

## Power Over



Like many others, I watched the five-part 10-hour miniseries that aired on the History Channel entitled “The Bible”. With an American audience of between 10 and 13 million viewers for each episode, it is the biggest cable television hit of 2013. It has been interesting and enlightening to hear the television critics and pundits review the content of each episode as the series progressed. They universally dubbed the

series as overly violent and wondered why the Bible is so violent. They expressed shock over the series’ depiction of what constitutes devotion to God. They wondered why Abraham had to prove his devotion to God by being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac and why Joshua had to prove his devotion by leading a bloody conquest of the Promised Land. They also wondered why God’s servant Moses couldn’t have led the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity without hardening the Egyptian Pharaoh’s heart and then inflicting ten plagues on the people of Egypt as a consequence of that hardening. The cause of their shock and wonder was the conviction that Bible reveals that violence and death seem to be the preferred and ultimate means by which one person, group or nation maintains “power over” another or others.

Violence and death are not the only ways “power over” others is expressed in the Bible. In the beginning, God exercised power over the void by creating the universe, the earth being its focal point. God filled the earth with plants and animals and gave them the power to flourish, grow and reproduce. The crowning glory of the creation of the earth was the creation of the first human beings, Adam and then Eve. The life that was in Adam and Eve was the product of God’s breath. They were created in God’s image. God gave them the power to reproduce and power over the earth and animal life. Adam and Eve were made stewards of the earth and exercised their power as equals. Good and evil are real. Every human culture defines what constitutes good and evil and theoretically strives to ‘do good’ and avoid evil. It was not that way in the beginning. God did not give Adam and Eve the power to discern good from evil, as they were created innocent. The reality of good and evil and the power of their discernment were represented by a forbidden tree and a forbidden fruit planted within Paradise. God forbade Adam and Eve just one thing: “Don’t eat the forbidden fruit or you will die.” Adam and Eve were duped (by the evil one or Devil) into believing that they needed the power to discern good and evil, so that they would be like God. They ate the forbidden fruit and the word of God exercised power over them and changed them. As a consequence, they could no longer look at the world, themselves, or God, in the same way. They realized they had committed an evil act by eating the fruit. They realized that they were powerless to change what had happened. They felt shame. They realized they were naked and needed to cover up. They realized they could not relate to God in the same way. They hid when God came to them in Paradise. God was forced to exercise power over them once more and pronounce the death sentence God’s word demanded. God also changed the relationship between Adam and Eve. Eve was to continue desire Adam and Adam was to have power over her.

The Bible reveals God did not carry out Adam and Eve’s death sentence immediately. He did not destroy the earth as a result. The earth continued and reproduction continued; however, the world

was changed. Like Adam and Eve's mind, the earth became tainted. Weeds, disease, decay and death marred it. Thereafter, the earth would quake and erupt, storms and whirlwinds would rage and floods would erode. Mankind still had dominion over the earth but the exercise of that dominion changed. Adam and Eve would eke out a living in a ground that was hostile to them. They would no longer use and manage the resources of the earth in innocence and through a direct relationship with their creator. From then on, their stewardship would be based on their own flawed understanding of good and evil and without the power required to always do the good and shun the evil.

The television series revealed much of the violent Biblical text in both the Old and New Testaments with graphic detail for all to see. Secular television critics and pundits are not the only ones who wonder why the Biblical text is so full of violence. Christians studying the Bible in Bible Studies ask the same questions. They wonder why God and humanity have and continue to struggle together and why the violence persists. These questions have been debated by Christians, Jews and scholars of every discipline for millennia. The debate has not been settled. However God has spoken very forcefully in this debate by word and deed.

Jesus demonstrated His divinity by the exercise of power over humanity and nature. The Biblical text records many instances of His exercise of power over people; not with plagues but by the healing of people's broken bodies. The deaf heard, the blind received sight, and the lame walked. He healed people's minds by forgiving their sins. He showed power over evil by overcoming the Devil's temptation and casting demons out of people. He showed power over nature by walking on water, calming a storm and turning water to wine. He showed power over death by raising a man named Lazarus, a widow's son, and a little girl from the dead. Jesus told His disciples that He would delegate some of His power to them and the church they would establish.

However, God spoke most forcefully on the first Good Friday. In the Garden of Eden, God pronounced a death sentence on Adam and Eve and all their descendants for the act of eating a forbidden fruit, and in so doing acquiring attributes that made them like God, knowing good from evil. While they may have had the power to discern good from evil, they did not have the divine power necessary to do the good and shun the evil. On Good Friday, the best and brightest of God's Chosen people pronounced a death sentence on Jesus, the one and only Son of God, for claiming that He was the Son of God. They judged Jesus' claim to be the divine Son of God a lie, despite the evidence to the contrary. Jesus demonstrated His divine power by accepting the false death sentence. In accepting the sentence of death, Jesus permitted God to lay the sins of the world on Jesus. In this way, Jesus did not suffer and die for His sins but for our sins. God showed His divine power by raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus' resurrection was for our good. Jesus promised: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jesus promised to return to the earth and make a new heaven and a new earth, and eternal life with Him for all who believe.

Jesus exhorted His disciples to love others, most especially those who hate them. Jesus exhorted His disciples to love others by forgiving those who offend them. He encouraged them to feed the hungry, give clothes to the naked, water to the thirsty, visit and tend the sick and give sanctuary

to the stranger. He guaranteed that in so doing, they would help Jesus Himself, in the person of the poor Christian (read Matthew 25:31-46).

Jesus gave every Christian the authority to share His message of forgiveness, love and hope of the resurrection and everlasting life. His most passionate desire is that Christians express that message in acts of forgiveness and kindness. However, far too often, individual Christians and the Church have not used the power of the cross and the resurrection to proclaim Jesus; rather we have used fear, intimidation and the promise of wealth. We also have to admit we have not used every opportunity to spread the love of Christ through acts of mercy and forgiveness. It is imperative that we proclaim Christ crucified and resurrected, and express our faith in acts of mercy. For when we share the power of the Gospel in this way, the image of God we bear will be enhanced. If we use fear, intimidation, the promise of wealth and violence in God's name, we efface or mar His image in us. God exercises power over us and shapes and molds us through the power of His Word and the real presence of Jesus Christ among us.

In Christ,  
Pastor Ed Skutshek