

What About the Movie? (The Passion of the Christ)

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

What about the recent movie-craze that is affecting so many Christians today? Should Christians attend the movie theater to see the latest movie about Jesus by Mel Gibson? We want to answer some questions in light of the recent movie that seems to be sweeping people like a storm. I'm not going to become trendy in all of my preaching but I do want to be discerning. There are appropriate times when the preacher needs to shoot from his hip, so to speak, and speak on some controversial issues to help direct the people in the right direction.

I want to look at several points revolving around the movie ("The Passion of the Christ") and the Movie Theater in general. No, I did not see the movie, so I'm not going to critique a movie I did not see. That would be ridiculous. However, I want to talk about the subject of religious movies in general and the trend of Christians (even fundamental Christians) who attend the Movie Theater on a regular basis. I simply want to share some thoughts on religious pictures and their dangers. If you desire to hear positive points on all of this, you will probably be disappointed. But if you want to hear some truthful and I trust helpful points, then you will learn some things that may benefit you and your family in the future.

I think we always need to keep our hearts open and ready to learn even when what we hear challenges the way we live and what we do. Ezra 7:10, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." I think we need to prepare ourselves to seek God's mind on this movie issue.

The Positive

Lest you perceive me to be all negative and against everything new that comes down the pike let me say on a positive note that I'm for everything that is good and which is done in good taste and which follows Biblical principles of Bible separation and upholds "the

doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3). However, I’m against everything that sidesteps God’s clear commands for separation from evil and which supports error, confusion, or the enemy in some way.

By the way, separation is positive when it’s done unto the Lord and for His glory. If I choose to not attend the movie theater because of what it represents many Christians would perceive me as being a negative legalist but when I separate unto the Lord, wanting to please Him, it’s a positive thing and different matter altogether. Colossians 3:23-24 states: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily (out of soul), as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." Romans 12:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." In Titus 2:14 and 1 Peter 2:9 God's people are called "peculiar" or more literally "unto" (Greek preposition - "eis") people meaning that they are a special people separated unto God for His purpose and glory. Well, separation from evil and error or places that promote terrible things can be done unto the Lord.

1 Samuel 12:23 says, “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way.” This is my aim in this study. It’s not my aim to ride some kind of hobbyhorse or pulverize you with unscriptural ideas. I don’t get my kicks doing this! It’s my aim to teach you the good and the right way. So let’s keep our hearts open as we evaluate and study God’s Word together.

So what about the movie and its positive points?

1. The matter of people being saved is always positive.

What are the positive things that can come from a movie such as this? One positive note is this. We can praise the Lord when people truly do get saved in spite of the pragmatic methods of Contemporary Christian Music, ecumenicalism, or even some religious movie that is being used in a wrong way. Any person who becomes a Christian is another precious soul for whom Christ died and I praise the Lord for saved souls. Don’t you?

This does not mean that I condone the medium or support the notion that a person is saved through some kind of worldly pragmatic medium. No person is saved through pragmatism. But I praise the Lord when people are saved even in an atmosphere that may not be 100 percent conducive to God's holiness. Paul said in Philippians 1:18, "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." When Christ is preached or the message of Christ is in some way portrayed so that people can be saved, I rejoice. It is wonderful and exciting to see souls saved. What can be more exciting than seeing people come to Christ? I'm not saying that people can be saved as a result of just seeing a moving picture. The message must be clearly proclaimed. This study will confirm this. But when people are given the Gospel and saved because they were first intrigued by some movie portraying Christ, we can be grateful for their salvation.

I was talking to someone on the telephone who said that when he saw the blasphemous movie "Jesus Christ Superstar" that this particular movie drove him to search the Bible and find the truth. He is now a pastor. Yes, for this I am grateful. From a positive perspective, we can look at the questions and reactions that the unsaved have toward this film as a catalyst or way that can be used to witness and spread the Gospel.

Let's take the opportunity to witness to the lost if they have questions about the Lord's death. Let's not stick our heads in the sand! Let's buy up every opportunity to win people to Christ especially when people have questions about the death of Jesus Christ. Colossians 4:5 says, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time." In a time when Christ's death is paraded in front of millions of lost people we are foolish to not take the opportunity to witness to them as questions arise. If we can get the clear message to people, then we ought to in spite of the controversies that surround a picture such as this.

2. The distraction from social evils is positive.

There is something else also wonderful about this. It's wonderful to see how the death of Jesus has more coverage than the homosexual issue right now. We can at least praise the Lord for this! There is

something else in the news other than same sex marriages. Any American with any sense of morality should also be grateful for this.

Let me also say today that there is a place for wholesome entertainment. If entertainment does not hinder our walk with the Lord and glorifies the Lord (Col. 3:23) there is nothing wrong with entertainment. But where we view entertainment has to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, upon examining the Scriptures, I find no warrant for using entertainment as a tool or method to win the lost. What we need to do is separate entertainment from God's work and do God's work in God's way. This will breed less confusion and allow us to do God's work in God's way and get God's results. So, I praise the Lord even more when a person is saved in an atmosphere that is conducive to God's holiness and where right methods are used – the preaching and teaching of God's truth, spiritual music, etc.

In any event, there are some positive points that revolve around the issue of this religious picture but the negative far outweighs the positive in our study. As someone has said, "There is power in negative thinking." New Evangelical preachers and Christians who want to in some measure promote worldliness only want to dwell on the positive and forget about the negative things that are mentioned in the Bible. When we do this we become one-sided, undiscerning, unbiblical, and even unholy in our stance and living. So let me say that this is primarily not a positive critique revolving around issues dealing with the movie or movie theater but a truthful critique of religious movies in general. I sometimes feel like John the Baptist who said that he was a voice crying in the wilderness.

The Negative

So what about the movie and its negative points?

1. Consider its endorsements

Hollywood actor and director Mel Gibson's controversial film on the death of Christ has proven popular among Christians even before its February 25 release date. The graphic, multi-million-dollar film "The Passion of the Christ" depicts Christ's life from the Garden of Gethsemane to the resurrection. After a private showing, Billy

Graham praised it. Mission America Coalition now plans to use the movie for evangelism. Campus Crusade is promoting it. Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in southern California purchased 18,000 tickets. Two members of Wheaton Bible Church in Wheaton, Illinois, have offered to buy out two screenings of the movie at a local theater, and this is being done by other churches today.

