



In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
One God, Amen.

The Christian and the Media

The Power of Mass Media

Throughout the ages, rapid communication has always been a goal of mankind. From the days of the Romans who built straight roads to expedite the travel of their messengers to the global network of the Internet, fast and reliable communication has always been man's fascination. This is not surprising since communication can influence people, cultures, politics, and can even be the difference between winning a war and losing it. In the past century we have seen marvels of communication technologies. From the invention of the telephone that allowed instant voice transfer to the television and more recently the Internet, communication today is faster, broader, and deeper than it has ever been. Ideas can flow very easily from conception to consumer.

Technologies like Instant Messaging have pushed the boundaries even further in how fast we communicate and interact. One can only stand in awe in front of the rapid pace of technological advances that has brought forth such a cultural change.

In the midst of all of this, a Christian person may ask themselves: Is all this technology a good or bad thing? How does it affect me as a Christian? How do I face this tidal wave of communication?

There is no doubt that technology in and of itself is a good thing. It has allowed mankind to share knowledge and to grow, it has exposed the world cultures to each other and increased tolerance, and it has removed the friction between people and loved ones etc. However, as with any technology it can and has been abused. As individuals who live in the USA we are all well aware of the "lowest common denominator" factor that appeals to the media. In other words, in order to increase ratings and thereby advertising revenue the media tries to appeal to our basest instincts and to the populace at large. Decisions on what kind of programming to air or distribute is not based on morals but on its impact on the company's profits. This leaves us with two deductions:

1. After Adam's fall our nature is prone to sin and therefore sin will appeal to us and the media will use that against us. It can be our "Achilles' heel" so to speak.
2. The number of religious Christian people is dwindling so the vast number of people consuming material has much lower moral standards.

As the media tries to push the edge of decency in terms of violence, sex, and other shocking behavior it not only ends up affecting us but also giving a bad image of America to the world at large who tend to assume that all Americans behave in this manner. Worse, the media's affect on us can be profound and we might not even know it.

How Does Media Affect Me?

Here are some ways in which media can affect us:

- It can be a major distraction. Think Superbowl Sunday or any other major television event. This not only distracts us from our daily spiritual life but can even prevent us from going to church.
- It can be a stumbling block. Because the media caters to the lowest common denominator it can present to us images or stories of people who cause us offense. Sometimes we might even think that we're different because we don't act the same as the characters on TV when in actuality most people are nothing like those portrayed on TV.
- The media presents the extreme cases. The media might open our eyes to things that are so extreme or unbelievable that it would have been better not to know it. This is similar to what happened to Eve when she wanted to know more about good and evil and the knowledge was a detriment.
- It can be trivial. So much material these days focuses on the trivial things or even makes important things pretty trivial. We can get caught up in this triviality and lose the heavenly wisdom that God gives us. For example by watching people act foolish their behaviors rub off on us and we start acting foolish as well.
- Emotional influence. The media attempts to toy with our emotions whether through fear, or aggression (from violence) or sadness, the media is a big magnifying glass for all emotions. By getting too engrossed in it we can lose faith in God and let fear or sadness overtake us.

How to Face These Influences?

There are two main ways in which we can combat the media's influence. The first is through satisfaction - satisfaction with God and satisfaction with ourselves. By being satisfied with God we will not be easily tempted by the desires of the world as presented to us in the media, for "A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet" (Proverbs 27:7). We will automatically reject all thoughts that are not pleasing to God. Also by being satisfied with ourselves we won't let the world's ideas creep inside us and steal our peace from us. The second way in which we can combat the media is by filling our mind with selected knowledge. By being picky about what we watch, read, and hear we will slowly remove all the bad ideas from our head and replace them with holy thoughts. It is said that Pope Kyrillos when undergoing a major surgery was put under anesthesia and while usually people blather all sorts of non-sense from their inner subconscious when in this state with Pope Kyrillos they heard him saying the psalms. It is the life of one who filled his mind and his life with prayer and that is all he knows. By carefully examining everything we consume we can make sure that the media cannot influence us but we influence others through our good actions, kind words, and strong belief.

Final Word

While the media may be a powerful tool in today's world, it doesn't hold a candle next to the power of the Holy Spirit within us that teaches us right from wrong and gives us the will of God. By nourishing our spirit and loving God, He will protect us and the not just from the media but the gates of hades itself will not prevail against us. May the Lord our God bless us and fill our hearts with His peace and may He let us trample all the works of satan speedily and be a positive force for good and for the glory of His Holy name. To our Lord is all glory forever, Amen.