

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My 10-year-old son is really into video games. He wants us to buy some new games that appear to have very realistic violence. I said “no”, his father said “maybe”. My son keeps pressing me with “What’s wrong with it? It’s just a game.” I really want your thoughts.

ANSWER: Who would have foreseen *Pacman* morphing into *Mortal Combat* ??? Remember when video games were just silly and fun? Frankly, I don’t know much about most video games, but can speak at length about making godly choices for and with our children.

The spiritual adolescent asks: “What’s wrong with it?” The mature Christian asks: **“What’s right with it?”** Imagine what a country we would have if the average adult would ask: “What’s right about it?” instead of “What’s wrong with it?” America is so morally confused, even that simple concept escapes most of us.

The Corinthian congregation had a problem. They used the freedom they had in Christ as an excuse for immorality. They rationalized because they had the forgiveness of Christ, they could live however they wanted. St. Paul exposes their sophistry in First Corinthians 6:12. (You Corinthians say) “Everything is permissible!” (I, Paul say) “but not everything is beneficial...not everything builds up.”

Consider the following:

1. Is it “beneficial” for a child to entertain himself with violence that is becoming increasingly ever more real? We already know from research that children who play violent video games are desensitized to violence (Indeed, the military uses such “games” to desensitize soldiers as part of pre-combat training.).
2. Are the images of death, blood and indiscriminant violence that are moment by moment imprinted onto the brain of the “player” the kinds of images you really want floating around your son’s brain?
3. What will your son turn to when the present game fails to produce the same “high” it did when it was novel? Consider the progressive nature of pornography or drugs or adrenalin addictions.
4. Does this “game” value or dehumanize life?

5. Do you believe the “entertainment value” of the game outweighs the damage to innocence? (Exactly, what is the entertainment value of the game? It appeals to our “dark side”, our sinful nature.)
6. In your wildest imagination could you picture Jesus playing this game?
7. Are you naïve enough or lazy enough to believe the “it’s-only-a-game” rationale? If you are, you’ll fall for the same rationale when it comes to raunchy movies and pornography.
8. Besides the development of some eye-hand coordination, what benefit does the game offer? We know that significant visual stimulation everyday tends to “wire” the male brain to crave more visual stimulation. That fact alone should give us parents great pause.
9. Is the type of accomplishment in video games the kind of accomplishment you want your son to spend hours working toward? The accomplishment sensation in video games is repetitive and instantaneous. This sensation is incredibly attractive to male brains.
10. Is this game the best of what video entertainment has to offer?

Philippians 4:8 exhorts us: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” I know not everyone who plays violent video games becomes sociopathic. If that’s what you are thinking, you’ve missed the point. You may not see immediate, overt damage in your child—the same is true for cigarettes. Someday, you will be unable to make good decisions for him, but today you can. Someday he will be on his own, but today you can give him a good foundation. Someday he might choose garbage, but today you can help him watch what he eats. **The only biblical reasons to expose oneself to evil is (1) to overcome it with good and/or (2) disarm or contain it. (RM 12:21)** Is that what Christians are doing when they “play” these kinds of games?

I bet there are video games that are just plain fun, or silly, or challenging in a positive way. Why not seek out those games? I believe there are “doors” in life that should remain closed. Enough garbage comes into our lives unbidden without us actively seeking to jump into the trash truck.

Jack Lipski, M.A.

SOTHCS Counselor

(Permission to copy granted for personal use only.)