

The Effects of Television

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Of all the things that can be said about television, one of the most outstanding things that is apparent is that television is really not necessary. Nice to have, but not necessary. For the child of God this is a very important distinction that needs to be always kept in mind.

Television is much like a drug that one might take for "recreation," except that it is a mental and spiritual drug that gives no external evidence of its usage. Nevertheless, there are certain cases where the person is easily swayed to "act out" the things seen and heard. Television affects every person's heart and mind regardless of the outward show. How can I say this? Consider the following evidence from a study on the effects of denying a family television, even for a limited time. The subjects of the study were asked to do without the television for a time. They had not, of their own volition decided to put away the television, rather they were asked to do without for a time.

Nearly 40 years ago Gary A. Steiner of the University of Chicago collected fascinating individual accounts of families whose set had broken—this back in the days when households generally had only one set: "The family walked around like a chicken without a head." "It was terrible. We did nothing—my husband and I talked." "Screamed constantly. Children bothered me, and my nerves were on edge. Tried to interest them in games, but impossible. TV is part of them."

In experiments, families have volunteered or been paid to stop viewing, typically for a week or a month. Many could not complete the period of abstinence. Some fought, verbally and

physically. Anecdotal reports from some families that have tried the annual "TV turn-off" week in the U.S. tell a similar story. ((Television Addiction, Robert Kubey and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Scientific American, February 2002, <http://tv-addiction.blogspot.com/2007/01/television-addiction-is-no-mere.html>))

Now, for the born-again believer this ought to be a red flag concerning the potential for destruction of one's witness, especially if we remember what happened to Lot and his family when they heard and saw the wickedness that was continually around them. ((The Holy Bible, King James Version, Genesis 19:all, II Peter 2:7-8)) This is not to say that all television is like Sodom and Gomorrah, but even a swift glance at it today reveals much ungodliness and a vast amount of "information" that is direct opposition to what the word of God states is true. Thus we are given a choice to make: Are we, if we continue watching, going to continually say "no" to the ideas and concepts that come from the television, or, are we at some point going to quietly concede that particular battleground and not even protest, just so we can keep watching?

Again, I do know this is a bold thing to state. However, it is not said out of ignorance of the power of television. Researchers do know that every one responds to stimuli in a certain way. It is our automatic response to stimuli that causes many to concede this particular battleground.

In 1986 Byron Reeves of Stanford University, Esther Thorson of the University of Missouri and their colleagues began to study whether the simple formal features of television—cuts, edits, zooms, pans, sudden noises—activate the orienting response, thereby keeping attention on the screen.

The orienting response may partly explain common viewer remarks such as: "If a television is on, I just can't keep my

eyes off it," "I don't want to watch as much as I do, but I can't help it," and "I feel hypnotized when I watch television." ((Television Addiction, Robert Kubey and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Scientific American, February 2002, <http://tv-addiction.blogspot.com/2007/01/television-addiction-is-no-mere.html>))

Now the researchers do not understand that God put that response mechanism there. However, just because they misidentify the source of the response does not negate the fact that the response is there. What it does mean is that we must learn to rule over our flesh and its desires and not concede this battleground. If we fail in this area, what will ultimately occur (and sooner than we think) is the insidious slide into worldliness and the forsaking of the witness and testimony that we, as members of the Lord's church, are in covenant with the Lord about.

There are additional effects of television that are documented. These effects also contribute to difficulty in maintaining our witness and testimony. One of them is significant in its contribution to the ultimate downfall of this society as well.

Jerome L. and Dorothy Singer of Yale University, among others, have suggested that more viewing may contribute to a shorter attention span, diminished self-restraint and less patience with the normal delays of daily life. More than 25 years ago psychologist Tannis M. MacBeth Williams of the University of British Columbia studied a mountain community that had no television until cable finally arrived. Over time, both adults and children in the town became less creative in problem solving, less able to persevere at tasks, and less tolerant of unstructured time. ((Ibid))

Of course, we have seen and heard in the news many times in recent years where people have lost patience with one another

over the most trivial of things and the result was either grievous bodily harm, or murder. If we say, 'So what, big deal. That has always happened,' we ignore a time in United States history when television was not present, and a national economic crisis occurred. The result was not the kind of lawlessness that we see today. During the Great Depression so many people had little to nothing, including food. Yet, the vast majority of individuals willingly worked for what they could get, and were very patient concerning the conditions that they had to endure. Crime, especially assault and murder was rare at that time. I know, as I have spoken with many older people that lived through that time in America's history, and none of them experienced what we, as a nation, are going through today.

Now, we know the nature of man has not changed. So what has? How about the stimulus to man's nature? Is it possible that man can be encouraged to do evil by the things continually placed in front of him; especially if they are shown to be acceptable, even approved actions to take? God has much to say about looking upon evil and the effects of it, even on the believer. Think about it.

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