

Jesus Died for Michael Avenatti

I do not like attorney Michael Avenatti. His first claim to fame was as the lawyer of a porn star who allegedly slept with Donald Trump. His latest claim to fame is as the lawyer of a woman who accused Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh of being involved in multiple gang rapes.

Personally, I find Avenatti's style distasteful and his morals offensive.

But there is something that tempers my attitude towards him, namely, the recognition of grace. In short, I remember that God had mercy on me in 1971 when I was an idiot and a jerk, a heavy drug-using 16-year-old who, to my shame, even stole money from my own father.

And He had mercy on me during those previous two years of intense folly (from the ages of 14-16), not allowing me to destroy myself with my abusive and reckless lifestyle.

I did not deserve a drop of God's mercy or favor (nor, in fact, do any of us). Yet it was when we were rebels, when we were disobedient, that Jesus died for us. As Paul wrote, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6, NASB).

That means that Jesus died for Michael Avenatti too. (Feel free to fill in the name of anyone you don't like, be it the president or your next-door neighbor). And that means that he can receive mercy, just as I did, and just as millions of others have.

This does not mean that we approve of someone's wrong choices or sinful conduct. It does not mean that we look the other way when we believe something is wrong or unfair. It does not mean

that we tolerate evil (wherever we see it). It does not mean we do not speak out or that we do not stand for justice.

But it does mean that we temper our attitude towards others. That we don't parade around so self-righteously. That our greatest hope is for someone's redemption rather than their condemnation.

And for those of us who seek to live God-fearing, God-pleasing lives, we should remember we receive mercy from heaven every single day. Without that, all of us would stand guilty in the Lord's sight.

In another of his letters, Paul counseled followers of Jesus "to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people" (Titus 3:2; chew on those words for a while before you post your next comment on social media).

Why should we conduct ourselves in this way? Paul continues, "We also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various desires and pleasures, living in evil and envy, filled with hatred and hating each other. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:3-7, MEV).

In other words, think back to what jerks we used to be before Jesus saved us. That will help us be more gracious to others.

Paul himself had a sordid history, reminding his young disciple Timothy 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).

So, rather than curse those who rankle us and offend us, let's pray for them. One of them might become the apostle Paul of our generation.