After Gibson showed part of the movie to a convention of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, he received a standing ovation. Afterward, the daughter of the organization's president laid hands on Gibson and asked Jesus to "bind Satan, bind the press, we ask you, Lord" (Peter Boyer, "The Jesus War," *The New Yorker*, Sept. 15, 2003). *Worship Leader* magazine for Feb. 2004 offers a free guide to Gibson's movie and says, "There has never been a film like it! Powerful, life changing, an unprecedented opportunity for evangelism & discipleship." Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral was given a private showing and afterward proclaimed, "It's not your dream, this is God's dream. He gave it to you, because He knew you wouldn't throw it away. Trust Him."

The movie has been recommended by psychologist James Dobson and Focus on the Family. Ted Haggard, president of the National Evangelical Association, called Gibson "the Michelangelo of this generation." The American Tract Society proclaims on its Web site that the movie is "one of the greatest opportunities for evangelism in 2,000 years." Teen Mania says at least 3,000 youth leaders have bought kits that instruct young people in how to use the film to bring their friends to accept Christ. The Catholic League purchased 1,200 tickets at \$9.75 apiece and will make them available to members for \$5. The film was shown to members of the Vatican Secretariat of State, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and all of them expressed unanimous appreciation and approval. In other words, Catholic based organizations praise this film since it came from a Roman Catholic man.

It's interesting that all of those who immediately backed and endorsed this film are outright practicing New Evangelicals who have chosen to no longer embrace the doctrine of separation from apostasy and worldly pragmatism. Some like Robert Schuller are even apostates

who reject the Gospel of God's grace and replace it with a Gospel of self-esteem. The hodge-podge of religious praises and backing of such a film should cause some red lights to begin flashing in our minds. Let me just say that those who back something are not always necessarily right in their assessments and conclusions about a film's success and greatness. The praises and predictions of this movie are just the opinions of men. They are not the opinions of God. We should get our opinions from God's Word and not become enamored with the opinions of the majority within Christendom. By the way, Jesus was never impressed with the opinions of the majority, who seem to band together to promote their cause.

The majority has always been wrong in spiritual matters. The majority was wrong in Jesus' day. Jesus said, "fear not little flock." The majority was wrong in Noah's day and they were swallowed up in the Genesis Flood. The majority was wrong in Moses' day when the people cried out to return to Egypt, when the twelve spies voted 10 to 2 not to enter the Promised Land, and when the entire congregation endorsed the wrong decision. The majority also crucified the Lord. Remember one thing: Never confuse the will of the majority with the will of God. And we must also remember this in light of the hour in which we live: Many times "The problem lies not with the faithful minority but with a compromising majority."

So, let's not be led astray by the endorsements of the majority. Even if some good comes about because of this movie we do not have to agree with the conclusions of the majority within Christendom that this movie is going to change the face and force of evangelism forever and cause a revival to sweep among God's people. These are simply the endorsements and opinions of men – not God. The thing that will cause the lost to come to Christ is the faithful witness of God's people – not a movie. Acts 8:4 says, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (not showing Mel Gibson's Movie – "The Passion of the Christ"). 1 Thessalonians 1:8 records, "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing."

2. Consider its producer

Mel Gibson is a Catholic producer with a religious agenda to promote the Catholic Church. This makes the movie a religious issue that is linked with Roman Catholicism. Mel Gibson is a traditional Roman Catholic who believes that the pope is the replacement of Christ and that entrance into Heaven only comes through the Roman Catholic Church and a system of works done through the Roman Catholic Church. In accordance with Catholic theology, Gibson identifies the Mass with Christ's sacrifice. He told Eternal Word Television Network that the "sacrifice of the cross" and "the sacrifice of the altar" are "the same thing" (EWT News Feature, Jan. 13, 2004).

Romanism teaches that Christ died only for original sin inherited through Adam and that one must atone for our other sins through the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Romanism, Jesus Christ died on the cross and purchased redemption and then delivered this redemption to the Catholic Church to be distributed to men piecemeal through the seven sacraments. Man cannot receive eternal salvation directly from Christ through faith; he must approach Christ through the Catholic Church, through baptism, confirmation, mass, confession to a Catholic priest, etc. I'm so thankful that none of this is true. One day I realized what Christ had done for me and I simply trusted in Christ to save me.

The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was not once for all and sufficient to save us but must be perpetuated in the mass, which is called a non-bloody sacrifice, and that people must eat to merit their salvation. Consider this statement from the Vatican II Council: "Hence the Mass, the Lord's Supper, is at the same time and inseparably: a sacrifice in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated ... For in it Christ perpetuates in an unbloody manner the sacrifice offered on the cross, offering himself to the Father for the world's salvation through the ministry of priests"

I don't know about you but I don't want to be openly viewed as a promoter of what Mel Gibson believes in his Roman Catholic doctrine and what He wants to promote in this movie. I'm not in agreement with Roman Catholic Theology. The living Lord Jesus said in Revelation 2:15, "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." We don't hate Mel Gibson but the doctrine, which he teaches and promotes! In any event, because of

the background of the producer and the catholic cause he promotes and stands for, I would not attend the movie theater to see this film. There are other reasons I would not attend the theater but this is reason enough. Evangelicals and fundamentalists who are supporting this movie are supporting a Roman Catholic producer who preaches a false gospel, and a movie that is designed to promote the catholic cause.

The script of *The Passion of the Christ* was specifically intended to link the crucifixion of Christ with what Roman Catholics believe is the re-sacrificing of Christ that occurs in the mass. Gibson's intent is to show us that the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the altar (the mass) are the same thing. Protestant Evangelicals have historically rejected the idea that Christ can be sacrificed again and again, and declared it "abominable." It's interesting that the focus of the movie is on the suffering of Jesus since this is what Roman Catholicism centers upon in the Mass – the continuing suffering and sacrifice of Jesus offered on the cross. Little in the movie (about 30 seconds) is attributed to the resurrection because in the Catholic way of thinking they don't really understand the significance of the resurrection or Christ living. They still have Him on the cross suffering. This is why they have catholic statues of Christ on the cross.

Dear friend, Jesus is the living Lord of Glory and His resurrection is the basis of the Father's acceptance of His once and for all sacrifice on the cross. Romans 4:25 says this about Jesus: "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Without the resurrection of Christ our justification before God could not and would not be possible since a dead Christ could not save us or provide our standing before God. We might say that the resurrection is God's receipt to prove that Jesus paid for our sin debt in full on the cross of Calvary. Today Jesus lives to give us His salvation fully and finally through simple faith in His finished work (Acts 16:31).

