

A Word to Self-Righteous Christians Attacking Josh Duggar

I have been terribly grieved by some “Christian” responses to Josh Duggar, as if there are some sins God cannot forgive or some people that He cannot transform. Such an attitude betrays a fundamental lack of understanding of the gospel of grace and is actually a slap in the face of the Savior.

When I shared some redemptive thoughts about Josh’s situation earlier in the week, I did not for a moment minimize the gravity of his acts. Specifically, I wrote that “he did sin grievously”; I put his actions in the category of “wicked things” that some of us did as teenagers; I stated that, “There’s no excuse for sin, so own up to it”; I referred to Josh committing “serious sexual sin”; and I said “there are consequences to our actions” but that God can redeem, also stressing the importance of the church helping the victims of abuse.

And although I have never been the victim of sexual abuse, I have listened to the stories of abuse victims for years, often devastated by what they shared.

I remember reaching out to a blind, facially disfigured teenage girl at a church service one night. She told me that her problems began when she was sexually abused as girl, after which the pain was so great she got into drugs, finally making a death pact with her boyfriend and another friend. The other friend would shoot each of them in the head and, hopefully, not get caught.

Tragically, her boyfriend died as a result of his wounds, the other boy did go to jail for his actions, but instead of dying, she was blinded.

I thought to myself, "What kind of divine judgment awaits the man who abused her if he does not repent and find mercy before that day?"

A number of our ministry school grads work tirelessly in several nations to combat human trafficking, and I support their work however I can. They tell me in detail about the trauma experienced by these kids and teens sold into sex slavery, with full recovery being extremely difficult and rare (if they even manage to survive and are rescued).

In no way would I dream of minimizing the sin of a sex offender, even a younger one like Josh was, but I absolutely believing in maximizing the grace of God, who delights in saving the worst of sinners.

That's what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy, using himself as an example. He explained that "I was previously a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and an insolent man. But I was shown mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. The grace of our Lord overflowed with the faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, first, Jesus Christ might show all patience, as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:13-16).

Sadly, professing Christians have written to me, assuring me that God could never forgive Josh for what he did or that "once a molester, always a molester." And they also assure me that they understand grace and believe in the power of the gospel.

Nonsense.

Responses like theirs make me wonder if they have ever experienced God's mercy themselves.

The fact is, the very best of us are worthless wretches outside of His grace, and on the holiest day of our lives, in ourselves, we are utterly depraved in light of God's perfect brightness.

If you have ever come under deep conviction of sin, either as a sinner or a saint (meaning, as a nonbeliever or as a believer), you know what I'm talking about.

Suddenly, your flesh is revealed, as happened to the prophet Isaiah when he encountered the Lord, crying out, "Woe is me! For I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Is. 6:5)

Suddenly, you become aware of the depth of your guilt and depravity, of the impurity of your motives, of the corruption of your actions, of your selfishness or greed or envy or lust or hatred or pride or rebellion or bitterness—or all of the above.

You feel as if the worst hell is too good for you, and you are completely overwhelmed when you realize that not only is God willing to forgive you, but that Jesus died for you and paid for every one of those sins, pronouncing you righteous through faith and bringing you into His family as a fellow child of the Father.

In the words of John Newton, the former slave trader, guilty of committing atrocities against fellow human beings, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

I know extraordinary men of God today who used to be involved in terrorist activities or who were once sexually depraved or consumed by hate, and they are some of the saintliest people on the planet. And all of us, no matter how we lived our lives, were sinners in need of salvation and mercy.

Those who have been shown mercy should lead the way in showing mercy; those who have been forgiven should lead the way in forgiving others; those who have been transformed should be the first to believe for the transformation of others.

We should exercise wisdom when it comes to putting certain people in certain positions (for example, no matter how transformed a convicted former child molester might be, I would never put that person in the church's children's ministry, for many obvious reasons), but we should absolutely believe in the power of God to forgive the worst of sinners and trust the power of the blood of Jesus to make us truly clean.

I really do fear for those who do not recognize the depth of their own sin in light of God's holiness and who do not understand the principle that "he who has shown no mercy will have judgment without mercy, for mercy triumphs over judgment" (Jacob [James] 2:13).

May we be ambassadors of the transforming mercy of God, and may we glory in the life-transforming power of the gospel.

That's what the cross is all about.

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