

Text: Rm 14, 1 Cor 8-10

Today I want to finish this brief mini-series on the question, What should Christians do about the media?

In the first place, we talked about what prompts the question?

The fundamental Christian instinct of sanctification (growth in grace) brings the question to our minds. The Bible doesn't (and can't) address every issue we face, so we have to ask the question.

In the second message, I tried to show you the various nuances of the idea of worldliness.

Sometimes worldly things are just temporal "on earth" things. That doesn't make them evil, or tainted, but such things may be worth giving up for more important things.

But often worldly things are tainted by the anti-God mindset of the world. The Bible clearly commands us to "mind not worldly things" and "love not the world" and so on.

In our last message, I wanted to show you that there are things in the world that push an unreal or ungodly message. We need to be really careful here.

One point we emphasized is the "fantasy" nature of media with an illustration from Malcolm Muggeridge. What he meant is that media always shapes its message so that it is always somewhat unreal, even when it is "just news" that the media is reporting.

I've read more of that book this week, and found that Muggeridge really emphasizes this point:

"I have tried to show that, as I see it, the media have created, and belong to, a world of fantasy, the more dangerous because it purports to be, and is largely taken as being, the real world."¹

Now, Muggeridge is mostly talking about his field, television. We can apply what he says to every other form of media, be it music, movies, the internet, video games, any form of communication that promotes ideas can be mere fantasy and not reality, including sermons!

¹ Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 60.

The thing for us to do (especially with sermons) is to check the message against the standard of truth, the Bible. Each of us needs to know the Bible as thoroughly as possible so we can develop our skills in discerning those messages that depart from it.

Today, I want to focus on discernment with this message:

The Christian and Media (Part 4): Good, Neutral, Evil, Which?

I've given two texts for this, but we can't read all that is in these chapters. I will highlight some key verses, then we will go from there:

Rm 14.1-8, 1 Co 8.1-6, 10.14-22

Proposition: The key to discernment is identifying the extent a thing reflects worldly values, the "fantasy quotient."

I. The difference between Rm 14 and 1 Cor 8-10

A. The conflict in Rome was over indifferent things

1. The conflict over food (2)

- a. Free to eat all things
- b. Free only to eat vegetables

Many Christians get it wrong right here. They insist this means the vegetarians did that to avoid eating meat offered to idols.

- The text does not say this.
- When Paul and the Jerusalem Council wanted to talk about meat offered to idols (1 Cor 8-10, Ac 15) they were very explicit.

2. The conflict over days (5)

- a. One day is more important than others
- b. Every day is alike

Again, some want to say these days are Jewish holy days. What is the correct answer to this supposition?

- *The text does not say this.*

When Paul wants to talk about Jewish holy days, he is very explicit:

Col 2.16 ¶ Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—

3. These issues are matters of indifference

- a. If you choose to be vegetarian, or to restrict your diet in some way, it is your own business
- b. If you choose to keep Sundays as a day distinctly different from others, and restrict your behaviour on Sundays, it is your own business

Now, just going to church makes Sundays different, but some would say you should never buy or sell, go to a restaurant, or do any “frivolous thing” on a Sunday.

That is their business

- c. Indifferent things are things we might hold to individually, but don't impose on other people

B. The conflict in Corinth was over things closely connected to idolatry (1 Cor 8-10)

1. Right up front: “Now concerning things sacrificed to idols” (8.1)
 - a. A lot of argumentation follows about the thing sacrificed to idols
 - b. The thing is not *in itself* evil: meat is meat
 - c. But the connection with the idol cannot be denied

To use Muggeridge's example, television *in itself* is a tool, indifferent in itself, but it is inescapably connected to what he calls “fantasy,” and consequently it presents a false message at least to some degree.

This can't be denied.

2. In the conclusion, Paul comes down to this: if you *know* the meat is offered to idols, don't do it (10.14-22)
 - a. Paul won't have us in communion with idols

- b. Something as “indifferent” as eating chicken can have you participating spiritually with idols
 - c. So don’t do it
3. Notice the comparison:
- a. Paul says to the Corinthians, with many arguments, “don’t do it”
 - b. Paul says to the Romans, “leave each other alone, it doesn’t matter”
 - c. The difference is indifference ... or not
 - 1) Vegetarianism is a matter of indifference
 - 2) Knowingly partaking of idol food *is not*

II. The application of the Bible to media

We can’t possibly cover every type of media or every case that might come to your mind in this message! But...

Proposition: The key to discernment is identifying the extent a thing reflects worldly values, the “fantasy quotient.”

A. Video games

- 1. Do role playing games where you learn the skills of trolls and dwarves and fantasy figures reflect worldly values or Biblical values?
- 2. Do “first person shooter” games reflect worldly values or Biblical values?

What about shooter games where the characters are just eggs?

- 3. Do games that involve theft as a major component of the strategy reflect worldly values or Biblical values?

Note, the board game Catan has a “robber” feature where you “steal” a resource from other players... for me, it is a feature of the game, not the main component of the strategy (though those who steal from me *are* sinning!! Just kidding!)

B. Television

1. Most of us are aware that the dramas we watch often have false narratives and worldly values in them (always?)
 - a. At what point should we say no?
 - b. Do you say no?
2. Yet even the news projects a fantasy world. I'll give you an extreme example from Muggeridge:

"I remember once returning to my hotel in New York and noticing on the way that a crowd had assembled outside what was obviously an embassy or consulate of some sort I found out afterwards that it belonged to one of the Arab countries. There were the usual students assembled bra-less girls, bearded men, holding placards with slogans on them; also a police van in attendance, and a number of cops standing by with their truncheons — everything set for a demo. "What's going on?" I asked, and was told, as though it should have been obvious, that the cameras hadn't yet turned up. I lingered on until they came, and watched them set up and start rolling. Then, "Action!" whereupon, placards were lifted, slogans shouted, fists clenched; a few demonstrators were arrested and pitched into the police van, and a few cops kicked, until, "Cut!" Soon the cameras, the cops, and the demonstrators had all departed, leaving the street silent and deserted. Later, in the evening, in my hotel room, I watched the demo on the screen in one of the news programmes. It looked very impressive."²

3. Documentaries
 - a. Do they project worldly values or Biblical values?
 - b. Do they have a worldly agenda?

Now, how much does watching a documentary shape our values against the Bible? That seems to me the crucial point.

² Muggeridge, 66–67.

C. Books, Music, Movies

1. All the same matters can be applied to each of these media
2. We could say, “none of these,” but most of us couldn’t or wouldn’t live this way
3. What we need is to know the Lord’s message first (read your Bibles!) and apply it to everything we take in
4. And sometimes simply turn away

Conclusion:

Proposition: The key to discernment is identifying the extent a thing reflects worldly values, the “fantasy quotient.”

Questions?