

Why Teach Purity and Modesty in the Church

"I'm just not seeing the message of grace presented in these purity and modesty movements," a woman recently wrote to me. "Why did Jesus die on the cross? We are righteous because of Jesus, not because of our works ... I am all about ... waiting to have sex until marriage and using common sense in dressing in a manner that is respectful to yourself and those around you. But these are conversations that play such a minor role in the fabric of our lives. The gospel is about Jesus and God's grace; it's not about purity."

Her inquiry is deserving of consideration. Frankly, I was deeply troubled by it and wanted to correct myself if I've been wrong. My heart pondered this question: Is the way I teach modesty and purity—or the way you teach it or live it out—in contradiction to the powerful grace of God?

After a lot of prayer and study, I have an answer. Let me start with the ugly part ...

God's Freeing Grace

Secrecy bore images my mind could not erase. Guilt riddled my life with an even heavier dose of shame. Suffocating loneliness. Hypocrisy. These are the chains and bars that made up the prison of my enslavement as a sexual sinner. Have you known them too?

Long after sin had its way, I remained in my prison. For 10 long years. Hiding. Dying emotionally day by day. But then ...

God chased me down—literally on a highway—and orchestrated a radical healing in my life. I did not seek out my healing. I did not think myself worthy. But He did. So, one day when I

was blinded by my hopelessness, He burst through it. And gave me the key to the door of my prison: confession. He invited me to tell someone. To walk out of the dungeon of secrecy.

To be free. To be in deep community because I am known—the good, the bad, the ugly—and accepted. To walk in authenticity that ironically leads others to live in modesty and purity—not because I did, but because I know how much it hurts not to.

The theology of grace comes alive not in the textbooks of seminaries but in the ugly mess of our sinful living.

The story always begins here. At least mine does. I cannot and do not teach the rules of modesty and purity without telling the ugly truth about my sin and letting others see the beauty of God's grace—lavish, radical, unbelievable grace! The theology of grace and the theology of purity complement one another. They do not compete.

Undeserved Grace

Grace is the goodness of God extended when you don't deserve it. Maybe you've heard the acronym **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. There's no greater richness than the freedom you taste when you were once in bondage to sin. I've walked this one out, girlfriend! John Piper writes that grace is "a totally unconditional and utterly free act of God to save them. This freedom is the very heart of grace."

To be honest, I am often incredulous that God chose me—a sexual sinner—to be a leader in the modesty and purity movement. Why not select the poster child for purity? Why me? But last night I got it in a new way!

Deuteronomy 6 spoke deeply to me as I prayed through this seeming dilemma of grace vs. purity. God is telling the Israelites who've just left 400 years of bondage that one day their children will come to them and ask, "What is the meaning

of all these rules?" He tells them to tell the story of their deliverance! To tell them how He chased them down and burst through the bonds of their suffering and enslavement to bring them into freedom. And He told them to say, "The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always that He might preserve us alive, as we are this day."

One who has tasted of the life and freedom of grace does not want to go back to the death and bondage of sin. We have a special desire to live by God's rules that "preserve us alive." Perhaps that is why those of us teaching purity and modesty are such a motley crew!

The woman I mentioned in the beginning of this blog has obviously never heard me speak. Otherwise, she would have heard a shameless testimony of sexual brokenness healed by grace. I never speak publicly on the topics of sexuality and modesty without at least referencing it. Even in my TEDTalk where I could not say the name of my Savior, I was careful to reference my sin. It is a deep conviction of my heart that this is where the best teaching on modesty and purity begins.

But just as you cannot teach modesty without grace, you cannot teach grace without a thick theology of sin. And that requires us to teach guidelines for living such as purity and modesty.

Grace and Sin

Let's face it, it's a whole lot more fun to hear messages on things like grace, God's goodness, His blessings for your life, and spiritual gifts than it is to hear messages on modesty and purity. We live in a day and age when people's "itching ears" don't want to be confronted when they sin or hear teachings on right living. Books are being published stating that Christians can be free to have sex anywhere, any way, and with anyone they like because this is the heart of

the doctrine of freedom.

My own experience is that this kind of teaching and thinking only leads to bondage! And you don't NEED grace if those teachers and books are true. Unless there are guidelines for our living and therefore the state of being sinful when we live outside of them, there is no need of grace. Or mercy. Grace exists because sin does! You cannot teach grace without also teaching sin and God's commandments for living. There is no grace, mercy, forgiveness, or redemption without sin.

Grace AND sin are why Christ came (Mark 10:45). Grace AND sin are why He died (Rom. 5:8). Grace AND sin are at the very heart of the gospel message (2 Cor. 5:18–21). The gospel is about BOTH grace and sin, including and perhaps most importantly sexual sin.

Of course, all sin separates us from God, but the Bible says that sexual sin is unique. It has, perhaps, more efficacy in its ability to chain us in bondage (1 Cor. 6:18). But most importantly, marriage and pure sexuality are a picture of Christ's love for the church. Though this truth rings clearly from Genesis to Revelation, Ephesians 5:31-32 states it most succinctly:

“‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I am speaking about Christ and the church.”

It is a great lie of the enemy of our souls and of God to believe that the conversation about modesty and purity plays a “minor role” in the fabric of our lives. It is one of the most major themes that exists. If marriage and sexuality are a picture of the greatest spiritual truth there is—that Christ came with grace—then how motivated do you think Satan is to see that picture destroyed in your life? In the lives of your

children?

He is motivated.

Maybe you and I should speak more, not less, about the call to modest and pure living, being careful to include the grace-filled stories that compel us to have a voice!

*Taken from **Dannah Gresh's** blog post "Does Teaching Purity Contradict God's Grace?" at . Used with permission.*