

That's Not Just Entertainment!

Why discernment matters in a media-saturated world



These days, the term *entertainment* is all-encompassing. Television, movies, radio, video games, Facebook, YouTube, smart phones ... often, it's lumped into one word. In the United States, the consumption of entertainment is almost like breathing. Yet how many of us consider that most entertainment is created to advance an agenda and deliver a message? Whether it's a Christian message of salvation or a hedonistic message extolling everything from fornication to occultism, there is an underlying purpose.

As believers, we long to please Jesus in all that we do, including with our entertainment choices. Yet when it comes to making godly choices amid the plethora of entertainment available today, it's imperative that we develop discernment not only for what's on the surface of what we're engaging with, but also for the underlying messages.

In Romans 14, Paul specifically addresses how to live godly lives and make Christ-honoring choices in a culture where "anything goes." At the time, Paul was dealing with issues surrounding choices about what to eat—and believers' judgment upon those who had no qualms eating meat. He settles the argument by reminding the church, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men" (vv. 17-18, NKJV).

God Likes to Party, But ...

Let's get one thing straight: God is not opposed to entertainment. We know Jesus enjoyed parties and celebrations. There is a proper time and place for entertainment for us too, just as there was for Jesus.

However, we who live by the Holy Spirit have a different standard. As a result, our entertainment choices should meet certain criteria. When we don't use discernment, we risk falling into temptation. The apostle Paul knew such temptation was to be avoided, and he exhorted the early church to set practical boundaries for this very purpose.

CHEW ON THIS:

In 1 Corinthians 10:7, Paul also wrote: "And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.'" How do the limits Paul sets in this verse help to keep entertainment in its proper perspective?

Spending time recreating or being entertained is not, in itself, sinful. The key, however, is where we draw the line. The Bible is explicitly critical of pleasure in the context of excessive pleasure or evil pleasure. When our lives revolve around our own means of pleasure—what movie we'll see, what sports event we're watching, what video game we're buying—we've entered dangerous territory. Proverbs 21:17 states it bluntly: "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich."

In other words, wise people are not consumed with their own pleasure, nor do they enjoy indulging in sinful or evil pleasure. Proverbs accentuates this: "A fool finds pleasure in

wicked schemes, but a person of understanding delights in wisdom” (10:23, NIV). And Ecclesiastes 7:4 adds: “The heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.”

SOUL-SEARCHING:

- 1. How many hours a day do you engage in entertainment-related activities?*
- 2. How often do you think about these activities each day?*
- 3. What kinds of entertainment do you currently enjoy that might put you in the “fool” category, as described above?*
- 4. What do you feel when you’re consuming such entertainment—during and after?*

Light or Dark?

If it’s natural to enjoy being entertained, then how do we make wise decisions with the media we consume? How do we keep a healthy balance between the extremes of guilt on one hand and indulgence on the other? It starts with setting boundaries.

King David established boundaries and expressed some of those in Psalm 101:3-4: “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes. ... A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness” (NKJV). David didn’t always succeed at doing this, and he paid the consequences for some of his poor “entertainment” choices. Yet God was quick to reach out to him and re-establish the standard of purity in him. In the same way for believers, Jesus has already re-established that standard in us, no matter what poor entertainment choices we’ve made in the past—now it’s a matter of walking it out.

One of the basic ways we do this is by understanding the importance of what we take in with our eyes. Jesus reinforced the power of the eye gate on multiple occasions: “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness” (Matt. 6:22-23).

If most of what you see is dark, then don’t expect your inner life to be full of light. (As Proverbs 4:23 says, “Out of [the heart] spring the issues of life.”) Every moral story includes an element of evil to differentiate the bad guys from the good guys. In the early days of filmmaking, depictions of good and evil were clearly portrayed. It’s difficult to find the true hero in many films today. Movies are just as likely to portray the villain as the hero, a guy who engages in sinful behavior such as lying, cheating, stealing or even murder—all justified to accomplish a higher purpose. Exposure to movies that blur the lines between good and evil can cloud our thinking. This doesn’t mean we should never watch movies that don’t have a clear-cut good guy or bad guy; but it does mean we need to think about what our eyes are taking in and how the underlying messages affect our inner life.

Believers have the Holy Spirit to distinguish between good and evil (light and darkness). As heirs of Christ, we have a keen awareness of testing the spirits. Yet entertainment is one of the more difficult diversions to test, because we are surrounded by a worldview that is innately permissive.

YOUR TURN:

Read 1 John 4:1 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22. How do these Scriptures apply to discerning between light and darkness? List some ways you can “test the spirits” in the various forms of entertainment you enjoy most.

Christians too often embrace the notion, “The things I really like are immoral, illegal or fattening.” If we’re honest, many of us feel guilty if we’re having too much fun because we immediately relate it to sinful pleasure.

God has given us His Spirit to dwell in us, and we know He does not condemn but instead convicts. Therefore, we must discern if our entertainment choices produce guilt (condemnation) initiated by the enemy or conviction by the Holy Spirit. Guilt will draw you away from the Lord and deeper into sin. Conviction is the Holy Spirit nudging you to confess and turn away from sin.

CHEW ON THIS:

- 1. How does the promise in Romans 8:1 help to keep our lives in balance?*
- 2. Read also Psalm 32:5, Romans 8:31-39 and Philippians 4:13. How do these verses apply to your entertainment choices?*
- 3. Now read John 14:26 and 16:13. What does the Holy Spirit offer you when you’re making an entertainment-related decision?*

The Ultimate Standard

Ephesians 5:11-12 sets the bar on how we deal with entertainment that celebrates darkness: “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret” (NIV).

Similarly, Hebrews 5:14 challenges mature believers to a discerning lifestyle: “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their

senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (NKJV).

God’s Word is all about setting standards. Philippians 4:8 gives us a written standard of Christ-like living so we can judge for ourselves what is good and what is sinful: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (NIV). We can apply this to our entertainment choices, keeping in mind the meaning behind each criterion:

True—promotes biblical truth

Noble—honorable and respectable

Right—regarded as upright, righteous, virtuous, innocent and without fault

Pure—absence of evil; modest or clean; nothing inappropriate

Lovely—generally acceptable or pleasing

Admirable—deserving the highest praise

Excellent—having moral excellence

Praiseworthy—worthy of admiration

An important part of developing discernment is committing to a standard of behavior that lives up to a worldview pleasing to God. Read Proverbs 4:23-27 as a pledge to keep God’s standard alive in your life. Personalize the Scripture and make this your prayer of commitment to a lifestyle of Christ-like entertainment choices.

Dick Rolfe launched The Dove Foundation in 1991. The nonprofit organization is committed to encouraging filmmakers to make clean movies and empowering consumers to make wise choices. For more information, go to .