

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE: HOW IS TELEVISION IMPACTING YOUR MARRIAGE?

For many of us, television viewing occupies a more prominent place in our daily lives than we might like to admit. And whether we realize it or not, what we watch affects us in a variety of ways. Don't think so? Advertisers spend billions of dollars annually, convinced that thirty-second promotions of their products influence our buying habits. Entertainment industry insiders pride themselves in playing a significant role in changing public opinion about homosexuality through the frequent, positive portrayal of gays now commonplace on television. Pro-family organizations decry the gratuitous violence and salacious material in television programming because they know constant exposure to these things negatively impact impressionable youth. Numerous social studies have provided convincing confirmation of what scripture declares to us, common sense tells us, and only the most naïve would deny: For better or for worse, what we hear, what we watch, who (or what) we spend time with impacts our thinking and in turn, our behavior: "Do not be deceived: evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Is it possible our television viewing habits may constitute a sort of "evil company" corrupting our relationships, particularly the most intimate one of all—marriage? Over the past several decades Hollywood has offered up a relentless negative portrayal of marriage and the family which had undermined the home as God designed it. The mocking and maligning of marriage is now the norm in prime time television programming. In contrast to television's early days, when viewers feasted on a banquet of idealized images of affectionate families and adoring couples, *positive* portrayals of committed, contented husband and wives today are rare. Instead, the typical TV family is dysfunctional, with marriage relationship stressed, troubled or even treacherous. We've gone from the likes of the squeaky clean marriages of Rob and Laura Petrie and Ricky and Lucy Ricardo, to the conniving and adulterous couples of the immensely popular *Desperate Housewives*. This kind of company cannot be helping our homes.

Unfortunate Expectations

It's hard to believe that entertaining ourselves with the current, popular fare of sad and sorry TV families can be good for our marriages. Seeing marriage relationships regularly portrayed as empty and unsatisfying can subtly condition us to have low expectations for our own marriages. Instead of inspiring us to put forth the effort to resolve issues which may be preventing our marriages from being all that God would have them to be, a steady diet of bickering and bitter television marriages can become a wet blanket dampening the desire to develop into better husbands and wives. From the unbalanced, gloomy or irreverent models of marriage on TV we may come to resign ourselves to the notion that it is inevitable for marital love to deteriorate into a pitiful caricature of a model marriage. Might the continual normalization and glorification of divorce on TV plant the seeds of infidelity in the backs of our minds and diminish—perhaps even subconsciously—our determination to acquire the skills and take the steps to make our marriages work? Is that what our Lord wants for us?

While indiscriminate television viewing can lower our standards for marriage, it can also take us to the opposite extreme, damaging the bond of matrimony by creating unreasonably high expectations of our spouses. Women who sit for hours wistfully watching daytime soap operas often pine for the gorgeous, chiseled and sensitive men who smother their lovers with devotion and affection, sweeping them off their feet and saying the day. (Do these men even exist in the real world?) This kind of fantasizing can wreak havoc with the emotions and inhibit the cultivation of real marital intimacy,

leaving women disillusioned with their less-than-perfect husbands. On the other hand we have television's depiction of the ideal woman: perpetually young, beautiful, fit, sexy, energetic, able to shop in high heels, and handle all the chores of the day—including the needs of her husband and children—without getting so much as a hair out of place. Little wonder, then, if a television junkie husband is disappointed when his wife doesn't live up to what he has been led to believe she ought to be. Marriage and family therapist Denise MacDonald commented on this problem: "If you get your information about relationships from TV, you're going to think there's something inadequate about yours." Waiting for our spouses to live up to some impossible, romanticized ideal keeps us from learning to love each other the way we are—warts and all.

Impurity

Through both programming and advertising, television frequently assaults viewers with a barrage of sensual images. We're not always safe even if we limit our viewing to allegedly "family friendly" programming, as commercials with suggestive content or scantily clad women with perfect bodies can perversely punctuate shows which would otherwise be inoffensive. These enticing images especially affect men, who are undeniably more visually stimulated than women. Once in the mind, they can be difficult to extract.

Our increasingly pornographic culture makes the struggle for men to maintain purity of thought more difficult than ever. In this battle against the "lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16), television can be a powerful tool of the devil in hampering holiness by planting unwholesome thoughts into the hearts of husbands. This can contribute to problems of unrealistic expectations, followed by dissatisfaction, in the important area of sexual intimacy. A man should, as Solomon advised, "rejoice in the wife of thy youth" (Proverbs 5:18), but improper television consumption can leave him instead frustrated that she doesn't look like Angelina Jolie or Jennifer Anniston. That cannot be good for any marriage. Adultery in the flesh has wrecked many a home, but adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:27-28) can be destructive as well.

Killing Time

Marriage can be adversely affected not only by *what* we watch, but by the fact *that* we watch it at all. According to Nielsen Media Research, the average American watches four hours of television per day. Even if we think we are watching less than the average, there is little doubt that to many of us are still allowing television, like a welcome thief, to invade our homes and steal our time. With cable and satellite television, we now have literally hundreds of channels with around the clock programming to allure us away from one another into the daze of constant TV gazing.