So the movie is a religious issue that is linked with Roman Catholicism. I would openly boycott a religious movie on Christ's passion that was done by a Roman Catholic simply because of what Romanism stands for as a religious system and what they believe

and promote about Christ as a religious system. Of course, we can't boycott everything that is produced by unregenerate people or else we would probably have to live in a cave somewhere without light bulbs and any modern conveniences. I'm not advocating that we seek to boycott every item that is produced or made by unbelievers for this would be an impossibility. However, this is a religious issue that is out in the forefront and limelight and the separatist Christian can take a stand against Roman Catholicism by refusing to openly support, promote, or condone a producer's film that was created to support the cause and beliefs of Romanism.

Let me confirm once again that Roman Catholicism is not the same as Protestantism. What gospel is Mel Gibson trying to preach through this movie? Some will say no Gospel. But it actually is the Catholic gospel of sacramentalism that puts the emphasis on the suffering of Christ, which according to Catholic Theology is recreated in the Roman Catholic Church. When asked by a Protestant interviewer if someone can be saved apart from the Roman Catholic Church, Gibson replied, "There is no salvation for those outside the Church" (Peter Boyer, "The Jesus War," *The New Yorker*, Sept. 15, 2003). This was the official teaching of Rome prior to Vatican II. Mel Gibson will tell you this himself.

3. Consider its trendy emphasis

This movie is yet another trend or fad that is viewed as some kind of magic button Christians can push to supposedly fill the church with the unsaved. The movie is also some kind of quick fix approach for Christians to change their lives apart from God's promises, presence, and power (2 Pet. 1:2-4). All they need to do is buy a ticket and they will be ushered into a new experience that will change their lives forever. One brochure sent to my place said this: "Share your experience as you watch *The Passion* and tell how it made you feel." The church is caught up in fads and feelings today! They are always looking for "some new thing" (Acts 17:21) or some magical wand that will transform their living. A while back it was *Promise Keeper's* then the prayer of Jabez, then the books and new wave of the "Purpose Driven Church" by Rick Warren and now it's the movie "*The Passion of the Christ*." What will it be next? Today the church seems to need

special books, movies, seminars, and ecumenical programs to keep them moving in the right direction.

It would be hard to stay up on all the new fads that are coming down the religious pike. Dear, friend, there is no need for us to become part of the trendy nature of the modern day church when God has promised us daily power through the Spirit's ministry (Acts 1:8) and given us the inspired outline that will change our lives. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (not in attending the movie theater, seeing the passion of Christ, or religious dramas). Instead of God's people crying out, "Give me that old-time religion" they are now saying, "Give me that show-time religion."

If God had intended entertainment movies to be part of church ministry and worship, there would be some mention of it in the New Testament document. What we read about in connection with first century church life and worship is singing, praying, breaking of bread together, fellowship, doctrinal teaching, and preaching (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:14-15; Eph. 4:11-12).

A.W. Tozer once said:

"The temptation to introduce new things into the work of God has always been too strong for some people to resist. The Church has suffered untold injury at the hands of well intentioned but misguided persons who have felt that they know more about running God's work than Christ and His apostles did."

Although the drama option was freely available to the apostles as they brought the Gospel to cities, which had amphitheaters and a long tradition of using the dramatic arts to convey religious and moral themes to the populace, they did not do so. The wisdom of the apostolic methodology should not be lost. There is a subtle danger of returning to entertainment by once again reviving the methodology of the medieval church, which involved teaching lessons through passion plays that were headed up by the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages.

What disturbs me greatly is that Christian people want to get stirred over movies, CCM, and all kinds of other quick fix spiritual remedies

but they don't want to get stirred over God's Word, attending prayer meeting, and doing those things that God wants them to do. We have our priorities distorted and need to get back to obedience instead of running our lives on emotional ups and downs and shortcuts to spirituality. It is the truth of Scripture that should stir our hearts and bring repentance and change into our lives.

Nehemiah 8:8-9,

“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, which *is* the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day *is* holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.”

I wish more Christians would weep over the Word of God, the sin in their lives, and become moved and stirred by the Bible instead of visual effects, sounds, and pictures.

Luke 24:32

“And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”

What we need is a fresh stirring from the Word of God about the truths related of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we as God's people don't need religious based entertainment such as movies to enable us to learn truth or stir our hearts. We need the simple preaching of absolute truth (2 Tim. 3:16-17 – “All scripture ... is profitable”) and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:25 says we are to “Walk in the Spirit” to be transformed. It does not say that we must walk into the movie theater to experience transformation. It's the working in our hearts and lives by the Holy Spirit that changes us and promotes spiritual growth in our lives (2 Pet. 2:2; John 17:17; 2 Cor. 3:18).

4. Consider its problems

a. The problem of pragmatism

The pragmatic approach to evangelism always has its flaws. Pragmatism uses the methods of visual effects to become part of communicating truth or either replaces God's ordained methods of communicating truth. The cancer of entertaining pragmatism continues to have a hold on the professing church. Its approach is to appeal to the emotions and is primarily an entertaining appeal to people instead of a saving Gospel message. I have always spoken against the danger of religious entertainment and I think this movie is no exception. Truth was designed to be communicated through sharing the Gospel message without entertaining techniques.

Truth was never to be communicated through the medium or agency of pragmatic entertainment. In Paul's day the theatrics was an important part of society or culture but he did not communicate truth this way but truth was communicated through the "foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor. 1:21). This means it was centered upon the proclamation of the truth through the vehicle of speaking forth the Word of God. Texts of Scripture such as 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 15:11, and 2 Timothy 4:2 also verify this. Preaching or sharing truth through speaking was the God-ordained method.

No doubt this is because forms of entertainment can dull the message of truth and lead to skewed spiritual results. We must remember that the Scriptures and the Spirit are sufficient to bring people to Christ. Jack Graham, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said, "The movie is biblical, powerful and potentially life-changing." Morris Chapman, president of the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention said, "I don't know of anything since the Billy Graham crusades that has had the potential of touching so many lives." Well, entertainment can touch lives but not necessary in the same way as the truth of the Gospel and the ministry of the Spirit working in the hearts of people.

