

Should Christians Avoid All Movie Violence?

Our comprehensive movie reviews at Movieguide, the definitive family guide to movies and entertainment, not only tell parents the amount of foul language, sex, nudity, alcohol use, smoking and drug use occurring in movies like the reboot of *Superman* and *Iron Man 3*, they also tell them the level of violence the movie has.

Even so, people still get confused about the issue of violence. In fact, many well-meaning Christians think that God the Father and His one and only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, are pacifists. Thus, they shun all but the softest levels of violence.

They also use the inaccurate translation for Exodus 20:13, "Thou shalt not kill," when the original Hebrew text actually says, "Thou shalt not murder."

This makes for a disconnect with other biblical passages where God directly orders the Jews to destroy the wicked people in the Promised Land, who were so evil that they engaged in perverted homosexual acts, witchcraft and child sacrifice. Moreover, many Christians specifically forget that, in His first coming, Jesus offered forgiveness to sinners and the nations of the earth, but in His second coming, Jesus brings divine judgment.

Revelation 19:15, 21 describes the final judgment that Jesus will bring: "Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword to strike down the nations. ... The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse." Even the Hebrew Scriptures describe God's Judgment Day in violent terms. Thus, quoting God (and actually quoting Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God made flesh), Isaiah 63:3 says,

"I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing." Then, of course, there is the lake of fire, into which God casts the devil and all unrepentant sinners.

Some time ago, a couple readers complained to us about the level of violence that occurs in the new *Chronicles of Narnia* movie, *Prince Caspian*.

Although the violence in *Prince Caspian* is indeed too strong for young children, one must put the movie's violence into context. Thus, in the movie, it is clear that the villains don't just want to wage war; they want to commit murder and genocide. Furthermore, it is the good guys who suggest to the villains that the war be decided by single combat between the two kings, Peter and Miraz. Then it is King Miraz's lieutenant who breaks the peace by murdering Miraz and waging total war against the Narnians. Naturally, the Narnians, led by Prince Caspian and the four Pevensie children, defend themselves, and a great battle ensues. When the battle is won, the Narnians show mercy to those they have defeated.

Thus, the filmmakers behind *Prince Caspian* actually use its depiction of violence to make some important and valid moral points about self-defense, mercy and peacemaking.

The admonishment by Jesus in the New Testament to turn the other cheek and to bless those who persecute the faithful does not apply to criminals and terrorists who are trying to murder our families or mutilate our bodies! It certainly doesn't apply to people who are attacking children, women or defenseless men. Furthermore, as Paul writes in Romans 13, the righteous governmental authorities over us do not bear the sword in vain but must use the sword to restrain and punish evildoers. Of course, in the United States of America, it is the people who are supposed to rule the government, not the other way around.

The same Jesus Christ who commands us not to pick a fight and not to seek vengeance is the same Jesus who violently overturned the tables of the wicked moneylenders in the temple and drove them out of the temple with a whip. He is the same Jesus who will come again to punish evil nations and cast the wicked into the lake of fire. He is not some milquetoast who, while preaching peace, sticks a gun to your head to steal your money and property so he and his colleagues can live in luxury in some suburb in your state's capital or in Washington, D.C.

As always, Christians need to exercise discernment when it comes to the depiction of violence in the mass media. Impressionable people, especially children and teenagers, must proceed with caution. Perhaps they should stay away if they, or their parents, feel they are susceptible.

Even so, there is nothing inherently evil or immoral with some amount of action violence in a movie. Especially if the movie, like *Prince Caspian*, uses such imagery to send some important moral lessons along the way.