

Want Better Christian TV?

Give your money to ministries and churches that produce quality programs.

You don't have to go far these days to hear people complain about Christian television. As a producer myself, I can tell you that most programming on religious channels is produced by people who have a genuine calling and are trying to reach the largest audience possible with the message of freedom in Christ.

So why is so much of religious TV still corny and so poorly produced? (And if you've read this column before, you know how much I hate the junk some TV evangelists give away.) You might be surprised with the answer: It's us. The audience is the reason much of Christian television is so awful.

Because the vast majority of networks and stations do not broadcast commercials for secular products, they rely on a marketing technique called "direct response." That means churches, ministries, TV stations and networks rely on the financial response of their audiences to keep the programs on the air. Without you and me sending in money, Christian television would be finished. Whether you send in your gift during a telethon, or through follow-up direct mail, those financial gifts keep the programs on the air.

The bottom line? Somebody supports the programs you're watching—even the bad ones!

Want better Christian programming? Change your giving habits. Start supporting churches and ministries that produce the best quality, and most innovative, scripturally sound and

compelling programming. This will have a dramatic impact on the future of television.

Here are some recommendations to follow:

1. **Programs need to be biblically sound.** Whether it's a teaching, interview, music special or movie, the program needs to present an orthodox view of the Bible. It can be subtle, as in a movie story, but whatever the presentation of the gospel, it needs to be doctrinally correct. The truth is, a lot of people are teaching some controversial stuff out there, and some Christians are too lazy to study the Word to find out.
2. **Media ministry leaders need to live a life of integrity.** Don't fall for the self-proclaimed prophets or teachers. Their ministries need to hold to principles of accountability—financially, morally and spiritually. Perhaps the greatest scandal of Christian television is that so many leaders' lifestyles aren't different from the mainstream culture.
3. **Don't give to a ministry out of guilt.** Don't let anyone manipulate you into giving through emotional appeals. Think and pray before you send a check, and never send a gift on impulse. Be particularly careful during telethons, when the "A-team" of fundraisers gets in front of the cameras. Their arguments are too often emotional and scripturally dubious, so if you feel someone trying to whip the audience into a spiritual frenzy, change the channel.
4. **Stop giving to get something in return.** The single biggest reason ministries offer what I call "Jesus junk" is because people won't give unless they get some cheap gift in return. Scripture key chains, plastic statues of Jesus, angel pens, prayer cloths and miracle water all would disappear if we

simply stopped giving to get something.

Whatever you do, don't take this as a reason to stop giving to Christian television. But I would encourage you to rethink your giving. Some wonderful ministries that are trying to produce compelling and uplifting programming struggle because they're not being supported. Yet, we shovel money to questionable ministries.

The gospel of Christ deserves better. You have far more power over programming than you think. If you'll start using it, TV will never be the same.

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