

Christians, Now Is Probably a Good Time to Stop Watching ‘Game of Thrones’

Matt Walsh (<http://www.theblaze.com/matt-walsh>) May 20, 2015 9:44 am

My wife and I watched one episode of “Game of Thrones” several years ago. I think it might have been the first episode of the series. From what I can remember, that particular installment ended with a graphic scene of incest and a child being tossed out of a window. It closed on a cliffhanger (or a cliff dive, in this case). I guess we were supposed to tune in next week, and every week for the next five seasons, to find out how it all unfolds.

We didn’t. We already knew what would happen: lots of people would have sex and die, and there would be blood and nudity and more sex, and then sex followed by sex, which would often occur right after a sex scene.

In hindsight, it appears we were entirely correct.

Now, I’m not pretending that I never make bad choices in the media I consume. I have and I do. But I recognize, even in those moments, that entertainment is not a neutral exercise. In every instance, it’s going to be a net positive or a net negative for my mental and spiritual welfare. I am inviting these messages, images, and ideas into my mind. I am doing something that is active and purposeful, and it will either help me or hurt me in the end.

Music, movies, TV, games — we spend so much of our lives wrapped up in all this stuff because it *affects* us. There’s a reason why, in this economy, Americans still commit an inordinate amount of their income to cable bills, Netflix accounts, movie tickets, and video games. It’s important to us. Too important, clearly. But even in proper proportion, this is art, and art is a powerful thing. Art says something to us and about us. It drives us. Transforms us. Art moves the heart and the mind in a particular direction. It can pull us closer to Him or push us further away, but whatever it does, it does *something*.

So anytime we sit in front of the tube, we should ask: Am I progressing or regressing? Is this drawing me to God or away from Him? What am I getting out of this?

The opposing argument, however, says that entertainment is never a moral concern. A thing is pleasurable because it is, and it is because it is because it is. Why worry about it? Why analyze it? Just sit back and let it sweep you away into its world. Be so utterly passive and lethargic that you don’t even stop to think about what you’re thinking about. Become like a vacant shell, filled in and emptied again according to the whims of these glowing screens. If the entertainment industry says, “here, stuff this in your brain, it’ll feel good,” just do it. Take whatever they give you. Take it and go with the flow.

Actually, I guess that’s not so much an argument as it is a whimper.

“Game of Thrones” has certainly benefited from this henpecked attitude immensely, although sometimes they can take it too far, even by their audience’s permissive standards. Occasionally, the debauchery on the show runs a bit ahead of Hollywood’s campaign of desensitization, and viewers are confronted with material that they aren’t quite numb enough to accept (yet). That’s what appears to have happened this past weekend, as the show aired (another) explicit rape sequence.

I imagine the show’s writers have some sort of pinwheel that they spin before every session to decide if an episode’s particular brand of pornography will be fornication, sodomy, incest, bestiality, necrophilia, or rape. I’m not sure if the wheel has ever stopped on bestiality or necrophilia, though I’m sure it eventually will if it hasn’t already. But for the episode this past Sunday, the winner was rape. Again.

Tonight’s #GameOfThrones (<https://twitter.com/hashtag/GameOfThrones?src=hash>) featured one of its most disturbing scenes yet: <http://t.co/i32zzx24Qu> (<http://t.co/i32zzx24Qu>) [pic.twitter.com/Qby51pjfFV](http://t.co/i32zzx24Qu) (<http://t.co/Qby51pjfFV>)

— The Daily Beast (@thedailybeast) [May 18, 2015 \(https://twitter.com/thedailybeast/status/600198420268220416\)](https://twitter.com/thedailybeast/status/600198420268220416)

But this time, some of the show’s most loyal viewers awoke from their prolonged moral slumber to discover that, wow, violent sex as entertainment is actually pretty disturbing.

