

going, the sports package on cable, or other forms of entertainment and send the money to a poor saint in the Philippines or India—preacher or otherwise? As stewards of the material possessions God gives us, we will give an account for entertainment expenses.

¹United States. Census Bureau. Performing Arts, Spectator Sports, and Related Industries: 2002. Washington: GPO, 2004.

²Sports Media & Marketing Industry. William and Joan Schreyer Business Library. 27 Feb. 2008. <<http://www.libraries.psu.edu/business/industryguides/sports.htm>>

³Television and Health. California State University, Northridge. 27 Feb. 2008. <<http://www.csun.edu/science/health/docs/tv&health.html>>

- Steven F. Deaton

As a door turns on its hinges,
So does the lazy man on his bed.

- Prov. 26:14

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Entertainment Problem

Man is a fascinating creature. God made us as complex beings, more complex than any other on earth (Gen. 1:26, 27; Psa. 139:14). We have feelings, self-awareness, and the ability to look toward the future. Man has a creative and inventive streak that is not present in animals. Man has created aesthetically pleasing works of art and architecture. He has accomplished engineering feats from aqueducts to airplanes. No animal ever has or ever will come close to this, let alone equal or exceed it.

Part of the nature of man is to seek stimulation of the mind. This comes in various forms, such as the challenge of designing and building a great structure or figuring out the mechanics of flight, but it also includes entertainment. We like entertainment for many reasons. Sometimes we want to hear a story that inspires us to be better or warns us from self-destructive behavior. Other entertainment conveys history or the epic struggle of civilization or the possibilities of the future (think science fiction). Still, there are times when we want entertainment for its own sake; a diversion, nothing else.

As with many other aspects of our nature and the world in which we live, entertainment in and of itself is morally neutral. It is the form or content or time—or a combination of the three—that determines if it is good or bad. Entertainment may also consume too much of our money, taking away from other things that are important, even required by God.

Since entertainment has the potential to be destructive, and often is in our society, we need to have a biblical perspective on it. As with all other things, our involvement in

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entertainment must be governed by God's will, not our own (cf. Matt. 26:39).

Time & Money Waster

Our nation has an entertainment mind set. We are obsessed with being entertained and will pay good money for it. Take, for example, the spectator sports industry. According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2002 the spectator sports industry took in nearly \$22 billion.¹ The Penn State Business Library states that \$16.4 of that is just the big four, NBA, NFL, MLB, and NHL.² That is just the teams, stadiums, agents, et cetera. This does not include broadcast revenues and all the licensing of products. One figure cited on the web said the overall sports industry was a \$500 billion per year business. If you divide the \$22 billion figure by 365, it comes to over \$60 million per day that Americans spend on sports.

Consider this anecdotal evidence. What do most people you know do with their "off" time? Do they better educate themselves? Are they busy with good deeds helping neighbors? Is their time taken up going to church or studying religious issues? Rather, most of our friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors are focused on being entertained. They go to the movies, rent a DVD, or watch some broadcast on cable or satellite. They go to concerts and sporting events. Then there is the Internet, which is beginning to dominate all media. If they do other things, the ratio of time spent is very lopsided toward entertainment.

Here is some hard evidence. The California State University, Northridge, web site states, "According to the A.C. Nielsen Co., the average American watches more than 4 hours of TV each day (or 28 hours/week, or 2 months of nonstop TV-watching per year). In a 65-year life, that person will have spent 9 years glued to the tube."³ Can you believe nine years of your life could be wasted watching television? The same article says that the average child spends 1,680 minutes a week watching television and 3.5 minutes in meaningful conversation with his or her parents.

This cultural mentality of entertainment has crept into the lives of Christians and, thus, into the church. Christians can unwittingly waste a tremendous amount of time pursuing entertainment activities. Again, there are times when we need to be distracted and unwind a bit. However, too much robs God. Daniel was in the habit of praying

three times each day (Dan. 6:10). David said, "Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall here my voice" (Psa. 55:17). Entertainment can push prayer out of the picture.

Moreover, as children of God, we are required to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). We are to mature to the meat of the Word and be able to rightly divide it (Heb. 5:11-14; 2 Tim. 2:15). This is not possible if our free time is dominated by television, sports, video games, or surfing the net (unless it is in pursuit of Bible study).

Further, is it possible to be hospitable or help others when consumed with entertainment? The Bible exhorts us to regularly exhort one another and be hospitable (Heb. 3:13; 1 Pet. 4:9). We are to consider those less fortunate (Matt. 25:31-46). Our neighbors need teaching (Acts 8:4). How can we do these and the other things mentioned above if we are glued to the television to see how much fat a 350-pound man can lose in a week?

As our society has become more accustomed to being entertained almost constantly, people have demanded a more entertaining worship service. This has impacted the denominational world in a big way, nearly stripping it completely of religious services. Churches of Christ are no exception. Brethren have clamored and called for shorter sermons with more witty repartee. And they have gotten it (2 Tim. 4:3, 4). Some preachers spend more time telling cute stories, jokes, or reminiscing than on preaching the Word. Gospel meetings are fewer and farther between than in years past. They are also shorter in length. Do you suppose if we researched it, this changed along with the introduction and proliferation of the television in the home?

Let's go back and touch on the money now. The Bible has a great deal to say about a Christian and his money (see Truth Magazine January 2008). For the purposes of this discussion, we will notice three things in particular. First, a Christian is commanded to give to the Lord (1 Cor. 16:1, 2; 2 Cor. 9:6, 7). Second, we are to provide for our family, including aging parents and in-laws (1 Tim. 5:8). Third, we are to help saints and sinners who are in need (Gal. 6:10). If we spend an inordinate amount of money on entertainment, we cannot do these as God would have us to do. Consider this example. How much help and good could a family do by cutting back on movie