

How to Evaluate Movies

By Rebecca S. May

[While I am specifically addressing movies here, these principles can also be applied to evaluating books, TV, and videos.]

- *Why should we evaluate movies?*
- *What questions should we ask in order to properly evaluate movies?*
- *What is the most important thing to be aware of when evaluating movies?*

As you know, today movies are rated in order to prepare you for what you will be seeing. While the rating system is somewhat helpful in warning you of the sexual content, language, and violence, the current system is insufficient for helping believers determine what is biblically acceptable or dangerous.

It is not reasonable to say, “As a Christian, I should not see any ‘R-rated’ movies.” The reason is because what the world calls a ‘PG’ movie may be biblically worse than an ‘R’ movie. For example, no secular movie evaluation that I have seen has ever said, “This movie promotes a pantheistic view of God” or “This movie takes God’s name in vain 50 times.”

The following questions have been formulated to encourage you to apply biblical standards to movies and to not rely on a worldly rating system. Not only will this help you defend and teach biblical truth, but it will also help you to *be prepared* and to prepare your children *that you would not be put to shame* (2 Corinthians 9:3-4).

Application Instructions

Understand that **this will not dictate which movies will be a sin to watch**. There is no Bible verse or formula which could provide you with that information. Rather, as you evaluate each movie, begin with the end in mind, and apply the following questions to each movie. Is the overall theme, message, or moral of the movie valuable or good?

- Is there a good moral lesson to be learned?*
- Is there a valuable biblical lesson to be taught?*

Violence, in general, is not necessarily sin. While it may be frightening to children, and unsettling at times, violence can be good if it properly displays the sinfulness of man. For example, the violent and murderous acts of Adolf Hitler are shocking to see in the movie *Schindler’s List*, but it is also a valuable lesson of the extent to which man is depraved and capable of grotesque sin.

Using the Ten Commandments to Evaluate Movies*

When God spoke to His people at Mt. Sinai, He gave them specific instructions so that they would fear Him and so that they would not sin (Exodus 20:20). He wanted to test the faithfulness of His people. Every time we watch a movie, our faithfulness to God is tested. Because of this, we should prepare ourselves as God prepared His people.

(1) *Then God spoke all these words, saying, I am the LORD your God, ... You shall have no other gods before Me* (Exodus 20:1-3).

Y/N—If the movie has a supreme authority which is not the God of the Bible, is it presented as wrong or evil?

(2) *You shall not make for yourself an idol ...* (Exodus 20:4-6).

Y/N—If the movie has someone or something being worshiped or worthy of worship besides God, is it presented as wrong or evil?

(3) *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain... (Exodus 20:7).*

Y/N—If the movie has frivolous or a disrespectful use of God’s name, is it presented as wrong or evil?

(4) *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8-11).* Since the Sabbath commemorates God’s rest after His creation, this commandment will be applied with that in mind.

Y/N—If the movie has anything but God as the source of life (like evolution), is it presented as wrong or evil?

(5) *Honor your father and you mother... (Exodus 20:12)*

Y/N—If the movie has a broken family or one in which the father and mother are not treated with respect or given the proper authority, is it presented as wrong or evil?

(6) *You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13).*

Y/N—If the movie has murder, is it presented as wrong or evil?

(7) *You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).*

Y/N—If the movie has an adulterous relationship, is it presented as wrong or evil?

(8) *You shall not steal. (Exodus 20:15).*

Y/N—If the movie has stealing, is it presented as wrong or evil?

(9) *You shall not bear false witness... (Exodus 20:16).*

Y/N—If the movie has lying, defamation of a character or gossip, is it presented as wrong or evil?

(10) *You shall not covet... (Exodus 20:17).*

Y/N—If the movie has lusting or desiring to possess what others have, is it presented as wrong or evil?

Evaluating Your Answers

If you have answered “no” to any of the above questions, you need to realize that those things go contrary to the heart of God.

First, understand that by choosing to expose yourself to these particular sins, you are risking sin yourself. You must then prepare yourself as Paul warned Titus, to *deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age* (Titus 2:12).

Second, if you think you are able to be exposed without temptation, you should use the aspects of the movie which violate God’s Word as a learning and teaching tool that you might grow in wisdom and knowledge of who God is.

Here are some examples:

- The movie *Harry Potter* is full of magic. The source of their power is not identified, but it’s clearly not the God of the Bible, since the Bible says practicing magic is sin (Exodus 22:18).
- The movie *Star Wars* is another example where the first commandment is broken. The all-powerful force behind good and evil is a pantheistic god, clearly not the God of the Bible. A more current example of pantheism is portrayed through the “circle of life” in the Disney movie *The Lion King*.
- Evolution as the source of life, in the movie *Jurassic Park*, would be a violation of the Sabbath day commemoration since it does not give God the credit for creation (Job 38–40).
- The murders in the movie *Pulp Fiction* violate the sixth commandment, since it glorifies the taking of another person’s life.
- The affair in the movie *Horse Whisperer* is not only justified but they expect you to sympathize with the adulterers rather than with the betrayed spouse.

Remember, some movies may appear innocent, but movies come out of the world, from those who are *defiled and unbelieving... to them, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled* (Titus 1:15). Therefore, you cannot judge based only on appearance. As Christ commands, you should judge with a righteous judgment (John 7:24).

Questions and Answers

Q: *Why should we evaluate movies?*

A: Because the world's rating system is not trustworthy or sufficient to prepare believers for what they should or should not be exposed to.

Q: *What questions should we ask in order to properly evaluate movies?*

A: I have chosen the Ten Commandments God gave Moses as a guideline for evaluating movies in light of the wisdom of God. There are several lists, however, which could be used, such as "The Fruit of the Spirit," "The Deeds of the Flesh," or "The Beatitudes," to name a few.

Q: *What is the most important thing to be aware of when evaluating movies?*

A: The most important thing to remember is that we will give an account to God for how we spend our time and money. We should, therefore, take seriously the job of evaluating movies from a biblical perspective.

*For the purposes of this brochure, I used the Ten Commandments as a list from which to evaluate movies. There are other lists in the Bible which could also be used for evaluation criteria, such as "the Deeds of the Flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21, the "Fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23, the list in Philippians 4:8-9, the characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13, or "the Beatitudes" in Matthew 5:1-10, etc.