The fact is that no medium, whether it's rock music, ecumenicalism, or a religious based movie has the power to save a person. A person is saved through the call of the Holy Spirit as the message of the Gospel is communicated to their heart. John 16:7-8 says, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if

I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

The Holy Spirit does not need movies to call people to salvation. He simply needs the Gospel message. The Holy Spirit works through people who are witnessing for him as they go into all the world with the Gospel message. Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” The Gospel message (not Mel’s Gibson’s movie or any other religious movie) is a dynamite message because it’s the Gospel that the Holy Spirit uses to bring people to Christ – not entertaining pictures about Jesus.

Entrainment has never saved any man nor will ever save any person. The power is in the message and ministry of the Spirit - not the method. We must remember that when Jesus commissioned the disciples He did not promise to give them electric guitars, CCM music, and rock bands. He gave them His Word and the Holy Spirit to get the job done. Zechariah 4:6 reminds us: “Not by might, nor by power, [nor by Mel Gibson’s movies] but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”

There is something else that should be cause for alarm. Religious entertainment can be convincing and convicting in a different way than the Holy Spirit’s work of conviction. It’s one thing to be moved by pictures, movies, and programs but it’s an altogether different thing to be genuinely convicted by the Word of God (Isa. 66:5) and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-10). Theatrics, tear-jerking stories, religious comedians, and the world of entertainment may stimulate certain human responses and produce man-made results, such as emotional highs, intellectual pleasures, and artificial behavior, which are generated from the power of visual affects instead of from the Holy Spirit. At worst, theatrics can also produce the manmade results of pseudo-revival without repentance and reformation without regeneration. Matthew 13:20-21 states, “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.”

God's method of sharing is through non-entertaining truth, coupled with the Spirit's dynamic power, which is designed to produce genuine and lasting results. We must learn to do God's work in God's way so that we can get God's results and not man's results. God's work done in God's way produces only good results. God's work done in man's way produces good and bad results. Whenever entertainment enters into the picture of church life and evangelism, a strange brew or mixture of man's pragmatic philosophies (Col. 2:8) is poured into the same pot with God's Word. When this happens the message can very easily become blurred, distorted, diluted, misleading, and hidden behind theatrical pictures and man-produced or Hollywood generated emotional feelings. The mixture of entertainment with God's Word can produce manmade results instead of God's results. We must remember that God hates a mixture (Lev. 10:10).

One article on the website of Discernment Ministries has stated it very well. I give them credit for this valuable summary:

“It is true that we live in a highly visual and increasingly anti-literate society—that places a premium on sound bites and easily assimilated visual imagery. But does this mean that we should abandon preaching in favor of using movies or dramatic presentations? We need to remember that the last time dramatic presentations replaced preaching as the main vehicle by which the truth of the Bible was communicated was during the Middle Ages when the church refused to allow the translation of the Bible into common languages, and when in place of the preaching and teaching of God's Word, the common people were given visual presentations such as Passion Plays, statues, relics, and icons. These things were designed, like most visual imagery, to play upon the emotions and stimulate a response; but the ability to evoke an emotional response via imagery or drama is not the same as successfully transmitting the Gospel. The means that God has ordained for the transmission of the Gospel was neither drama, imagery, nor even “lectures” — it is preaching. Preaching involves the communication of the Gospel in a way that patiently convinces, rebukes, exhorts, and teaches (2 Timothy 4:2-4). The Bible teaches us the awesome importance of preaching and why it cannot be replaced by another medium.”

We must preach God's Word because it always accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent (Isa.55:9-11). God never promised that a religious movie would accomplish His purpose! Simply stated, God does not command us to produce dramatic presentations of Gospel themes, He commands us to preach. Preach the word! God has ordained the foolishness of preaching to evangelize the world. He has promised to attend the preaching of the Word with the power of the Holy Spirit.

For the first four centuries of its existence, the church did not use pictures of Jesus as an aid to evangelism. This was despite the fact that they were bringing the Gospel to highly visual cultures that had always used imagery to convey religious ideas. The initial movements toward making pictures of Christ were initially strongly opposed, and the practice was formally condemned by the church as late as 753 AD. Sadly, once they had taken hold of the public imagination, the practice of making visible representations of Christ proved difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate. Gradually, pictures and dramatic representations of Jesus became quite commonplace in the church. At the time of the Reformation, Protestants overwhelmingly rejected the practice of making images of Jesus as a clear violation of the Second Commandment. They also rejected the notion that such images had a necessary role as "textbooks for the laity," and then proved that notion false by producing generations of other Protestants well versed in the Word and familiar with their Savior, though they had never once owned or seen a representation of Him.

Rather than visual imagery, the apostles and early believers relied on the preaching of the Word to save souls, and the Gospel made great advances. If we return to the use of imagery and begin endorsing movies like *The Passion of the Christ*, we will be returning to the very state of affairs the first Protestants struggled and died to reform – plays, performances, and pleasurable acts of entertainment. Endorsing one form of visible representation of Christ can very easily lead to other forms that take the emphasis off the simplicity of the Gospel truth.

b. The problem related to the Christian life

As a Christian, we don't need movies to stir our hearts concerning Christ's passion. I think you will agree with this. It's is the job of the Holy Spirit and Word of God to stir my heart - not emotional or entertaining pictures. The Holy Spirit is the One who shows the things of Christ to me. Jesus said in John 16:13-14, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you." I can read and meditate about Christ's death in the Word of God and the Spirit will move my heart to reflect on the love of God with deep appreciation and gratefulness. Romans 5:5, "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

There is no need to go the movie theater to be stirred about Christ's death. Furthermore, the emotional stir from a movie is temporary at best but the teaching of the Spirit is a constant inflow of appreciation and gratefulness for the passion of Christ. Graphic pictures do not do the same thing as the ministry of the Spirit of God. John 7:38-39, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The Spirit's ministry is constant and ongoing like a continual refreshing spring of water gushing up inside of us.