Feminists (http://www.salon.com/2015/05/18/heres_why_people_are_so_upset_about_the_latest_game_of_thrones_rape_so_cheap_such_an_obvious_choice_i_felt_offended_as_a_fan/) and Vanity Fair writers (<http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/05/game-of-thrones-rape-sansa-stark>) and senators (http://twitichy.com/2015/05/19/sen-claire-mccaskill-is-done-with-hbos-game-of-thrones-after-sansas-gratuitous-rape-scene/?utm_source=autotweet&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=twitter) protested, swearing off the show and declaring the scene “unnecessary,” “cheap,” and “offensive.” After ingesting some 50 plus combined hours of glorified brutality and perversion, they finally noticed what they were watching and decided that it was completely uncool.

Good. It was. They’re right.

Yes, it wasn’t real, it was a fantasy, but that’s the point. A choice was made to include this material into an entertainment show about dragons and guys with swords. So what was the point? Why did it need to be shown? What purpose did it serve? What value did it have? And from the viewer’s perspective, is there ever a good reason to watch a rape happen, even if it’s just pretend?

Answers:

What was the point? Shock and spectacle.

Why did it need to be shown? It didn't.

What purpose did it serve? Promotional tool.

What value did it have? None. Also, entertainment.

Is there ever a good reason to watch a rape? Definitely. And by that I mean no.

[mattwalsh-social-instory]Even without the rape, there are still important questions we should ask ourselves about this show and so many others like it, such as: should sex be turned into a circus for our viewing pleasure? Is there anything redemptive about pornography just because it's featured on a premium cable series rather than someone's webcam? If I watch five seasons worth of it, will I come away somehow more enlightened? Is this honing my moral compass? Is this drawing me closer to Truth? Am I proud of myself for watching this?

Answers: No. And today, surprisingly, even some progressives appear to agree.

Now if only all Christians could follow suit.

We Christians have long been pretty careless about our entertainment selections. I've noticed that many of my Christian friends and acquaintances are incredibly enthusiastic fans of "Game of Thrones" and other similar programs. In the last couple of weeks, readers have sent me two impassioned Christian defenses of the series, one published on the [Christian Post](http://www.christianpost.com/news/the-surprising-morality-of-game-of-thrones-139259/) (<http://www.christianpost.com/news/the-surprising-morality-of-game-of-thrones-139259/>), and the other on [National Review](http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/417553/no-game-thrones-wont-corrupt-christians-david-french) (<http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/417553/no-game-thrones-wont-corrupt-christians-david-french>).

Their argument summarized: The show reveals the complexity of human nature and illustrates the ugliness of sin, therefore viewers can learn from it.

Clever rationalizations, but flimsy. Flimsy particularly because this could apply to literally everything that's ever been filmed. By this line of reasoning, Christians should watch child porn just to fully understand the realities of our imperfect existence.

Of course, the only thing worse than the "it shows what sin looks like" excuse is the "Christians shouldn't hide from the culture" bit. And they're correct. We shouldn't hide. But we shouldn't go along with it or follow its dictates or conform to it, either. In this culture, lots of sins are considered fun, harmless, and entertaining. Do I need to actually commit them all, or watch someone commit them while I sit on my couch and cheer along, in order to not be guilty of "hiding"?

Give me a break.

I mean, does anyone believe that the producers of the show choose to pepper it with non-stop nudity and sex in order to sharpen our moral sensibilities or to teach us something? Does *anyone* buy that? Is HBO filling the airwaves with graphic sex in order to show that man is fallen? They might indeed be demonstrating that fact by putting this crap on TV, but is that their intent?

And whatever their intent, should we participate in it? Should we indulge in it? Is it cool to sit down once a week to watch something that we know will involve graphic sex and stylized violence? If you wouldn't want your spouse watching that garbage on the Internet, is it alright as long as there's a more intricate story and better acting surrounding it?

That's a hard case to make.

I'm not saying that Christians should only watch children's cartoons. I'm not saying Christians should insulate themselves from the culture entirely, or relegate all of their viewing habits to Kirk Cameron movies and Charlie Brown specials. I'm saying that the Bible tells us to protect our purity of heart and mind, and if those exhortations don't apply to a show like "Game of Thrones," when and where *do* they apply?



