

How does it rate?

(1 Timothy 5:4, NIV) But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

Among the various issues discussed during this year's political campaign, violence in the media was a hot topic. Candidates for various public offices had to assure the public that they would seek to improve the quality of media without offending any Hollywood supporters, which often led to "speaking out of both sides of the mouth."

Among the most popular discussions was the discussion of violent video games, either for computers or home console systems like Nintendo® and Sony's Playstation®. If you're not into video games, bear with me. They're not the point of this article, just an illustration, yet during this "holiday shopping season," it's something to be aware of.

Movies have, for a long time, had a ratings system. "G" means it's usually suitable for the entire family. "R" and "X" (which has now been renamed "NC-17" but means the same thing) are intended for adults only (and I'll contend that NC-17 movies should only be thrown in the trash). However, as video games improve in graphic quality, they become more realistic, and we are now to the point where video games can be mistaken for a real program. Football fans who wish they could tell their players how to play can now control their favorite teams, and the players walk, talk, and dance in the endzone just like their real life counterparts.

But as graphics improve, so does the "quality" of graphic violence. The old Atari systems of the 80's were no problem, since they were just a bunch of squares on the screen, but now, many games are filled with blood, sex, and all sorts of inappropriate images.

In order to help consumers decide which games would be appropriate to them and their children (The average age of Playstation® owners is 24, and over 1/3 of homes in America have one, not to mention all the computers and other systems out there.), a ratings system similar to the movie ratings system has been developed, and legislation is in the works to enforce the ratings system the same way children under 17 are not allowed into R-rated movies without an adult.

But this should not be necessary. Were parents to understand that "PG" stands for "Parental Guidance," and parents should talk about these issues and decide for their children what's appropriate for them to see, enforcement wouldn't be necessary. Is all violence in the media bad? Anyone who's ever seen a movie about Jesus or any other Biblically-based movie will hopefully tell you, "No." The Bible *is* media, and it's one of the most violent books ever written, but at the same time, when we teach the stories in Sunday School, we don't teach the stories about rape, incest, and dismemberment to the little children. Even stories like "David and Goliath" are watered down for them. Of course, killing with no purpose, though, is sin.

We live in a world full of sin, and it's sometimes hard to determine where the line is between sin and righteousness. Parents, be a model to your children, and children, trust your parents' teachings, but above all, remember this: for all the times when we cross that line into sin, whether deliberately or accidentally, thanks be to God that Jesus died for those sins, too, that we are forgiven for our inability to distinguish as well.