As a Christian, we don't need to witness a graphic moving picture to remember the death of Jesus! The early church did not need movies about Jesus to stir their hearts and motivate them to serve God. Why do we need them? One must wonder how the early church turned the world upside without the movie theater (Acts 17:6). In fact, the Lord Jesus did not give us movies to remember His death but the communion service. 1 Corinthians 11:24-26, "And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me (He didn't say and see Mel Gibson's film) For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

When I hold the bread and the cup in my hand I'm reminded that Jesus died for me. I'm reminded that Jesus died in my place and that His blood was shed for me. I hold the symbols of Christ's death in my hand so that I might remember the great sacrifice He made on my behalf. I think we will both agree that it does not take photography and graphic pictures to move our hearts? Our heart should be stirred every time we meditate upon the cross and as we keep "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

The message of grace can do something to our hearts that movies cannot do. Titus 2:11-12 states: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." The message of grace can do something that entertaining and emotionally charged movies cannot. It can sanctify my life on a daily basis. I need grace and not movies about Jesus to change my life!

c. The problem of an image-based faith.

Visual effects can create what we might call an image-based faith. This plays into Catholic Theology which likes to see visual pictures of Christ still suffering on the cross and in some sense these images are worshipped as they give honor to the person represented by the image. In other words, a person can place faith in an image of Jesus suffering instead of in Jesus Himself and His saving work for salvation. A person can eat the Catholic Mass for salvation instead of trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

The point is this, an unsaved person does not have to see a visual image or picture of Jesus on the cross to generate faith in their hearts. In fact, a visual image does not generate true faith. The bottom line is this. Faith is generated in our hearts by the Word of God. Romans 10:17, "So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We need to beware of an image-based faith that does not generate true faith in Christ Himself – His saving work on the cross. God has ordained that men approach Him by faith, and

faith does not need visible screen imagery to be generated in the hearts of people.

Jesus said something in connection with His resurrection, which is applicable to His death upon the cross. John 20:29, “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed.” Faith is opposite of sight! “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith comes through the truth of God’s Word being impressed upon our heart – not the Hollywood images of Jesus. No person has faith generated in their hearts through a moving picture. In Luke 16:31 Jesus said, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Or whether they see a picture of Jesus suffering on the cross!!). The Bible states that a man must come “unto the knowledge of the truth” to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). He does not have to come into the movie theater to be saved!

It’s interesting there were very few people who actually witnessed the sufferings and death of Jesus. This tells us that God has not found it necessary to use pictures of His Son suffering on the cross as a way to communicate His message of salvation. The Bible says in Galatians 4:4, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” God could have made the fullness of time in the 21st century when we had pictures and TV’s to film the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Instead, God chose that Christ should come to earth before His Son could be captured on picture or film. Why? Simply because people would no doubt worship the pictures and images of Christ instead of the true Christ. In doing so people would create the image of Jesus in their minds and trust in that image rather than in the Son Himself. People would worship the image and not the true person of Jesus Christ.

d. The problem of missing the significance of Christ’s death

The movie places the emphasis on the brutal beating and suffering of Jesus Christ. But we must remember that there was a mental anguish and suffering that Jesus experienced even far greater than the physical suffering. It was the horrible prospect of being separated from the Father when He actually bore the weight of the sins of the

world upon Himself. Matthew 26:39, “And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou *wilt*.” Matthew 26:44, “And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.” Hebrews 5:7, “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.”

The prayerful cry of Jesus was not requesting exemption from His brutal suffering but from His separation from the Father. His heart was broken when He thought of being separated from His father for that time upon the cross! Matthew 27:46, Jesus cried while upon the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” There was a spiritual battle that occurred in Christ’s heart which was even greater than the physical battle. We must be very careful that we do not miss the true significance of Christ’s death. Emphasizing only the physical suffering of Jesus does not convey the true meaning or way of redemption – nor the greater suffering that affected Jesus – His separation from the Father.

If Jesus would have only suffered physically and not actually bore the sins of the world, while being separated from the Father, there could be no salvation. So undue emphasis on the physical sufferings of Jesus can miss the important fact that Jesus died as a sacrifice for lost sinners and that lost sinners need to believe that the sacrifice of Jesus was a replacement for them. Hebrews 9:26, “For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” 1 Corinthians 15:3, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.” 1 Peter 2:24 “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.” We need to remember that it was not the suffering of Jesus that saves us; it’s the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus that saves us. It was not the physical brutality of Jesus Christ that saves us but the substitutionary sacrifice that saves us.

Gibson's comments about the sacrifice of the altar and the sacrifice of the cross being one and the same thing shows the link between the Catholic view of Christ's sacrifice and the portrayal of the Crucifixion in *The Passion of the Christ*. In Roman Catholic Theology, the intense physical suffering of Christ's Crucifixion is *the* focus along with the emphasis on physical sacrifice. This is one of the reasons why in Roman Catholic iconography we have so much imagery related to Christ's physical pain and that crucifixes show him still suffering on the cross.

It's interesting that the Bible does not linger on the details of Christ's suffering. The Bible's description of Christ's passion is not R-rated. God could have graphically portrayed the details of Christ's death in His Word if He so desired. While it is true that "by his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5) and that Christ's visage was marred more than any man (Isa. 52:14), we must never lose focus on the redemptive price for sin that was made on the cross (Isa. 53:5, 10). The focus of the Scriptures is not merely upon Christ's suffering but upon Christ being made sin in the sinner's place. 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Jesus' physical agony in the Crucifixion was great and intense. But His obedience to the Father was what counted (Phil. 2:8). His suffering and death satisfied the wrath of God. The theology of the Bible points out to us that the grand importance of Christ's crucifixion lay not in His physical suffering, but in His once for all propitiation of God's wrath (1 John 4:10). Lest we forget, the greatest torment that Christ experienced on the cross was *not* caused by the nails driven into His flesh, but in His being made "sin for us" and being separated from the Father, and vicariously suffering the righteous punishment of the Father in our place.

e. The problem of venerating pictures in our mind.

Deuteronomy 4:15-16 says, "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day *that* the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt *yourselves*, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female."

Billy Graham in his endorsement of *The Passion of Christ* said, "Every time I preach or speak about the Cross, the things I saw on the screen will be on my heart and mind." As a result of seeing this film, James Caviezel said that the "*The Passion of Christ*, will become the figure countless thousands if not millions of people think of when they worship Jesus Christ." This is unfortunately part of the problem with all visual representations of Jesus. Although we may intend for them only to have a role in teaching, they inevitably become part of our worship and adoration. This is something that simply is not right. We can begin to unconsciously venerate pictures of Jesus in our mind instead of worshipping the real Jesus. This is what Roman Catholicism does with the statues of Jesus on the cross. Pictures can create a subtle form of idolatry in our hearts. By the way, the Jesus played in the *Passion of the Christ* was a Roman Catholic and was wrongly portrayed as some kind of white European medieval hippie!

