

Theater Attendance and Theatrical Amusements.

(The Preliminary Case Against Theater Attendance and its Amusements)

And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. (Acts 19:29)

Question.—*What do we mean by theater?*

Answer.—The word theater, θέατρον, is derived from θεάομαι, meaning “to wonder, to behold, view attentively, contemplate, indicating a sense of wondering consideration involving a careful and deliberate vision which interprets its object.” It may denote several things: 1.) The “theater or amphitheater” itself which serves for the presentation of dramatic and other spectacles and also for public assemblies, *cf.* Acts 19:29, 31. 2.) The “audience or spectators” collectively, attested in Plato’s *Symposium*. 3.) The “play or spectacle” seen in the theater, as used amongst ancient Greek authors. Criminals were sometimes exposed and punished in the theater, Acts 19:29-31. The Stoics used it to express the idea that the “drama” presented is a spectacle for gods and men to behold. This usage is echoed in the New Testament, wherein the apostles are said to be set forth in this manner, 1 Cor. 4:9. Its verbal form, θεατρίζομαι, “to expose publicly,” is also used to express this idea as it pertains to believers more generally, *cf.* Heb. 10:33. This idea is also present in Hebrew thought, as seen in the book of Job, Job 2:1-6.

By theater, then, we understand the complex of means which centers upon the notion of “public spectacles” presented for the contemplation, wonder and amusement of “spectators.”

Question.—*Why should we be concerned with theatrical amusements and theater attendance?*

Answer.—It is one of the most prominent features of modern religious adherence that there is a very sad inconsistency between acknowledged principles and the habitual practice of persons who profess to be and call themselves Christians, Luke 12:46, 47. When creed and conduct are contrary to one another, the doctrines of the Bible are said to be held in unrighteousness, Rom. 1:18. The apostolic command is: *first*, to prove; *second*, hold to the good; *third*, abstain from evil, even in appearance, 1 Thess. 5:21, 22. If theatrical amusements either dishonor God, or tend to lower our reverence for his authority, or lessen our regard to his will, then they show that they are evil, *cf.* Matt. 6:9, 10; Isa. 33:15.

First, it can hardly be denied that in theatrical amusements the sacred names of God (including his attributes, or perfections) are introduced on the most trifling occasions, most irreverently used either as mere expletives or as emphatic words to give greater force to the dialogue, *cf.* Ex. 20:7. Is it possible that any man who has received the truth in faith, will frequent such places and spectacles where the divine name is habitually profaned *and all for amusement' sake*, *cf.* Jas. 5:12?

Second, Christians are called to live for eternity, and to make sure the salvation of the soul, which is a work that calls for care and watchfulness, 2 Cor. 6:1, 2. Yet, the language of the stage and theatrical amusements is that this life is all, make the most of it while you can, 1 Cor. 15:32. Theatrical amusements represent the attainment of honor, possession and enjoyment of earthly good, success in some romantic scheme or worldly pleasure, as that which deserves attention, and will repay the pursuit, Mal. 3:14, 15. All of this is delusion, the present state is exhibited under false appearances, and the effects are such that it strengthens the fatal enchantment of Satan over the children of this world being led to ruin, 1 Cor. 15:33.

Third, the great end and design for which the Bible has been given is to have the sinner converted from the error of his ways, and brought to repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ, John 6:63. This Word teaches us to mortify all evil and corrupt affections, Rom. 8:13; and daily to proceed in all virtue and godliness, 1 Tim. 6:11. Yet, nothing is more clear

than that the theater, and theatrical amusements, undermines the pursuit of purity of mind, holiness of affection and contentment with the things of this world, *cf.* 2 Cor. 7:1; Ps. 101:3.

Fourth, spirituality of the mind is another part of Christian character, for no man can have good hope of heaven, unless he has a growing taste and tendency of mind for those things which pertain to eternity, Heb. 12:14; Col. 3:2. However, the theater not only does not promote such affections, but it is incompatible with them, *cf.* Phil. 3:19. Without considering the various evils of the theater, it should be noted that the theater has its own peculiar gratification, its own proper pleasure, which affects the mind by creating vain fancies, rousing base feelings, stimulating animal passions, heating the imagination, transforming life into a dream and embellishing it with various and impracticable and unattainable pleasures, Ps. 49:11-17. The artificial stimulation requires a constant succession from whence arises an increasing desire after anything calculated to pamper and please the imagination, Jer. 13:23. In contrast, Christians are called to be sober, 1 Thess. 5:8.

Fifth, if we were to survey the Christian graces, the very things commended by Scripture are made to appear rude and low in theatrics, Isa. 5:20. Most of the moral sentiments of the theater contain principles which the Bible condemns, and which it is the object of religion to root out and destroy, Gal. 2:18. Thus, the liberal and noble spirited profligate is made to interest the imagination, win the heart and excite to emulation, and the mean and low minded puritan provokes contempt and derision, Prov. 17:15.