

# Obscene Movies & TV Programs

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Few things frighten me any more than the passing comments I hear brothers and sisters in the Lord make about the movies and TV programs they've watched. Just when I believe there may be a deepening spirituality among the Lord's people in our day, someone who is thought to be a part of the strength of his or her congregation tells me what they've seen recently — and I find it difficult to be optimistic at all about where we are headed as a people. When it comes to telltale signs of spiritual shakiness, there are none more disturbing than the problem we have with obscene movies and TV programs.

The extent of the problem. It is an obvious fact that pop entertainment has gone from bad to worse in the matter of obscenity (as well as violence and secular philosophy, which are, of course, no less a problem). In regular broadcast television, not to mention cable TV or the movies, the language has grown increasingly profane and vulgar, producers are daily pushing the limits on nudity and sexual content, homosexuality has come out of the closet and onto the tube, and the "moral" values that are promoted are farther and farther away from anything the serious Christian can identify with. What is being pumped into our homes has changed for the worse so noticeably that even one secular writer previewed a recent TV season with an article entitled, "The Family Hour Fades to Black."

But the worsening of movie and TV content itself is not the whole problem. The acceptance of this fare by supposedly strong, faithful Christians is what is alarming. We may have an admirable devotion to the Lord in many things, but when it comes to entertainment we are bowing before the altar of television; we are going to the theater to see virtually any movie we believe we will enjoy; we are letting our kids watch nearly anything they want; we are paying to get "premium" cable channels which rarely carry anything the Christian can afford to be interested in; and we are buying DVDs that not too many years ago would have been classified pornographic. Basically, we've sold our souls for a mess of footage, and it is impossible to contemplate what has happened without being concerned about the future.

The worrisome aspect of the problem. Obviously, none of us can say we have been entirely consistent in our entertainment, least of all this writer. To my discredit, I have been places and seen things no Christian ought to. But the thing about the present situation that seems different to me is that I'm encountering mature saints who not only watch obscene movies and TV programs, but defend their practice as perfectly acceptable conduct for the Christian! It's one thing to give in to temptation and, when confronted, offer excuses about not being as strong as one should be. But if we are now thinking that those who question our viewing habits are the ones with the problem, then we have entered a new and worrisome phase in the battle against obscenity.

More and more often, I hear responses like the following whenever I express amazement at a movie or TV program that a fellow Christian says he has seen: Well, it didn't have much profanity in it.

I hear it so much at work, it doesn't bother me. I just tune it out. If it bothers or offends you, then it's not a movie you should see — but it didn't bother me. If you can't handle it, you shouldn't see it — but I've been out in the real world enough, I can handle it.

If it embarrasses you, you shouldn't see it — but I'm mature enough that things like that don't embarrass me.

We watched it at home. There's nothing really wrong when it's "just us."

Surely, we can't fail to notice the common thread that runs through these remarks: that obscenity is acceptable entertainment for us if we personally have been so "desensitized" that obscenity no longer bothers, offends, or embarrasses us. That we think that way is cause enough for concern.

But that we are pleased with ourselves for thinking that way is truly frightening. If we have, in fact, lost our sensitivity to obscenity and are patting ourselves on the back because of it, then we are not far from qualifying for Paul's description of those "whose glory is in their shame" (Phil 3:19).

But whether one is bothered or embarrassed has very little to do with the question of whether one should or should not indulge in certain entertainment. The Lord, if He were on earth today, would be strong enough to "handle" far more than any of us — but you would not catch Him entertaining Himself with the stuff we watch. What it comes down to is that we've turned decency upside down when we start defining how spiritually mature and strong we are in terms of how little embarrassment we feel in the presence of obscenity.

Whether we realize it or not, we have adopted the basic posture of the Gnostics of the first century. These were brethren who believed themselves to be a select group of Christians who had achieved such a high plane of strength and enlightenment that they could indulge in immorality and not be hurt spiritually. They liked to think the amount of fleshly indulgence they could "handle" was a sign of their advanced knowledge and sophistication. But John, as well as other inspired writers, called this enticing doctrine what it always is: a lie. He wrote, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 Jn. 1:6).

The New Testament admonition to purity. Need it be pointed out that the Scriptures call us to inner sanctity? Have we forgotten that the Lord said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:8)? Have we forgotten that Paul wrote, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8)? Whatever any of us individually may or may not be "bothered" by, the passage is still there waiting to be dealt with which says that there are some things not "fitting" for the Christian to dally with, among them "uncleanness" and "filthiness" (Eph.

5:3,4). Those around us, whose souls we hope to reach with the gospel, deserve to see in us a better example. We owe it to them, as well as to the Lord and ourselves, to demonstrate that the path of purity is better than any other path we may follow.