Are we really certain that religious movies will be as effective as we think in saving souls? J. Marcellus Kik in his tract titled "Pictures of Christ" addresses this very question and gives us some wise advice, which all Christians would do well to heed:

"But can it not help in the saving of souls, it is asked. But how? Looking at a picture of Christ hanging upon the cross tells me nothing. It does not tell me that He hung there for sin. It does not tell me that He hung there for my sin. It does not tell me that He is the Son of God. Only the Word of God does that. And it is the Word of God that has been given us to tell the story of salvation through the blood of Christ. It is not through the foolishness of pictures that sinners are converted, but through the foolishness of preaching."

It is amazing how slowly unscriptural practices or methods enter the professing Christian church. This is why we must keep going back to the Scriptures and check our teachings and methods with the Bible. The Scriptures are the final authority and court of appeal. The Bible is our infallible guide! And if our teachings, practices, and methods do not conform with the teachings of the Scriptures, then we must eliminate them. The Bible warns us about the danger of visual images. The present day pictures of Christ are false and no one would make a serious claim that they actually resemble Christ upon earth.

5. Consider its place (the movie theater)

There are at several reasons why a Christian should not attend the movie theater.

➤ Because of the holiness of God.

Refusing to attend the movie theater can be one way you can express holiness in your life. “For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy” (Lev. 11:44). The word holiness means to be set apart unto God and from the world system which is against God. The movie theater represents a place that promotes the most wicked and vile filth that this world has to offer today. The movie theater stands for sex, sins, and sensual living of the worst kind. It’s a place which openly glorifies the total depravity of man. The sins of adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, and the occult are openly promoted and glorified in movie theaters. This should be reason enough not to attend the movie theater.

Why would a Christian want to grace his holy presence in a place such as this? The holiness of God should drive us away from these open pits of sin. Titus 2:3 speaks about possessing a type of behavior “as becometh holiness” or which is fitting, proper, and conducive to holiness. Ephesians 5:3-4 also talks about living in a manner “as becometh saints” (befitting to Christian living) and mentions there are those things that “are not convenient” (proper or suitable) for a Christian to do. Attending a theater where terrible and sinful atrocities are promoted is not conduct that is becoming to a saint or one who is to be set apart from the world and represent Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:7 states that “God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” Holiness means we are to be separated unto God and steer away from those things and places that do not represent God and reveal on a giant screen the most wicked and vilest sins known to mankind.

In other words, *a Christian should not attend the movie theater because of the overall message of what the theater represents and portrays.* It makes no difference if a so-called religious movie is being played. The movie theater is a den of iniquity that can easily be avoided if one wants to practice separation. The term holiness (“Be

ye holy; for I am holy” – 1 Pet. 1:16) means to be separate from that which is evil and that which is unholy.

To attend the movie theater which is a place that promotes wicked and vile sins is a breach of the holiness of God. It's like the Corinthians who were attending the temple feasts. Paul told them because of what occurs in these places they were to not attend these specific eating places: “I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils” or demons (1 Cor. 10:20). In other words, certain places were off limits because of the terrible sins and wickedness occurring in these places. Attending them would cause them in some way to identify (fellowship) with the pagan practices and ways occurring in these places.

We are not representing God's holiness and therefore glorifying God when attending these dens of iniquity. Some of the worst sins of the human race are known to be promoted in the movie theater. The Bible tells us that we are “to be holy in all manner of conversation” or behavior (1 Pet. 1:15) which would include refusing to attend places whose sole purpose is to glorify sex, infidelity, and the world of the occult. It makes no sense why a Christian who believes in Bible separation from the world (Rom. 12:2) would attend the movie theater for in this place horrible and terrible sins of the last days are openly glorified. To state succinctly, the movie theater is nothing more than a hell hole within society.

As Bible separatists and fundamentalists, we need to continue to take our stand against the movie theater because of what it represents and stands for in our culture. But more so we must refuse to attend the theater because God has called us to holiness. Of course, there is nothing evil in a building or screen but what is openly endorsed and promoted can turn a place into a den of iniquity and vice that is nothing more than the devil's brothel house.

➤ Because of the glory of God.

The Christian should refuse to attend the movie theater because attending a place such as this does not glorify God or properly represent His holy character and righteous ways.

1 Corinthians 10:31 says:

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

The glory of God means that our actions and conduct (whatever we do) will bring honor to God’s name or who He is in His existence and being.

In other words, to glorify God means that whatever we do must represent God’s character and ways. If what we do does not align with God’s character of holiness and righteousness, then God is not glorified or honored in our actions. Colossians 3:23 says, “And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” In other words, whatever we do should be done to honor and glory God which means to properly represent His holy character and righteousness.

Now apply this principle of God’s glory to attending the movie theater. Can I honestly glorify God when I attend a place that the devil uses to openly promote and glory adultery, fornication, homosexuality (open sexual scenes) other vile sins, the occult, and ungodly practices? God cannot and does not get the glory when we attend a place like the movie theater.

➤ Because of our separation unto God.

We have already talked about holiness. Separation is holiness in action.

2 Corinthians 6:14 states:

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers (joined together with them in following and promoting their evil agenda and wicked ways): for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”

We must always follow the unchanging and enduring principles of Bible separation which call for a distinction between righteousness versus unrighteousness and light verses darkness. So here is the question. Does attending the movie theater pass the separation test? How can you sit and be entertained with vulgar speech, immodesty

dressed women, sexual innuendos, and all the other kinds of filth the movie theater offers by way of entertainment? As Christians, we should avoid all forms of evil (1 Thess. 5:22).

The theater is a dark place filled with unrighteousness and focused on evil. Therefore, we should not attend this type of heathen place and yoke together with others who are being entertained by sin, and therefore approve of the moral depravity and unethical practices that are being promoted in this wicked and vile place. Whether the movie is allegedly “good” or “bad” is a moot point. The place itself and what it *represents* and stands for (heathen darkness and depravity) is ground enough to not attend the cinema. The Bible says we are not to learn the way of the heathen (Jer. 10:2) and we are not to be like them (Matt. 6:8).

2 Corinthians 6:17 goes on to say:

“Wherefore come out from among them (they sinful and evil ways), and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,”

Separation involves not participating in the same sinful depravity as heathen or unsaved people. To separate from unbelievers means we must refuse to participate with their ungodly places, programs, and pursuits in life which are worldly, pagan, and represent sinful and degrading practices. To “touch” something that is unclean means we are in some sense partnering with it and fellowshiping with it, either *directly* or *indirectly* by our presence and endorsement (1 Cor. 10:20).