(<http://www.theblaze.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/game-of-thrones-feature.jpg>)

Photo Credit: Shutterstock

I agree that we ought not be sheltered. Adults should be adults, and develop adult tastes. It's just a shame that "adult," in our culture, always means "pornographic." In a more intellectual society, that wouldn't be the case. Purchasing an "adult" pay-per-view movie in your hotel room would mean you ordered "A Man For All Seasons" or something, not some XXX pornfest. If things made sense, "adult" would signal that a story is substantive, rich, deep, complex, nuanced, and mentally engaging. Instead, in our Idiocracy, it just signifies that someone's genitals are prominently featured.

That said, I do think an actual adult story — as opposed to an "adult" story — can be appropriately dark, and even, at times, graphic.

Take “Schindler’s List,” for instance. There is violence in that movie, and profanity, and nudity. But the violence serves the story and is never — not once — shown in a glorified, stylized light. The nudity is non-sexual and necessary to give the audience a full appreciation of the ways in which the Nazis dehumanized and brutalized their victims.

But if “Schindler’s List” reveled in outlandish “Kill Bill”-type bloodshed, and there was nudity every other minute, and coincidentally all of the naked people were supermodels, and the screenplay included 18 bizarre and unnecessary Nazi sex scenes, I would have a very different opinion of the film. Suddenly, it would go from a harrowing and terrifying tale about the evil of some men and the heroism of others, to a *celebration and exploitation* of the evil. It would go from adult to “adult.” From powerful to pornographic. From redemptive to corrupting. From challenging to lazy.

That’s the other problem with the proliferation of these depressing, amoral, sex-crazed shows and movies: they’re just lazy. Dumb. Contrived. They take our minds away from things that are above and drag us into the gutter where we lose brain cells and IQ points.

It’s easy to tell a story where the characters are horrible and horrible things happen and people have sex and then everyone dies. It’s cheap. It’s juvenile. Yes, horrible things are a part of life, but so are redemption and goodness. A more enthralling, exciting, fascinating part, in fact.

TV shows and movies offer a relentlessly nihilistic view of the world because the people producing them lack the intelligence to go deeper, say something profound, and make virtue interesting. So they compensate by populating their scripts with sociopaths and deviants, hoping we’ll confuse “grim and filthy” with “bold and smart.” The only time we get an actual good guy on TV anymore is when he’s wearing a shiny suit and has superpowers.

It’s pathetic.

And granted, not every story needs a clear cut protagonist. There’s nothing wrong with the Greek tragedy kind of thing — a story where all of the characters are deeply flawed and sinful — but there’s a fine line between a restrained and purposeful cautionary parable and a meandering, pointless trip into the abyss where we do nothing but gawk at naked bodies and bloody corpses.

Either way, whatever side of the line it falls on — and any show that relies on graphic sex to get attention always falls on the wrong side of it — we should ask ourselves what we’re gaining by giving this thing our attention.

Does it even deserve our attention?

What is it giving us in return?

Is it assisting us in our quest to be good people?

If the answers to those questions are no, nothing, and no, then we should turn off the TV and go do something else, like read a book, or exercise, or pulverize our television with a crowbar. That would probably be infinitely more constructive than watching “Game of Thrones,” and, given Christ’s recommendation that we cut our eyes out to keep ourselves from sinning, I’m thinking he’d fully endorse this strategy.

But if you’re not ready to go to that extreme — I know I’m not — then the best thing is to at least treat our brains and souls with the same respect we give a kitchen sponge. You wouldn’t put your sponge in the toilet and then use it to clean your dinner plate. Why, then, do we let our brains absorb hours of filth every day and then think we can turn around and use those same minds to be decent, virtuous people in real life?

Ultimately, I realize it’s impossible to make a moral critique of any show without being accused of Puritanism. So be it. I’ll wear the shoe if it fits, but I don’t think it does. Especially not on me, because as I said, I’m far from perfect in this regard. But I’m trying more and more to hold myself to a higher standard, even if Hollywood wants me to sink ever lower.

A higher standard. That’s what we all need to adopt. And I think finally ditching a show that makes a spectacle out of rape and incest is probably a good place to start.

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