

Should Christians Watch 'Game of Thrones'?

It's the most-watched show on television, but *Game of Thrones* (GoT) is not for the faint of heart.

The HBO show lavishes in violence and gratuitous sex scenes, giving the world exactly what it wants. There have been more than 150,000 on-screen deaths and 71 nude scenes in the seven seasons broadcast thus far. *Metro UK* reports pornography usage dips during the GoT hour, "which makes sense considering many of the episodes contain graphic scenes of sex and violence anyway."

The most recent episode netted 10.2 million viewers, and Christians likely numbered among them. But why?

"I know some people will say it doesn't bother their conscience or that it's art or they can view sinful sex without participating in it themselves. But that doesn't change what the Bible says about the importance of purity and the power of the eye. The fact is our consciences should be smitten; steamy sex scenes are not the kind of art for which we can give thanks; and it's hard to imagine Paul would have been cool with the believers in Ephesus watching simulated sex for a fee each month, so long as they don't hook up in real life," Pastor Kevin DeYoung writes for *The Gospel Coalition*.

Other Christians find solace in the story.

Josh Pease at *Think Christian* writes:

It's a world that expects its heroes to see that there may be good worth fighting for, but it has to be done with a humble recognition of your own weakness and a wide-eyed awareness of the world's brokenness.

As I've watched this theme emerge, I've been surprised by how personally moving it's been. The older I get, the more the idealistic answers of my 20s have led me to this realization: this world is a very broken place, and I'm very much a part of that brokenness. If I'm to be used by God to bring any hope or redemption to our sad Westeros it won't be with easy, bumper-sticker answers to complex problems. To use a term made famous by Henri Nouwen, I'm at best a wounded healer, slowly learning to accept my own failings, seeing them for what they are, diving deeply into the complicated process of internal transformation and then bringing the slow and nuanced hope of restoration to a world as in need of it as I am.

The more I watch Game of Thrones I see a somewhat similar theme emerging. The evil in the world can wreck us or shape us. And in the real-world Westeros, this is the work of Christians: to embody a hope that can truly shine in the darkness, and not be overcome by it.

Ordained minister Laura Barclay agrees, and even suggests Christians should consider *GoT* above JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

She writes:

*Yes, the show contains content that is at times graphic and unnecessary, but it underscores the unfair way women are treated in Westeros (and, thus, the Middle Ages that author George R. R. Martin based his story upon). Let us not forget that in the real world, millions of women are sold into slavery and abused. Read *Half the Sky* to begin to get an idea of the gender inequality that exists at present. It could be argued that fans of the series judge their loyalties to characters based on their interaction with women (Tyrion Lannister and Robb Stark being fan favorites). The empowered leader Khaleesi Daenerys Targaryen is the one everyone wants*

to be queen, and the knight Brienne is beloved by devoted readers and watchers alike. Similarly, Jesus treated women well in a historically patriarchal era, bringing many into his fold and they, in turn, supported his ministry with their money. In addition, Jesus defends the adulteress against the religious leaders who would stone her and women become important leaders in the fledgling church. One more word on sex and Christianity: Roman leaders spread rumors that Christians were incestuous and participated in orgies (because they called each other brother and sister in Christ and exchanged the holy kiss) and accused them of cannibalism (eating the body and blood of Christ).

The Red Wedding scene—(*spoiler alert*) how could so many beloved characters be slaughtered? How could the most seemingly moral family in the series lose so many? Individual like the apostles, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer and events like [the] My Lai Massacre, the Holocaust and far too many other genocides and wars to count tell us that life can be brutal and unfair. Yet hope comes in the response. The world didn't forget the Holocaust—it is taught in schools, in museums and documentaries. Martin Luther King Jr. and his ideals are well-known in households across America and the world despite his assassination. Christians and/or good people are not promised a good life because they are good. They are however, part of the kingdom of God because they are slowly bringing about God's ideal of love on earth. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Because this is true for our world and Martin is aiming for realism, I'm hopeful this series will tend toward justice in the end.

Unsure of if they should watch or not, some Christians turned to famed preacher John Piper.

One asked, "Pastor John, do you believe there is a difference

between film nudity versus pornography? I know many Christians who are against porn, but they have no issue watching movies or TV shows that show graphic nudity.”

The pastor gave 12 questions to consider before diving in:

1. Am I re-crucifying Christ?
2. Does it express or advance my holiness?
3. When will I tear out my eye, if not now?
4. Is it not satisfying to think on what is honorable?
5. Am I longing to see God?
6. Do I care about the souls of the nudes?
7. Would I be glad if my daughter played this role?
8. Am I assuming nudity can be faked?
9. Am I compromising the beauty of sex?
10. Am I assuming nudity is necessary for good art?
11. Am I craving acceptance?
12. Am I free from doubt?

What do you think? Sound off below!