JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My kids want to see every movie that comes along because all their friends do. They ask: "What's wrong with it?" Give me some guidelines, please!

ANSWER: Personally, I don't see many movies. Frankly, I don't want to. The same goes for most of what's on television. Hollywood could have so much good to offer our culture (What a powerful medium!), but it has generally taken the low road.

That said, it is the spiritually immature Christian who asks: "What is wrong with it?" The mature Christian always asks: "**What is right about it?**" (Parents, ask your kids: "What's right about it?")

The Corinthian congregation had a problem… they used their freedom in Christ as a license for living immorally. St. Paul exposed their sophistry in 1 Corinthians 6:12 (You Corinthians say) "Everything is permissible." (I, Paul, say) "But not everything is beneficial… not everything builds up."

I have a number of concerns, which directly and indirectly have to do with watching most of what comes out of Hollywood:

1. The people of God are called to be "salt and light". By who we are, by how we live, by what we do, and by what we don't do, we proclaim to the world both our commitment, and the kind of God we serve. In order to be salt and light, we must neither be afraid of the world, nor must we take part in any of its evil. **As parents, we must walk the narrow line of raising children who are neither naïve about evil nor participants of evil.** We are also called to be "IN the world, but not OF the world".

2. On the other hand, the church does not entice many people to Christ by vehemently presenting itself as people who are primarily **against** certain activities and philosophies. **We must also equally and passionately present ourselves as people who are for certain activities and philosophies**… like grace, reconciliation, loving our enemies, helping the oppressed, holiness, purity, truth,

mercy, and justice. It is sad that often the very groups of people who were so attracted to Jesus are often so repulsed by his church.

3. Although I'm addressing the movie industry in this article, don't forget the constant barrage of sex, drugs, homosexuality, violence, filth, perversions, and moral relativism that comes into many Christian homes every night via the TV and the Internet. We Christians must be careful not to focus on just one snake while we might daily be sitting in a nest of them. Satan is far more effective with Christians in his subtleties and his relentlessness than in his direct attacks. (Frankly, I can think of a number of prime-time TV shows that are spiritually as dangerous as a particular movie*…* **because they nightly and relentlessly present evil as attractive**, humorous, and fulfilling real-life.)

4. The church must have a strategy beyond **defensive** avoidance. We must also **offensively** march against evil. We must have a solid understanding of what we believe and who we should be. We must know how to disarm evil by dismantling its arguments and attractions. We must be able to verbalize coherently and articulately. Jesus said the Gates of Hell would not withstand his church (see MT 16:18).

Certainly, because of a believer's age, moral development and spiritual maturity, avoidance might be the best choice at that moment, but in the stratagem of the war, the believer must develop the faith-skills needed to defeat evil. These skills come through: (1) the careful, supervised, **gradual exposure to the tactics of evil** (not evil itself) complemented by (2) prayer, knowledge of Scripture, and the Armor of God (see EP 6). We, not Hollywood, have the words of life and truth. This Truth will stand up to any philosophy of evil. This Truth will unmask and expose evil. **Avoidance alone will give the world the impression that our faith is weak and vulnerable** without much to offer individuals or society.

5. Parents must be very careful about how they expose their children to the philosophy, tactics, and strategy of evil. A child's spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development must be carefully evaluated and considered. The goal of exposure to evil is to make Christian soldiers "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (MT 10:16). The

way children avoid the enticements of evil is **with a solid anchor of faith and an ability to recognize evil** (critical thinking skills).

6. Beware of the entertainment myth; it is seductive. It is the justification for the morally lazy and shallow thinker. The values, morals, social commentary, and theology of movies DO affect children (and adults) deeply. There is little neutrality or balance when it comes to Hollywood. Evil is titillating; children need to understand it and have the faith-skills not only to survive it, but also to conquer it.

With those underpinnings in mind, should your child see a particular movie? It depends on how you answer the following questions:

1. Will it draw your child into a deeper relationship with Christ?

2. Will it **confuse your child** about truth? Will it suck your child even just a little bit away from God? Will it plant the idea of compromise in their hearts?

3. Is your child **spiritually anchored** in his faith? Will this movie help him solidify his faith convictions or question them?

4. Will this movie help your child delineate the difference between good and evil? Or, will it blur the line? (Hollywood is great at this.)

5. Are the movie characters worthy of admiration (for godly reasons)? Or, do they promote choices and lifestyles that are contrary to God's law?

6. Will you be **willing and able to discuss this movie with your child** in a way that she can gain valuable offensive knowledge in her future battles with evil?

7. Will it further desensitize your child to evil in any form? Is evil presented as exciting, desirable, and fulfilling? (see GE 3:6)

8. What do you watch? Are you modeling the idea that there is an "age" that makes watching any kind of garbage okay?

9. Consider the ratings. They are put in place for a reason!

10. In my opinion, those questions should eliminate more than 80% of the movies; enjoy the rest!

The only valid reasons to expose oneself or one's child to evil is to overcome it with good (see RM 12:21) and/or to disarm it. If you are uninterested or unable to do this, **evil should be avoided** (flee immorality of any form). Many children see every movie that comes along… sadly, many adults do too.

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