Hours spent plopped on the couch in front of the idiot box mean less time spent with the family. Women complain of craving real conversation with their husbands—something more than "You're in the way" or "Hand me the remote." How many frustrated wives wish their husbands would just put down the remote, turn off the big game on the big screen, and give her and the kids a little personal attention?

It might transform some families if mom and dad just turned off the TV for a while and actually talked to each other. Growing closer as husband and wife is a lifelong process requiring commitment and communication, and that takes time—time we may be wasting watching television. One of the things a woman especially needs from her husband is for him to be an involved father, and that means spending quality and quantity time with their children. For parents to be what God would have them to be to their children, they need to cultivate intimacy in their own marriage, and that means time face to face, eye to eye, sharing hearts with one another on a daily basis. But television—especially having multiple sets throughout the house, as most American households do—tends to divide and disengage the family. If that kind of intimacy is missing from our marriages, we should try tuning out the television (or pushing away from the computer—but that's another study) and tuning in to each other.

Yes, what we take in through the various forms of media which surrounds us—especially television—does affect our relationships. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8). For better or for worse, what we "think on" does affect our marriages. It would seem, then, that one of the things we need to think on is the fact that what we watch, and how much we watch, is playing a part in shaping us into the husbands and wives we are, and possibly hindering us from developing into the husbands and wives we hope yet to be.

-Tyler Young

WHY I LOVE THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

For different reasons, it seems, there have been and are critics of the church of Christ. Those who bear the label “liberal” are demanding that the church change and become more like a denomination. Those who hear themselves called the “radical” conservatives demand that everyone “line up” with them in all areas of judgment. In either case, the church gets a bashing. Why cannot all Christians strive for unity as a “polar star” (as Barton W. Stone said it), and view the church as God does? God loves the church (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25), and this “senior” does too. Some of the reasons for my love are listed below.

First of all, I cannot say that “I love God” but I do not love the church. “Do I love God?” is exactly the same question as, “Do I love the church?” When Saul of Tarsus was confronted by Jesus (on the road to Damascus) Saul “fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me” (Acts 9:4)? Saul’s reaction to the foregoing question is not unusual for he asked, “Who are thou, Lord” (Acts 9:5a)? That Saul used the term, Lord, does not mean that at that moment Saul understood that the Lord of heaven and earth was speaking, but to use *kurios* (Lord) in such a fashion shows Saul’s respect for the speaker. (The Greek term, *kurios* can mean something like sir or master would in English as well as meaning the Lord). Saul is confused. How could he persecute someone he did now know? The answer is that, in hurting the church, Saul was hurting Jesus.

Saul brought “threatenings and slaughter” against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1). That is, Saul persecuted the church of Christ (Acts 8:1) and by doing so he persecuted Christ. The lesson is obvious. My attitude toward the church, Jesus’ bride (Ephesians 5:32) is exactly equivalent to my attitude toward Jesus. Marshall Keeble used to say that one should be careful how one treated Jesus’ “wife,” because the Lord “knocked a man down” (meaning Saul) who badly treated Jesus’ bride (cf. “and he fell to the earth,” Acts 9:4a).

Every member of the Lord’s church is my new family (Matthew 10:34-36), and I have not passed from “death to life” until I love that family, second only to loving God (1 John 3:14). When the angels in heaven first saw the church they viewed God’s “manifold wisdom” (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12). Since I am the church (1 Corinthians 12:20,27), what do the angels see when they view me? Do I understand that everything God ever purposed resulted in my salvation and that I am to be seen as God’s wisdom? It would be a terrible thing to be told on the judgment day to depart from God. What would even be worse is to hear the God who is Love say that I had disappointed Him by not loving my church family the way He loved me.

A second reason that I love the church is that I am now without pathological fear of God. When I was a boy I was in a Calvinistic denomination and was taught that God had either elected me to be saved or He had not. I had no choice. Therefore, as a child, teenager, and young adult I lived in abject dread of God because I was not sure of my salvation. The perfect love taught in the gospel of Christ, however, “cast out” such unwarranted fear when I was converted to the truth (1 John 4:18). I learned that I was not “elected” by a capricious God, but loved by a saving God (John 3:16). To come out of such darkness into the church of Christ is so wonderful that words cannot express such joy (1 Peter 2:9). I love the church of Christ because in her I am saved and in her I can give glory to the God who provided a plan for my salvation (Ephesians 3:20-21).

In the third place, I love the church of Christ because she is going to heaven (1 John 3:1-3). Over the last forty plus years of preaching I have seen the wrangling, bickering, dissatisfied, hate-mongering of some; but I have also seen the sacrifice, suffering, sincere service of many. I will be wit the sincere ones forever, and such a thought exalts my soul. My brethren who helped when my grandson died; my brethren who pray for my cancer-stricken wife; my brethren who have supported me to preach will all be there; both those already gone and those still living. What a joy, for there will be in heaven. Only those who love the church of Christ as they love the Lord.

There are other reasons, personal and biblical, to love the church. The three above of loving God, my brethren, and heaven were deemed most important for this “senior moment.”

-Keith A. Mosher, Sr.