When we are separated unto God we won’t want to fellowship (partner and participate) with any place like the movie theater whose sole purpose is to represent darkness and openly glorify sin. Ephesians 5:10 declares that we are to keep “Proving (testing or examining everything) what is acceptable unto the Lord” (which means we must test everything to make sure it is approved by God or that it reflects God’s character and ways). And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove (refute and correct) *them*.”

Philippians 1:10 says that “That ye may approve (test or examine) things that are excellent” (approving only what is superior in nature,

what is spiritual and best). In other words, we should not settle for second best and things which are flawed and impure in any way. If you approve of attending the movie theater, you are not approving of something that is “excellent” (superior in ethical and moral purity). This is because of the content of most movies today but also because of the place that promotes some of the most terrible sinful atrocities known to mankind. Attending the movie theater is not proving something that is excellent or superior in character.

God has called us to “have no fellowship with “the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). To “fellowship” with something means we in some sense participate with or endorse (condone) that which is spiritually flawed and unethical in nature and therefore place our stamp of approval upon it. To not correct “the unfruitful works of darkness” which is the content of most movies today and attend the movie theater where wicked and vile sins are openly glorified is a clear violation of God’s holiness. If we don’t “reprove” (refute, find fault with, correct) the wrong it means that we are complicit to it, willing to accept it, and promote it within our personal lives.

So this is another reason why we should refuse to attend the movie theater. To attend the theater which represents nothing more than an immoral house of sin and uncleanness is to give our approval of the cinema and to some degree we *directly* or even *indirectly* fellowship, endorse, sanction, and promote the overall evil nature and purpose of the movie theater. The devil is always pushing his agenda. Don’t follow it.

➤ Because of the temple of God.

1 Corinthians 6:19

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”

The Bible teaches that your body is the temple (holy shrine and dwelling place) of God. Think about it. God dwells inside of you in the person of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, we should use our bodies in a way that represents God’s holiness and that He is in control of our lives. We are a living temple of God’s indwelling presence. This

means we are to separate from that which is evil and not attend places that are totally pagan and which are designed to only promote Satan's purposes. "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16). In other words, we should not use our bodies (God's holy shrine) for unholy purposes since we are to represent God's holy presence within us and His control over our lives.

Neither should we take our bodies into pagan places like the movie theater because of the devilish, demonic, and degrading sinful depravity that is represented by the theater (1 Cor. 10:20). You might say, "But I'm going to see a new movie that is morally good and even talks about Jesus." This is not the point and what is deemed ethical and religious by Hollywood standards does not normally meet God's standards of righteousness. Hollywood promotes sketchy things which are skewed with vulgarity, promiscuity, and other sins. We are never to be entertained by swearing, scantily dressed women, or other sins which often appear in even the so-called good movies.

Philippians 4:8 is God's standard – not Hollywood's standard: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, 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."

The point is we take God's temple into a place that is the devil's temple and God's indwelling presence in our temple (the human body) creates an incompatible relationship and conflict with places where Satan and sinful degradations are glorified on open screen. In short, we cannot represent God who lives within us when we place ourselves in environments that are committed to marketing sexual sins and other worldly vices. 1 Thessalonians 4:4 again reminds us of using our bodies for holy purposes when it states: "That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour."

Psalms 101:3 is a good reminder not only as it relates to the movie theater but with all our viewing habits within the world of social media. "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; *it shall not cleave to me.*" Now think about this. *You*

never really walk into a movie theater alone. God is living inside of you and His presence should result in you separating from anything and everything that does not meet His approval. One Christian man said when he was in the movie theater, he became filled with deep conviction and shame after seeing what was being played on the open screen. If our conscience has not become seared toward sinful practices, this is what happens when we watch things which are unwholesome and degrading. God's dwells within us to convict and remind us that we need to stop a specific practice that does not honor and glorify Him.

➤ Because of our testimony for God.

If you are seen walking into the theater to see a certain movie, will it hurt your testimony for Christ? For instance, if you are seen walking into a movie that glorifies the occult, will you be able to answer the question of why and still hold onto your credibility as a Christian?

1 Thessalonians 5:22 says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." This is a very short verse and maybe this is why it's overlooked by so many Christians today. The word appearance refers to an external form, figure, or shape. In other words, the believer must abstain from everything that takes on the form of evil. This is not only referring to everything that is intrinsically evil (morally wrong) but also what may outwardly appear to be evil falls under this category of warning. In other words, attending the movie theater, even if it's not a wicked and vile movie like others, takes on the appearance that you are condoning, endorsing, and promoting a place that on open screen glorifies debased sex, cursing, and all kinds of ungodliness.

It also sends the message that you might also enjoy the forms of vile entertainment that normally occur in the movie theater. As Christians we should exhibit discretion regarding our conduct and places that we attend. This is because every Christian has an outward testimony of holiness to maintain before God and others.

1 Timothy 4:12 talks about our general Christian testimony:
"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example (a pattern in an ethical sense) **of the believers**, (to avoid the possibility of justified criticism) **in word** (speaking – avoiding forbidden speech but

engaging in kind speech), **in conversation** (conduct of living, deportment of life), **in charity** (our motive, goal, and spirit toward God's people and service), **in spirit** (wholesome affections and also intense enthusiasm), **in faith** (confidence or trust in God as well as faithfulness, steadfastness, dependability), **in purity**" (holy actions as well as motives in relation to sanctified and separated living).

God wants us to live above reproach (Titus 1:7 – "blameless") and attending a movie theater can potentially soil our reputation as a Christian who wants to honor God with our lives. How can we represent a good testimony for God when we attend a place that is designed to promote hideous and grotesque sins of homosexuality and all kinds of vice? The separated Christian should avoid those places that are questionable, and which might hinder his testimony and effectiveness in serving the Lord in some way.

Living a separated life (Rom. 12:2) means that I strive to separate from those sinful places in society which might be considered "hell holes" and where absolute filth and sinful degradation is practiced. Again, I am commanded to separate from every form (appearance) of evil (1 Thess. 5:22). God's people should want to avoid taking on the appearance that they are identifying or associating (1 Cor. 10:20; Eph. 5:7, 11) with the questionable, extreme, radical, worldly, and unbiblical movements or practices within our society. We are to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-14) – not darkness or chameleon Christians that seek to blend in with society and culture.

