

WINDOWS TO THE SOUL

BY

E. LONNIE MELASHENKO
WITH TIMOTHY E. CROSBY



Have you ever heard the modern couch potato's version of the twenty-third psalm?

"The TV set is my shepherd. My Spiritual growth shall want. It maketh me to sit down and do nothing because it requireth all my spare time. It restoreth my knowledge of the things of the world and keepeth me from the study of God's Word. It leadeth me in paths of titillation and bewitchment and mayhem and lust for amusement's sake, so that I skip the worship services and do nothing for the kingdom of God.

"Yea, though I live to be a hundred, I shall keep on viewing my TV as long as it worketh, for it is my closest companion. Its sound and its picture they comfort me. It presenteth entertainment before me, and keepeth me from spending time with my family. It filleth my head with ideas which differ from those set forth in the Word of God. It presenteth before me many interesting programs that I must see, therefore my life over-floweth with contention and sorrows.

"Surely, no good thing will come of my life, because my TV offereth me no good time to do God's will; thus I will dwell in spiritual poverty forever."

Sad, isn't it? Television too often becomes a master of the one who sits before it. It can make you an addict just as surely as narcotics can. It can so hypnotize you that you can scarcely muster the willpower to turn it off.

Cold Turkey

A Detroit newspaper made an offer of \$500 to each of 120 families if they would agree not to watch TV for one month. Of those 120 families, ninety-three said "nothing doing." They wouldn't turn off the set for thirty days for \$500!

Of the twenty-seven who accepted the challenge, five were studied in detail by Good House-keeping.

These five families had been watching TV between six and ten hours a day. That is, they were wasting about half of all their waking hours in front of the set! Their cold-turkey withdrawal from TV was accompanied by serious discomfort and occasional strange symptoms. However, there were many desirable results. Families played games, read books, and listened to music. Children took their baths at night without throwing a fit, and some of them willingly practiced their piano lessons. There was a marked increase in creativity, family eye contact, and patience between family members. We're talking domestic revolution!

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What happened at the end of the month? All five families studied returned to their prior level of television viewing.



Caught in the Trap

Anything that has this much power over human minds needs to be examined in the light of something Jesus said in His sermon on the mount:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you, That anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And if thy right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out, and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-30).

Jesus says, “If your right eye causes you to sin.” Now the word Jesus uses here for “causes to sin” is the Greek word skandalon, usually translated “stumbling block,” and it refers to something like a tripwire of a trap. It’s something that trips a person up, something that sends us crashing to destruction, something that lures us to our own ruin.

Can you think of anything like that in your own life?

Some people want to know whether Jesus is speaking literally here. A few fanatical believers have understood it that way and have cut off parts of their body to fulfill this text. I do not believe this is what Jesus meant; yet most of us take this principle very literally when it comes to saving our temporal lives. We would allow a surgeon to remove a lung or a kidney or even a leg if it were necessary in order to save a life.

A fox caught in a trap is often smart enough to know that, if he wants to live, he must chew off his own foot and escape.

I read a story once about a native of a certain African tribe who was bitten in the foot by a deadly poisonous snake. Knowing no other way, he took his foot and held it in the fire until it was burned to a crisp, but he lived.

That’s how much we must want heaven. We must want it at any cost. No sacrifice is too great. If it is necessary to remove part of the body to save the body, it certainly should make sense to remove part of the body to save the soul—if that were really necessary.

However, Jesus was not advocating self-mutilation here. One reason we know this is because Jesus happened to pick parts of the body that come in pairs. What good would it do to cut out your right eye, or right hand, when you still have the other eye and the other hand? That indicates to me that He is not speaking literally.

Getting at the Root

Besides that, Jesus has just said that the root of sin is not in the flesh but in the heart. Jesus said adultery is not just the fleshly act, it is the thought in the soul. Why then would Jesus say that the solution to this sin of lust is to mutilate the flesh? That would not make sense. Even if both eyes were shut forever the mind would still be capable of creating pictures to feed lust.

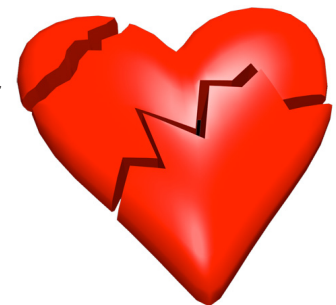
Jesus is using literary hyperbole here, just as He does in Luke 14:26, where He says that His disciples should hate their families. Both of these verses mean the same thing. We should be willing to cut ourselves off even from our loved ones rather than from Christ. If our parents or our spouse or our children force us to choose between them and Christ, we must turn our back on them, as it were; must hate them, comparatively speaking, and choose Christ. It's not just the bad things; it's the good that must be discarded if it interferes with our relationship to Christ. Nothing, no matter how valuable, should be allowed to stand in our way.

For many people, I am afraid the thing that will keep them out of heaven, into which nothing impure can enter, will be television. Now there is nothing wrong with a box full of electronics. Some might even derive some benefit from it. But if it cannot be controlled so that it brings us only those things which are pure, noble, lovely, and of good report, then it must be discarded.

“We love sin vicariously by reading novels and biographies of human misconduct”

Are you aiming for heaven at any cost? Christ says that it is better to be a cripple in this life than to lose everything in the next. Better that you not get that promotion at work; better that you lose that contract that would require you to compromise your principles; better that you turn down that golden opportunity in the arts that would lead you astray. Put first the kingdom of heaven. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

When Matthew 5 speaks of the adultery of the heart, it is talking about our thoughts. Sin starts first as a thought. If we can control our thoughts, then we can stop them from turning into sin. Temptation is not sin, but once the thought is cherished, sin is sure to come.



Windows of the Soul

We love to sin vicariously by reading novels and biographies of human misconduct. We enjoy committing adultery by proxy by watching the soap operas. It is this wandering of the eyes that Jesus was talking about when He says to pluck them out.

Job 31:1 says, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.” The eyes are the windows of the soul, and we must keep them pure, because whenever we plant a thought, we reap a deed; when we plant a deed, we reap a habit; when we plant a habit, we reap a character; and when we plant a character, we reap a destiny. That is why Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

How can we control our thoughts? Well, one way that does not work is to isolate yourself from society, so that sinful thoughts never intrude. The hermits and monks tried this by living alone in the desert. But they found, to their dismay, that temptation followed them there. While we cannot escape from society, we can avoid bringing society's sewage into our living room. Hollywood, like Biblical Babylon, has become "A home for demons and a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird" (Revelation 18:2). It is a fountain of filth. . . .

Some families have found that the only solution to the problem is to get rid of the TV. Others have devised creative strategies for taming the beast.

One family solved the problem by using crazy glue on the channel knob to cement it to channel three. This transformed the TV set into a monitor for the VCR, forcing the family to think ahead and rent good videocassettes to watch instead of feeding on standard network junk food for the mind.

Another family actually hooked their set up to a generator on an exercise bike, so that the set would stay on only as long as someone was pedaling the bike!

One person decided to allow himself to watch only as much TV as he spent in prayer and meditation. One hour devotional time allowed him one hour of TV.

Whatever your strategy, be assured that giving up the plug-in drug will not be easy. It may be like plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand. However, it will be rewarding. You will have a fuller, richer life, more time to build relationships with friends and family—and more time for God. And that will be the greatest reward of all.

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