

Watching Watchmen: Why Do We See What We See?

by Stacey Tuttle

I generally enjoy superhero movies and when a new one comes out, am likely to see it without too much investigation, assuming it's fairly safe. I hadn't ever heard of *Watchmen*, and while the trailer didn't attract me to it, it's popularity did. But before I could go see it, some of my non-Christian friends strongly encouraged me not to, saying it wasn't "my kind of movie." This prompted me to actually do some research. The Christian articles and reviews that I found were nearly all passionate, and completely split down the middle in their response to the movie. It encouraged me to evaluate again why I choose to see the things I choose and how the Bible affects (or ought to affect) my decision-making process in this area.

The Concerns:

Even those articles which are generally supportive of the *Watchmen* are quick to admit its many flaws and nearly unanimous in saying that it goes too far visually. One by-line on a Google search said it was full of "soft-porn and gore-porn". If you want details, Movieguide (<http://www.movieguide.org/box-office/7/6282>) offers a pretty thorough accounting of every type of violence, sexual situation and curse word included in the movie. Bottom line: *graphic-novel based movie takes graphic to a new level*. For those who are easily affected by such things, and especially for those who are easily tempted into sin by such things, this is reason enough to avoid seeing this particular movie. It should also be said that even those who think they are not affected by such visuals should be cautious: garbage in, garbage out.

The Benefits:

More positive reviews of *Watchmen* generally base their praise on the variety of themes and issues it brings to the table for discussion. In addition, the characterization of the very flawed super heroes is complex and thought-provoking. Whether or not you agree with the worldview it presents, or its conclusions, *Watchmen* is definitely provocative and can lead to some great discussions with Christian and non-Christian alike. The review in *Christianity Today* outlines several of the big ideas and includes a series of questions for discussion at the end that might be worth reading, whether or not you choose to see the movie (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/2009/watchmen.html>). It seems that the movie supporters often feel that the benefit of the provocative topics raised by the film overshadow the method of telling.

The Reality:

In just one week, the film has already grossed \$55.2M – in other words, people are watching it en masse. You will be talking to someone who has seen the movie, and likely be deciding whether you should see it or not yourself.

What is the Christian Response?

Some Christians are so horrified by all the sex, violence and language that they think it is absolutely un-Christian to consider seeing such a movie. Others feel that there are ways we can use the movie which might allow us to reach out to exactly the sort of sinners that Jesus himself hung out with. What is the true Christian response? Unfortunately, I don't think the answer is as easy as "see it" or "don't see it": the latter can lead to legalism, the former to relativism. The goal is to avoid both of those pitfalls as you develop a heart for Christ and an effective ministry. To that aim, what I do want to do is point you to some guiding principles for you to read/think/pray over as you make your own decisions about seeing not only Watchmen – but any movie that you see.

- What does God say about our minds and the things that go into them?
 - Take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. *2 Cor 10:5*
 - Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' *Mark 12:30*
 - 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 these things. *Phil 4:8*
 - Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. *Rom 12:2*
- Our Freedom in Christ
 - "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand." *Rom 14:1-4*
 - "Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything. *1 Cor 6:12*
 - Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. *1 Cor 6:19-20*
- How should we respond to those who choose differently?
 - Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone. *John 8:7*
 - All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. *Phil 3:15-16*
 - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. *Eph 4:3*
 - You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat... then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. *Rom 14:10-13*

- Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.
Rom 14:19
- Light vs. Darkness:
 - So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however,...were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. *Eph 4:17-24*
 - But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ... For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. *Eph 5:3-12*

One Final Consideration: Motive

As you think through God's word in response to any number of cultural dilemmas you face, a great question to ask yourself is "WHY?" Why do I want to do X or not do X? What is my motive for my actions? Sometimes a person's motives for abstaining from a certain activities are just as unspiritual as another's motives for participating. The truth is, "there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Prov 14:12), so we cannot fully trust our own judgment and reason to guide us through the murky waters. Jeremiah 17:10 says, "I, the Lord, search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." Certainly it is not just his deeds, but the heart and mind behind those deeds which concern the Lord. In light of this, it is a great thing to ask the Lord, as the Psalmist did, to "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." (Ps 139:23-24). Matt Chandler, pastor of The Village Church in the Dallas, Texas area, often asks the question, "Does [the issue at hand] stir your affections for Christ Jesus, or rob you of them?" How greatly might our lives be changed if we truly lived in light of that simple question?

Now What?

The good news is, for those who would like to engage the culture, but don't feel they should watch the movie, you don't have to watch Watchmen in order to use it to reach out to non-Christians! Here are a few ideas of how to use this movie as a tool for God's Kingdom, without actually watching it.

1. Read up on it. As mentioned, the Watchmen review in *Christianity Today* had a good summary of the movie along with discussion questions. The movie isn't what you really want to discuss anyway, you want to know how to use the movie to transition to a discussion of the bigger issues. There are plenty of other sites and discussion boards, Christian and non-Christian alike which will give you a good basis for discussion without introducing all the visual images into your mind.
2. Be prepared to discuss why you chose not to see it. You may find your decision to be "set apart" will lead you into even more valuable discussions than the movie itself. A word of caution: do this in love and gentleness. Your attitude and mannerism as you discuss the movie will either impress people and draw them to Christ or be a complete turn off. While an ignorant and judgmental response will do damage, a well-informed, calculated decision that is full of grace for others who decide differently will prove winsome.

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