

# Leaders warn □The Passion□ not for most children\_22304

February 27, 2004

Posted: 2/27/04

## Leaders warn 'The Passion' not for most children

**By John Hall**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

Christians may want everyone to hear the gospel, but parents should be wary of letting their younger children view Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," according to faith leaders.

Christian leaders are cautioning parents to use discretion when determining whether or not their children should see the film, which graphically depicts Christ's brutal last 12 hours on earth that led to his crucifixion and resurrection.

Many Christians are calling the R-rated film too explicit for young children and teens. Phil Boatwright, who reviews movies from a Christian perspective on [moviereporter.com](http://moviereporter.com), calls the crucifixion possibly "the most believable death scene ever to be placed on screen."

The violence is not only bloody but also prolonged, said Leighton Flowers, youth consultant for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The demonic also is portrayed vividly.

The brutality is more agonizing for Christian children because they are

seeing someone they love persecuted for the length of the movie, Flowers said.

The film could give some young children nightmares and flashbacks, said Bill Maier, vice president and psychologist-in-residence for Focus on the Family.

The movie is not suitable for many children under the age of 10, leaders said. Parents should strongly consider whether or not to allow anyone under 15 to see it in the theater.

“It’s too much for little kids,” Boatwright noted.

Generally, parents need to know what is appropriate for their children when determining if they should see the movie, Flowers said. They must understand their children’s tolerance for violence and ability to understand what they are seeing.

“It’s hard to pick a cut-off date because each kid is at a different point in maturity and exposure to violence,” Flowers said.

If parents are having trouble deciding whether a child should see the film, Maier encourages them to see the movie before their youth do. Adults also can choose to purchase the video of the movie at a later date and show it to their children when appropriate.

“Parents are the guardians, gatekeepers of their child’s media experience,” he said.

Maier also urged parents to attend the film with their children rather than letting them go with a youth group or friend. This allows families to discuss the movie and any emotions they are feeling immediately after the show.

Tommy Sanders, minister of childhood education at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, said the same standards that are applied in teaching the

gospel to younger children should be applied to the movie.

Bible study teachers should be careful not to over-emphasize the brutality of the persecution of Christ, because it can leave them fearful, Sanders said. Younger children need to hear the message of hope in Christ clearly. The brutality of Jesus' sacrifice is more appropriate for older youth.

The movie can invigorate the faith of mature teens, leaders said. The depiction helps viewers understand the painful sacrifice Jesus made for humanity's sins.

"It is brutal, but there is a difference between 99 percent of (movie) brutality and this brutality," Boatwright said. "This brutality shows what Christ went through on our behalf."

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention ( SBC ) and around the world.