

1 Reason the Church Is Losing Its Power in This Dark Age

Famed radio host Janet Parshall aired a program in 2013 about new movie sensations that are depicting ungodly themes, such as *Twilight* and others. Her guest made the point that the church is losing the power of discernment. I couldn't agree more.

Before sending this article to print, I asked my mother for feedback and perspective from an earlier generation. She said: "The older generation has seen the slow digression from standards of excellence in movie-making to movies that distort and destroy and are far removed from themes of integrity. Fifty years ago, these types of programs were recognized as wrong. Although we might watch them, few, if any, would dare justify them."

The unavoidable truth is that we are becoming desensitized. The Holy Spirit no longer fills our hearts with a passion for purity and holiness. As a result, there is a general lack of conviction. If this article upsets, that's often a good indication that change may need to take place.

Carnality not only affects the pew, but the pulpit as well. A carnal pastor still offers motivating sermons, but he will lose unction, boldness and spiritual insight. The world and carnal Christians will love him, but Spirit-filled believers will leave the service starving for more of God. Pastors, if we would make it our goal to know Christ more personally, we would preach Christ more powerfully. Are we calling people out of the deceptive cultural mindset or are we encouraging it by our silence?

Desensitization can be well-illustrated through a story I heard years ago. Eskimos in the barren North often kill wolves

by taking a razor sharp knife and dipping it in blood. They allow the blood to freeze to the blade. Then they bury the handle of the knife in the snow with the blade exposed. As the wolf begins to lick the blade, his tongue becomes numb and desensitized due to the cold. As he continues, his tongue begins to bleed, and he licks even faster—unaware that he is consuming his own blood and slowly killing himself.

Within time, the Eskimos return and bring the dead animal home. In the same way, the enemy numbs us through compromise by what we allow into our mind. Within time, we, like the wolves, don't see that we are dying—dying spiritually.

The enemy desensitizes us until we are numb to the things of God ... until conviction fades. For example, why do so many enjoy movies and programs that glorify illicit sex, witchcraft, the occult, extreme violence, vampires and child sacrifice? Incredibly, what God calls an abomination is today's entertainment. We have no time for prayer and devotion, but plenty of time for entertainment. Do you see the disconnect?

We rationalize watching and listening to questionable material because, in many cases, we have been desensitized. Let's be honest: We enjoy it. Excuses are often packaged in phrases such as "I have liberty to watch this," "It's no big deal; everyone is doing it" or, my personal favorite, "I need to watch these things so I can relate to the culture." But we must remember that liberty has limits. The key is to ask, "Will it build me up spiritually or pull me down?"

A Christian once told me, "I don't worry about what I watch or listen to as long as my heart is right." Sadly, this comment came from a youth pastor. It's an indication of how far we have drifted.

To suggest that these types of programs are neutral simply reflects a lack of spiritual discernment. Some animated

allegories of good and evil can carry a good message; however, when evil is portrayed as good, and we become obsessed in watching them, we've crossed the line: "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Is. 5:20).

There are gray areas—this I clearly understand—but illicit sex, enchantments, witchcraft, familiar spirits, wizards, extreme violence and child sacrifice are not gray areas; even if "portrayed" as good. Darkness should not entertain the church—there should be a different influence guiding us.

What we watch and listen to affects the heart; it's impossible to separate the two. This generation, in large number, suffers from hopelessness and depression ... suicide is an epidemic among young adults. Surely, one has to wonder if there is a correlation. Do we really think that these types of movies are not going to affect us or our children? Do we really believe that these are simply fun, entertaining shows with no spiritual ramifications?

Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." For this reason, Psalm 101:3 warns us not to put anything wicked before our eyes, and 1 Timothy 4:12 exhorts us to be examples of purity and decency. Philippians 4:8 says to fix our thoughts on what is true, honorable and right and to think about things that are pure, lovely, admirable and worthy of praise.

Everyone who names the name of Christ must depart from anything that goes against His standard of holiness if they truly desire discernment. Discernment cannot come from a polluted mind.

One year, with summer approaching, I stepped into my in-laws' pool. My immediate reaction to the piercing cold water was to

step out, but to avoid their comments, I continued down the steps. I stopped when the water reached my knees. After a few minutes, I continued to move slowly down, stopping for brief periods until I was fully submerged.

Each step was shocking, but gradually, I became comfortable with the cold water—my body accepted what was initially shocking. In the same way, we've become comfortable with ungodly entertainment, and what once alarmed us now amuses us. We continue to hear, "Come on in, it's not that bad; everyone's doing it!", and we step right in. There is no such thing as "good magic" or "good witches" or "nice vampires."

These things, by their very nature, are evil. Scripture makes it clear that fascination with the powers of darkness and the occult have no place in the heart or the mind of a Christian. Even more discouraging than the time and money spent on the occult and vampire craze, is the young age at which children are exposed to these spiritual perversions.

We must once again seek God's standards of purity and holiness. "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that will he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).