

Loving God with Our Use of Media

This class seeks to answer the question: what is right and wrong in our use of media? Where are the hard and fast boundaries God has set?

I. Commands

- We should always pursue God and seek to delight in him *in all of life*.
 - Ps 37:4: “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (See Ps 1:1–2; 16:11 “in your presence there is fullness of joy”; 43:4 “God [is] my exceeding joy”; 119:35)
 - Ps 73:25: “Whom have I in heaven but you? *And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.*” (See Ps 16:2; Phil 3:8)
- We must set our minds and hearts on what God loves: that which is pure and good.
 - Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”
- Key questions:
 - How can I best enjoy you with my leisure time, O God?
 - Will this music, movie, etc. take me closer to God, or further from him? Does this make me want to obey? Is it edifying?
 - Is this music, movie, etc. something that God himself would delight in?

II. Prohibitions

- We must not let our hearts go after what would displease God. Even to long for sin *is sin*.
 - Matt 5:28: “I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (see Prov 6:25: “Do not desire her [the adulteress] beauty in your heart”)
- We must not delight in what God hates.
 - Ps 119:37: “Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.” (cf. Isa 44:9)
- Every sinful desire, if left unchecked, will eventually take root, make its way into life practices, and become a stronghold of sin.
 - James 1:15: “desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” (see 2 Sam 11:2–17 [David and Bathsheba])
- We must not retain things in our lives that promote sin.
 - Matt 5:29–30: “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”
- Do not keep bad company. That includes finding “fellowship” in music or movies.
 - 1 Cor 15:33: “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’”
 - Proverbs 16:29: “A man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in a way that is not good.” (Cf. Prov 1:10)
- Key questions:
 - Does this music, movie, etc. make me want to sin?

- Does this encourage lust, pride, hostility to others, and other vices? Beware of self-deception. We love to guard our idols, and we need to be really honest with ourselves about the effect something has on us.
- By watching this, am I participating in the sin of others? (e.g., if people had to sin in order to make this movie, and I'm now paying to watch it)
- Are the vices depicted in this movie as attractive or as evil? Depiction does not mean approval. Who are the characters they want you to sympathize with?

III. Qualifications

- Some of the questions above are subjective, and different people will answer them differently.
 - For example, "does this make me want to sin?": we must recognize that some people will need to reject some things that others will not (Rom 14:2–5).
 - We each must stand before God for our decisions about art: L. Ryken: "Works of art are moral or immoral persuaders, but we are not persuaded against our will. The moral controls on art rest ultimately with the individual."
 - But beware of being self-deceived about your own strength: 1 Cor 10:12: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."
- If you believe something to be wrong, you must partake of it.
 - Rom 14:23: "But whoever has doubts [about whether something is wrong to eat] is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." (see Rom 14:14)
- If you believe the person you're with will stumble because of what you're watching / listening to, then you must not partake.
 - 1 Cor 8:10–11: "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died." (cf. Rom 14:15)
- In general, there is great liberty of conscience:
 - Rom 14:14: "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself"; Tit 1:15: "To the pure, all things are pure."
 - The key is, will this encourage me and others in our service to God? 1 Cor 10:23: "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify." (cf. 1 Cor 6:12)
 - Leithart: "[I do not believe that] every book read must have a direct positive effect on the formation of Christian character. Ancient classics and modern fiction, read with care and attention, can form a Christian mind in significant though less direct ways. Anyone who shapes his life by the example of Achilles or Odysseus is, as Dante knew, on his way to hell. But exploring the pattern of desire in Homeric epic (basically, hope of glory versus hope of shame) can help us to understand the ancient mind, and help us to appreciate more deeply the difference that the gospel has made."