A Flick Filter for Christians
Principles for Godly Interaction with the Movie Industry

Daryl Wingerd

As a Christian, how do you choose the movies you watch or permit your children to watch?

No one should lay down a legalistic set of rules by listing the movies you may or may not watch as a Christian. Christian parents certainly have the right (indeed the *responsibility*) to decide whether specific movies are acceptable or unfit for children still living under their authority. This is true whether the children are believers or not. But Christians who are not under such authority have the freedom and ability to make these choices for themselves. Christian freedom, however, is not a license to be careless or compromising. It comes with the obligation to "be holy yourselves also in all your behavior" (1 Pet. 1:15).

The following principles are intended as a self-check guide. Apply them, add to them, or disregard them as you see fit. They will undoubtedly raise some difficult questions—questions we won't all answer in the same way. At the end of the day when you or your children sit down to watch a movie, you need to be comfortable with your own conscience, not someone else's.

Before you buy the ticket or push the play button, ask yourself . . .

1. Does the movie dishonor Jesus Christ or His Father? Not many movies openly honor Jesus, but where He is openly *dis*honored by a movie's theme or language, Christians should think carefully before considering it acceptable entertainment. In some Christian homes, something as simple as an actor on screen using Jesus' name as a swear-word is an immediate show-stopper (meaning, they push "stop" and "eject"). Others may consider it sufficient not to view the same movie again. Still others may evaluate the context in which the language was used and decide that the movie as a whole is acceptable despite the unseemly reference to Jesus' name. Whatever your response to Christ-dishonoring themes or language, remember that even the newly-converted thief did not remain neutral while his Savior was being reviled (Luke 23:39-41).

2. Does the movie treat immorality as acceptable or humorous? As a member of the audience watching this movie, will you be expected to laugh at situations or jokes involving fornication, adultery, or homosexuality? Are sexual relationships between unmarried people, or two members of the same sex, portrayed in a positive light? Sexual sins are abominations to God. Reading about them in the Bible where history is being described is one thing, viewing them for amusement or laughing at jokes about them is another. Remember that "it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret" (Eph. 5:12).

3. Does the movie glorify spiritual darkness? Consider the spiritual darkness associated with demons, sorcery, witchcraft, or communication with dead people. This dark and evil spiritual realm is spoken of in the Bible as that which Christians are at war against (Eph. 6:10-12). Many good movies contain elements of this "dark side," but are characterized by the overcoming faithfulness and courage of those who fight against it. Other movies, however, glory in the darkness itself, as well as the perversions and immoralities associated with it. Regarding this second category—movies that treat the realm of darkness as entertaining—consider this thought: If you are a Christian, God sacrificed His beloved Son to rescue you from the domain of darkness (Col. 1:13). Why would you want to return there for two hours of pleasure?

4. Is the movie vulgar or profane? Everyone loves a good laugh, but humor often goes where Christians should not. Many movies are designed to bridge the gap between parents and children by including crude "potty humor" or "mature" humor in order to get the adults to watch. The vulgar or sexually-oriented comments and jokes go over the children's heads while their parents snicker secretly. "Why are you laughing mommy?" "Never mind. You'll understand when you get older." Is this really the pattern you want to establish in your home? Paul tells us that among Christians "there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting" (Eph. 5:4). Therefore we should question the appropriateness of treating filthy language, silly talk, or coarse jesting as entertainment.

5. Does the movie depict unnecessarily graphic violence? Hunting videos, wild animal documentaries, and historical films about war or other disasters contain images of violence, as do many other forms of media that should not automatically be considered inappropriate. The question is, should you as a Christian entertain yourself with movies that *glorify* death and violence? I'm referring to movies about psychopaths who chop people into pieces, or movies in which the gruesomeness of death is magnified for dramatic effect. Death is a tragic aspect of human existence, brought about by human sin (Rom. 5:12). It is a reality, so there is no value in hiding our eyes from it altogether. But death is not something to revel in or be entertained by in order to satisfy a lust for blood and gore.

If you decide to apply the above principles, you may significantly reduce the number of movies you watch, but would that really be a bad thing? What suffering would it cause you to play a few games with your family on a Friday night instead of watching the latest new release? What will you lose, spiritually or eternally, if you read more good books, develop a useful hobby, or practice more hospitality with people in your church, rather than absorbing hour after hour of the "best" Hollywood has to offer?

Whatever you decide to do—or *view*—remember that your obligation as a Christian is to "be holy . . . in all your behavior."