

# TV or Not TV?

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The debate over whether television is a 'tool of the devil' was reignited when Angus T Jones, star of the popular American sitcom 'Two and a Half Men' urged viewers to stop watching the show, condemning it as unbiblical 'filth'. In what has been reported as a 'Christian rant', Jones attributes his comments to a spiritual awakening having embraced the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In the video interview, Jones states, "Do some research on the effects of television and your brain and I promise you, you'll have a decision to make when it comes to television and especially what you watch on television. It's bad news." In spite of media reporting portraying Jones as a religious crackpot, there is a serious discussion to be had regarding the validity of television as a legitimate source of entertainment.

I became intrigued with the influence of TV after my attention was drawn to a couple of unusual statements penned by Ellen White many years before the idea of television was birthed in the mind of John Logie Baird. She said that, "Satan exercised his power of hypnotism over Adam and Eve" (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, volume 5, 1081) and that, he through "mesmerism [hypnotism] . . . works with that power which is to characterize his efforts near the close of probation. The minds of thousands have thus been poisoned and led into infidelity (Mind, Character, and Personality vol. 2, 711).

Hypnosis is an artificially induced mental state characterised by an individual's loss of critical powers and consequent openness to suggestion. The hypnotic state can be accomplished through various mechanisms including the use of music, flashing lights, monotonous tones and rhythmical movement. Social scientist Fred Emery states that "Television is a . . . direct technological analogue of the hypnotist" (The New Internationalist, January 1983). His research has indicated that the rapidly changing scenes of reference, especially in drama and entertainment programming can produce alpha brainwave activity, which is akin to the hypnotic state. The danger here is that when the brain is functioning in the alpha state, much of the information received is not processed by the rational part of our brains, but goes straight into our subconscious. As a result, TV is an ideal tool for psychological conditioning. The purpose of psychological conditioning is to trigger new thought patterns in the imagination in order to extinguish emotional reactions to ideas or events. This can be positive or negative depending on the new thought pattern we are seeking to create.

The best conditions for psychological conditioning are when an individual is calm and relaxed in a comfortable place and in good humour. Our own living rooms are the ideal environment. Ken Matto in his book *The Dangers of Television*, states that, "Many of the anti-Christian and immoral precepts are belled forth in situation comedies. They get you to laugh . . . much reprogramming is done through comedy ([www.scionofzion.com/tv.htm](http://www.scionofzion.com/tv.htm)).

The mounting evidence regarding the effects of television on the brain is of particular concern in light of the many hours of viewing to which our children are

often exposed. Some of the effects shown by research are, moral influence; lowered attention span; altered dreams; social isolation, obesity and desensitization to stimuli which should invoke moral response.

Is television the ‘tool of the devil’? No, but it is a tool used by the Enemy. Our challenge in regard to television is to make discerning choices about what we watch and to what we expose our children.

So, should we pull the plug? Ask yourself, ‘Do I control the TV or does it control me?’ Does my viewing constitute good stewardship of the time God has entrusted to me? How do the values expressed measure up to God’s standard? If the images portrayed for my entertainment were taking place literally in the room in which I am present, would I still watch? Paul counsels us in 1 Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

In order to “guard well the avenues of the soul”, we need to follow David’s example in making a covenant with his eyes, he says, “<sup>2</sup>I will behave wisely in a perfect way . . . I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. <sup>3</sup>I will set nothing wicked before my eyes (Psalm 101:2-3).