ELIZABETH SMART, SHAME, AND GOD'S LOVE



By Grant Hawley

A beautiful girl, only fourteen-years old, was kidnapped at knifepoint in 2002 and kept as a sex slave for nine horrifying months. One of the saddest things about it is that her oppressive religious upbringing prolonged it. She was taken out into public on more than one occasion but didn't cry out for help or run away. Here's why:

> **Smart said she "felt so dirty and so filthy" after she was raped by her captor, and she understands why someone wouldn't run "because of that alone."**
> **Smart spoke at a Johns Hopkins human trafficking forum, saying she was raised in a religious household and recalled a school teacher who spoke once about abstinence and compared sex to chewing gum.**
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> **"I thought, 'Oh, my gosh, I'm that chewed up piece of gum, nobody re-chews a piece of gum, you throw it away.' And that's how easy it is to feel like you no longer have worth, you no longer have value," Smart said. "Why would it even be worth screaming out? Why would it even make a difference if you are rescued? Your life still has no value."1**

As Christians, this should be a sobering story to us. I know it is to me.
Elizabeth Smart grew up in the Mormon church, so the fact that she received this kind of shaming shouldn't surprise us. But do Christian churches do the same thing? Of course they do.

If we are beating people up with garbage like this chewed-up gum analogy, we are participating in something truly evil. We are denying the value of the Cross and the depth of the love of God, and leading people into shame-driven self-harm.

On top of this, we are providing fodder for those who want to hate God and His ways. I read two articles published today that deny the value of purity and came right out and said it's evil to attach any morality to sex because of Elizabeth's story. Secular people don't see the fact that what was done to her in her school isn't a right expression of Christ. They don't see it because we don't do a good job of living out grace.

The problem is that too many Christian people and religious people who claim Christ make the mistake of thinking that shame will produce holiness. It doesn't. Law was never meant to produce holiness, quite the opposite, actually. Paul said:

> **Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:19-20)**

The law was given to make us all guilty and to make us know in practice that we have something inside us that drives us toward sinning. The result should be our turning to Christ for grace.

Grace is the Biblical answer for the sin problem. "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14). We need to be teaching people their great value in God's eyes. God loved every single human being enough to send His Son to the Cross for them.

People who have made mistakes are not chewed up pieces of gum to be thrown away. And even more than that, a precious young woman like Elizabeth Smart is not a chewed up piece of gum because of the nightmare she experienced through no fault of her own. Grace in Jesus Christ is the only way to holiness. We need to be a people of grace. Our words need to be words of grace, our view of others and ourselves needs to be based upon grace, and we need to boldly proclaim God's great love for those who are devalued by the world.

1Read the Whole Article Here. Please note that I am not advocating Christian Science Monitor, just giving citation.

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