

**Into the Word:**

Jeremy challenged us this week concerning the things that we let into our lives through our eyes. In doing so he mentioned the things that we watch on TV. We all know TV can be a bipolar guest in our homes. It can bring in the good and the bad. Perhaps you simply don't like watching television; it poses no particular challenge to you because you never watch. But for most Christians, this issue is a challenge.

Finish these sentences.

- *I like watching TV because...*
- *I draw the line at watching...*
- *I know I've been watching too much TV when...*

Not only was there no television in Bible times, but there was little entertainment of any kind. Those living in the Greek world had more entertainment options than those in Palestine at the time of Christ, but the Bible doesn't directly address how Christians should interact with, say, the Greek theater. So we have to evaluate our viewing habits by broader biblical attitudes.

**Read Matthew 6:27–29; 13:22; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 2:15–17**

*On the basis of these texts, are there things on TV that are off-limits for Christians? (For the passages concerning worry, does worrying about what you should or should not be doing to be good cause stress?)*

You may find yourself wrestling with making absolute, sweeping prohibitions. For example, graphic sex will probably be on your list, but what about sexual situations that aren't particularly graphic? Does it matter if a scene is depicted as wrong behavior rather than as acceptable? You may also encounter the reality that different things affect people in different ways, which we will address later.

**Read 1 Corinthians 10:23–33.**

In this passage Paul was helping Christians sort out matters of liberty and responsibility when it came to eating food sacrificed to idols. In verse 23, when he wrote, "Everything is permissible," he was probably quoting a slogan used by Christians in the Corinthian church who got carried away with their Christian liberty. Paul quoted it, then clarified it.

*Not everything in this passage transfers to a discussion of TV viewing, but what are some transferable principles you see here?*

- *My viewing habits may affect other people.* The words beneficial and constructive (v. 23, NIV) refer to the community, not just the individual; thus, they suggest "beneficial to the common good" and "constructive to others." In choosing what we watch, we must be aware of others. The most obvious application is to others in our family: How will it affect my spouse or children

if they know I watch this program? Beyond that, since we often chat with others about what we watch on TV, we should ask ourselves, Is there any way I cause others to stumble?

- *What I watch should be seen as ultimately coming from God's hand* (vv. 25–26). While everything in a butcher shop can be regarded as coming from and belonging to God, the same cannot be said of everything on TV. However, we should ask ourselves, Is this idea or image from the Lord? Remember that even in the Bible, the Lord gives us some disturbing stories and pictures. How might a disturbing program on TV ultimately be something from God?
- *Watching a program might open doors to unbelievers, but it should not hurt my commitment to Christ.* Verses 27–30 highlight the challenge of interacting with unbelievers over questions of conscience. Unbelievers often ask us what we think of a certain show, or (especially in our kids' experience) invite us to watch something with them. On the other hand, Christians may talk about TV shows they would never watch that you don't find particularly offensive. How should you react to these situations?
- *My TV watching should be to the glory of God.* How does verse 31 challenge your personal TV viewing?

### **Apply the Word**

So how do we handle this thing called TV? Should we unplug it and throw it out of the house? Should we cancel all our cable and streaming services except for strictly Christian programming?

### **Read Philippians 4:8.**

*Could a Christian watch a murder mystery and still obey this verse? Could someone watch a silly, mindless comedy and still obey this verse? How about the evening news or the Home Shopping Network?*

Have you ever read the Bible's description of the conditions in Sodom and Gomorrah when Lot and his family lived there (Genesis 19)? The description is appalling and embarrassing. Yet God has given it to us to consider. How can we read or view something that is obviously about a sinful situation and yet obey Philippians 4:8?

To watch, hear, or read about sin does not necessarily mean that we buy into it. Think of all the advertising we are able to watch with a critical and discerning eye. Most people are capable of watching a program depicting something wrong and thinking rightly about it. That should be especially true of Christians. For example, to watch something showing an abuse of power (whether it is on the news or in a drama) might cause us to think, "That's not right! That is not what noble people do." If that is our reaction, aren't we obeying Scripture?

On the other hand, a steady diet of wrong things when they are portrayed as right can begin to warp our thinking. For example, we can begin to think of belligerent confrontation as the only sensible way to handle conflict, rather than adopting the humble, loving attitude of Christ. Or we may start thinking that buying things will make us happy, when Scripture reminds us that contentment should not be connected to the things we own. Furthermore, simply viewing wrong portrayed as right, especially consistently, is dangerous, like living in the company of liars.

Are there some kinds of TV that might be all right for other believers but that you must avoid? How do you know?

- *The test of conscience.* Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10 address the subject of Christian liberty versus responsibility to others. Romans 14:22b says, “Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.” One simple test of what I can watch is how my conscience reacts to it. Do I feel guilty about what I’ve seen? To do what you feel guilty about, even if it doesn’t seem to bother another Christian, is an act of disobedience for you. If you feel guilty, you must think God disapproves. Even if you should come to a conclusion later that he doesn’t, to do now what you feel displeases God is to foster rebellion against God’s will.
- *Aggravating your weaknesses.* Matthew 13:22, which we read earlier from the parable of the seed and the sower, points out how “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth” can choke a person’s faith. TV can help those thorns grow. There are many things on TV that aggravate our personal weaknesses and drain our faith. Watching the news, for example, is rarely wrong, but some people, especially during a major crisis, can become news junkies. That may fuel a pervasive anxiety that denies what the Bible teaches us about God’s sovereignty and care. Or simply watching too much TV—whatever the content—may keep us from loving our family as we should or doing work we need to do. In such a case, the content isn’t the problem; the time squandered is.
- *Smudging your view of God.* In the Beatitudes Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt. 5:8). The pervasive worldliness of television can gradually smudge our spiritual sight, the way eyeglasses pick up dust and smudges unnoticed by the person wearing them. While nothing we watch may be terrible, all that inane comedy, greedy commercials, gruesome cop shows, or earthly love stories can smudge our view of God until we can no longer pray in faith (if we pray at all), nor worship adoringly, nor serve wholeheartedly; all because we no longer see God clearly.

### **Taking Action:**

For many of us, TV is an ingrained habit. Even if we come to believe we ought to make changes of some kind, that isn’t easy to do. Here are some steps you can do if the Holy Spirit reveals to you that there are some changes needed. Confess your sin or weakness to God, asking for cleansing from the grip TV has on you. Ask others to pray for you as well. Set specific limits and tell someone else what your new rules for yourself are. For example, “I’m not going to watch [a particular show] anymore.” Or “I will only watch one ballgame a week.” Or “At the beginning of the week, I’ll look through that week’s TV listings and decide what I will watch. I will only watch those choices and will shut the TV off after the show I’ve scheduled.”

You may need to replace the time spent watching TV with something else. What is that going to be?