Here are some more questions you can apply to your life, so you do not take on the appearance of evil, that you are endorsing or participating with something that is wrong and evil.

- Can we abstain from the form of evil and even the outward appearance of evil when attending the movie theater?
- What message will we be sending or conveying by attending the movie theater where vile, wicked, and disgusting sins are openly promoted?
- What is the general or over-all emphasis and message being promoted by the movie theater and other places, programs, and activities that you engage in?

- What is the primary thing that the movie theater is trying to push and promote?
- What does the movie theater represent and stand for in society?
- What message does it communicate?
- Is there a breakdown of decency, honesty, and integrity that would be unbecoming for a Christian to identify with and represent by attending the movie theater?
- Can I mix light with darkness or righteousness with unrighteousness when attending the movie theater (2 Cor. 6:14)?
- Am I attempting to unite God's holy temple (my own body) with a pagan temple of unbelief and worldly practices?
- Can you attend the movie theater after applying the principle of holiness to your life (1 Pet. 1:14-17; Lev. 10:10)?
- Will my testimony as a Christian in some way be hindered by identifying or associating with the movie theater?
- Will I cause my brother to stumble in some way?
- Would Jesus attend the movie theater?

These types of questions will guide us in our practical daily separation. God wants us to learn and follow "the good and the right way" (1 Samuel 12:23).

➤ Because of another saint of God.

There is a final reason why a Christians should not attend the movie theater. If for no other reason, we should refuse to attend the movie theater for we may offend others in doing so. Inf act, we may cause them to stumble. There are some fellow Christians who can be discouraged when they find out that anther fellow believer attends the movie theater. The Bible says that "no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way" (Rom. 14:13).

This command applies to all Christians and is a principle that every Christian must take to heart. Where we go and what we do can have an adverse spiritual effect on others. Our decisions and actions can cause spiritual conflict to occur in the hearts of other Christians and even corruption to set into their lives. Our actions may cause another

Christian to revert to his old ways of living. What if a brother was bound to the movie theater with its lust and lewdness and then he sees you as a Christian attending the theater? This would be reason enough to cause him to revert back to his old ways.

1 Corinthians 8:13

“Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”

This Biblical principle is reason enough for believers to not openly endorse or attend the movie theater, places that promote dancing, and other places of questionable vice and entertainment. Your looseness of living can lead many others to compromise! To openly attend places and participate in certain activities that generate questions and controversy may cause confusion to some and lead others astray.

For a Christian, the question is not so much "is watching this movie a sin?" but "is this something that Jesus would want me to do?" The danger lies in (1) how what we are watching affects our heart and (2) how it affects others. For ourselves, if a scene we view brings a feeling of lust, anger, or hatred, then we have sinned (Matthew 5:22, 28), and we must do whatever we can to avoid this (1 Thess. 5:22). Of course, this means we should not attend the movie theater where these types of pictures to a lesser and greater degree are played. It also means I must refuse to watch any scenes like this in the privacy and secrecy of my home.

Again, attending a movie theater can be a stumbling block to someone who is struggling with a habit or behavior that is coming between him and God (1 Corinthians 10:25-33; Romans 14:13). As members of the body of Christ, we are to be a light to the world (Matthew 5:14) and a holy example of what God has done in our lives (1 Peter 2:11-12). If we are seen by others going into the movie theater, it could very easily send the wrong message to them - that we enjoy and/or condone illicit sex and violence. That is not conducive to being a light in a dark world.

➤ Because of following God.

Being disciple or follower of Christ involves suffering to God's way and purpose for your life despite what others might think and want you to do.

Jesus taught in Luke 14:26-28:

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?"

Jesus did not teach that we are to hate others in an unethical or bad sense. In Bible times the word "hate" was sometimes used in a comparative way. Jesus was saying that you are to love me more than anyone else or anything else in life. Taking up a cross means we are ready and willing to surrender and even sacrifice and suffer for Christ as His disciple or follower. This means you should not be pressured to attend the movie theater just because others are doing it – not even your friends. We are to follow truth – not people. We must follow God's will – not man's will.

Proverbs 29:25 warns:

"The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe."

In other words, we should not allow the fear of what others think about us (even our friends) to become a trap and keep us from doing God's will. We must be determined to do what is right despite what others might think and do. After all, we are Christ's followers – not the follower of the whimsical ideas and conclusions of others. 1 Peter 4:4 reminds us that some will "think it strange that ye run not with *them* to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you*." That's okay. You continue to do what is right and follow Christ. Christians will sometimes take some heat or pressure for doing the right thing. Don't cave to the culture. Sadly, Jesus said that some of His followers loved the praises of others more than His praise and glory. John

12:43: “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” Don’t follow the crowd; follow Christ and do what is right.

You must take up your cross, count the cost of being a follower of Christ, and not conform to the conclusions of others. In doing so, you conform to the world’s standards (Rom. 12:2). Instead, you must follow Christ’s calling for your life which is holiness, consecration, and dedication to His cause. So don’t feel like you are a Christian misfit or outcast just because you refuse to attend the movie theater. The important thing is that you keep following God’s will and purpose for your life based upon the Biblical commands and principles regarding holiness, separation, God’s temple, the glory of God, your testimony, causing a stumbling block before others, and being a disciple or follower of Christ.

Ultimately, we should be loyal to God and what He expects from our lives. We cannot “go along to get along” for this is caving to the pressure of others and compromising with the culture. So take your stand and do not blush or be embarrassed when taking it. Remember that if you don’t stand for something you will fall for everything.

1 Timothy 5:22 says, “neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.” It’s time to follow Christ. Make your refusal to attend the movie theater as part of your discipleship, surrender to the Lord, your Christian testimony, and the desire to reflect holiness and glorify God as your Master. Don’t treat others badly if they decide to attend the theater and don’t think you are more spiritual than others. Beware of developing “a holier than thou” attitude. The Bible says we should not compare ourselves with one another for “they measuring themselves by themselves (*their own standards*), and comparing themselves among themselves (*to determine who is more spiritual*), are not wise” (2 Cor. 10:12). Just determine to do right and leave the rest with God.

“I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.
Though none go with me, I still will follow;
Though none go with me, I still will follow;
Though none go with me, I still will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.”