already tainted! What is needed is a reality

check and the spiritual power of the new humanity in Christ to set us free. The light within us *can* overcome the darkness.

The apostle Paul would have seen numerous naked images and statues on his travels, and may even have visited homes that had walls that were covered with these images. Did he cover them up or try and make out that human sexuality was somehow wrong? I think not. What he *did* teach was that sexual perversion and prostitution (that is, unlawful use of the body for sexual pleasure, whether paid or unpaid) was unnatural and degrading, and that the obsession with the carnality of the gods was also shameful and unhealthy. But he fully endorsed natural God-given love-making between those who were committed to one another in love, legally covenanted before God as husband and wife. He also knew the reality and temptations of being a man! All of this is made clear in his first letter to the Corinthians.

But on the other hand, I have to say that I am sick of the world's pre-occupation with sex and sensuality. It is leading more and more people down a path of destruction, dark perversions and literal (and figurative) bondage. And tragically, the sickness of paedophilia is damaging the very foundations of human love and affection in family life. All of these sickening acts of the flesh will soon be judged. All wrongs will eventually be put right.

For Good or Evil?

Returning to the issue of movies, there are many great films that portray historical events, including Biblical ones. This can be achieved in a very realistic way through make-up, special effects and filming techniques. Even epic battle scenes can be realistically re-enacted, placing us in the midst of it all, giving us a better understanding of what others have experienced in life and death. Admittedly there is the question, "But how realistic does it need to be?" It is true to say that we don't *need* bad language, blasphemy and more explicit sex scenes and violence in a film to make it a good movie - especially if these things are gratuitous. For one thing, some films would be far better and more watchable in my opinion if they didn't bombard the viewer with a profusion of swear words and strong language! There's no need of it (and this is coming from someone who's had a real issue over the years with trying to control strong language myself!)

But I have to say again, at the risk of being misunderstood, that these things are a part of life, and I have been greatly blessed by, and have learnt a lot through, watching movies that do contain some of the above. **But I wouldn't force this upon anyone else.** In fact, there are some movies that I would greatly *discourage* people from seeing. It is up to each individual to decide what they do before God. We shall all appear before His Judgement Seat for our accounting - and that which is not of faith is sin. But by the grace of God we are what we are.

Flesh or Spirit?

But having said all of this, it is abundantly clear that the film industry, particularly Hollywood, is full of greed, corruption, filth and every lust and act of the flesh that there is. It is detestable. But although the whole business world revolves around money and is full of corruption, especially in movie making, we cannot tar everyone with the same brush. The world is the world and the flesh is the flesh. Yet I firmly

believe that the spiritual believer can walk in the midst of it all and remain free - and in the process, enjoy a good movie or TV program that can make us laugh, cry, meditate on the worlds affairs and suffering, and to even find inspiration and love.

The real issue then concerning entertainment in general, but particularly movies and television, is, "Does this feed my flesh or my spirit? What is the focus of my heart? Is this damaging to me?" God sees everything that goes on in this world but He is not tempted by anything or anyone; and Christ Himself doesn't have the inherent weakness of sinful flesh, though He was tempted in every way as a human, yet was without sin. The whole purpose of the spiritual walk is to become more like the Son of God, who sees the world and its people as they really are in truth and love. But He doesn't hide from sin and wickedness, believing that He will be tainted by it - neither should the mature believer. As the Spirit becomes stronger, the power of the flesh will weaken.

But we are not all in the same place as far as spiritual maturity is concerned, and we all have different strengths and weaknesses - but what really counts is our relationship to the Father through Christ. The Christian life is not about religious good works, but about living in fellowship with the Creator of all and walking in the freedom of His Spirit, being transformed into the Image of His Son. This atmosphere of grace will inevitably lead us to enjoy the good works of God that He has prepared for us beforehand, that we may walk in them. Let no one judge you in regard to what you watch - but walk carefully for the sake of the little ones.