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Why The 'He Gets Us' Super Bowl Commercial Fumbled

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By now, the [He Gets Us](#) Super Bowl commercial has been a topic of much contention amongst Christians and non-Christians alike online. [The commercial](#) itself is simple and artistically done—showcasing several photos of people washing the feet of those whom society might consider those on the “outside.” In the end, the only text offered up is equally as simple, “Jesus didn’t teach hate. He washed feet. He gets us. All of us.”

The intended message is not all that hard to miss for those who understand what Jesus did as He washed His disciple’s feet just before His death. It was an act of selfless servitude, demonstrating the very reason why Jesus Christ came in the first place. His life was one wherein He emptied Himself to serve the sons of men, even Judas, who would later betray the Messiah for a measly sum of 30 pieces of silver. While all authority and power had been granted to Jesus Christ by the Father, He humbled Himself in the form of man and took on the apron of a slave.

It is no wonder why the image of the very Son of God washing the feet of His disciples has remained as such a powerful reminder of Christ’s humility and love. And yet, this same image adopted by the He Gets Us campaign that recently aired during the Super Bowl, for all intents and purposes, has caused no shortage of outcry. What should be a

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relatively simple message to convey has become a point of controversy—not in the broader public, but amongst those within the church.

Many have been quick to say the controversy in the church is much the same as it was when Jesus upset the religious leaders of His own day. The purported rationale has been that just as Christ upset the status quo in the synagogues, so too does this message in the church today. In fact, you might just find a fairly large contingent of people who would argue that the modern-day church is not much different than the whitewashed tombs of Jesus's own day, with the Pharisees and Sadducees.

To be sure, there is some warrant for this charge when one considers particular examples of blatant hypocrisy—but that is the ill-defined problem of our day, isn't it? Much that gets labeled as "hypocrisy" isn't such at all, but rather, it is the oft-cited reason for why Jesus's own Words are rejected and labeled, as in the He Gets Us commercial, as "teaching hate." And that's the rub. We have not reached a point where the Son of God is taking on human flesh once more to reveal just how short we've fallen from understanding His holy Word; we're at the point in our society where we have two functionally (and ontologically) different gods we worship. One is the true Christ, one is not—and both sides argue over who is getting the details right.

What I would argue is that the same root reason why people fawn over depictions of Christ in popular culture (e.g., [The Chosen](#)) is the same issue we find present here. There is a wide-sweeping epidemic of biblical illiteracy, and the people behind ad campaigns like 'He Gets Us' intentionally play at this ignorance. This is not a new phenomenon, when we consider how Christians have been portrayed in popular cinema for the past several decades. The popular portrayal is anything but a genuine Christian who actually seeks to live in submission to God's Word. Rather, they are often portrayed as bigoted, backwoods idiots who can't string a few coherent sentences together—and they're massively hypocritical to boot (Picture Angela from the American version of *The Office*).

Now, again, some of this might be warranted when you look at the masses of American Evangelicalism who have claimed the Christian faith, yet seemingly done nothing to be in submission to Christ. I find it much like the teenager in my high school days who carried around a skateboard, but couldn't even ollie—the one we colloquially called a "poser." The problem is not that such "posers" exist; they do in virtually every clique in life. The problem is that they tend to take the predominate focus when it comes to the Christian world, almost as if it is an "easy out" for those who wish to turn their noses up at the Christian faith in general.

The interesting dilemma to me though is that the Jesus portrayed by "the posers" that the broader public despises—is the exact same portrayal of Jesus they wish to laud in the

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public square. This is the Jesus who is light on sin and judgment, heavy on grace and love—but not a grace and love that actually requires justice—it is a grace and love that requires a tailor-fit God who essentially adopts the same quasi-standards of morality that mankind does (provided He changes with the times, of course). He is not the God who is jealous, just, holy, and requires justice be met—He is the God who “Gets Us,” and He Gets Us in such a way that we never actually come to the point of repentance and faith. He Gets Us in such a way that we can say along with the best of them, “Que sera, sera.”

The problem is: God actually *does* “get us,” just not in the manner that the He Gets Us campaign advertises. Surely, God understands our frailty and human condition; He comprehends that we are finite creatures who fall short and need grace; He gets that we even need help. However, this is not a full portrayal of the way that God says, “He Gets Us.” Romans 8:5-8 portrays us in all of our splendor—as God *gets us*:

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Notice there are four present realities that the Scriptures speak to here, that make it abundantly clear about how God views all of mankind:

1. Those who live according to the flesh (read: their sinful desires) have their minds set on the flesh. In other words: they have no desire for the things of God. They do not think of them, comprehend them, nor think on anything else but fulfilling their own desires.
2. The mind set on the flesh is death. The natural result, in other words, for the one who goes his own way (which is all of us apart from the grace of God in Christ), is death. This is not merely physical death, but spiritual death. In clearer candor: the one who is ruled by his own sinful desires and not by the Spirit, will naturally (and willingly) go to Hell.
3. The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. To put it as bluntly as I possibly can: the mind set on their own sinful desires is *at war* with God. How does he continue to describe this? They do not subject (or obey) the Law of God, for they are not even *able* to do so. This is not merely a statement on mankind’s natural propensity for things that lead them straight to hell—but their utter inability to do *anything* but follow the path straight to hell.

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4. Finally, those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God. No excuses. No hemming and hawing. No equivocations. Just simply: they are quite literally unable to please God—wholesale.

When one considers the full ramifications of this, the point is quite simple: mankind, in his natural state, is morally bankrupt in all his ways, and in *desperate need* of salvation. Mankind does not have a desperate need for God to “Get us;” mankind has the desperate plight that God already fully understands our nature, our rebellion, our hatred for Him—and more. The way Christ Himself even viewed mankind in all of their splendor was to simply assess that He should not entrust Himself to men. Why not? For He knew all things, and knew what was in their hearts (Jn. 2:24-25).

The fundamental problem, when all is said and done, is that when we present a very skewed portrayal of man in front of the watching world, the natural result is that we will present a very skewed understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. When all is said and done, the He Gets Us ads are guilty of what they have been from the start: it is a soft portrayal of man to a culture that will not accept what God has to say about mankind, and therefore, the natural result is that the culture comes away with a soft portrayal of who God is in His complete holiness.

This is not to say that God doesn't, in fact, “get us.” It is to say that God gets us in more ways that we even remotely comprehend, and this is both a comfort and a terrifying reality if we truly stop to consider what that actually means. He does consider our frame; He will not cast any who are His own; He will not break the bruised reed, nor stamp out the smoldering wick. These are wonderful promises that any believer can hold onto in the most difficult of times—but they are only promises they can hold onto because God did, in fact, crush His Son and afflict Him in our place.

You see, the saddest part about what the He Gets Us Super Bowl commercial (and ministry as a whole) misses, is not that it highlights the wonderful fact that God is merciful and kind to sinners. He is. The saddest part is that it actually never gets around to presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no good news beyond the fact that Christ was a wonderful guy who did some wonderful things for His fellow man. But that is not the gospel. Christ did not wash the feet of disciples (and Judas) merely to demonstrate He donned the apron of a slave.

He washed the feet of His disciples to show them that the Kingdom of God demonstrated such a radical obedience that even the Son of God came to serve, and not to be served—and the culmination of this act cannot be divorced from the Last Supper, of which the washing of their feet was part. In other words: this fundamental act of service was intrinsically linked to the symbolism built into the passion of Christ, where His body was

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broken *for us*, and His blood spilled *for us*. These things cannot be divorced, nor can they be marginalized into a simple, yet vapid, 12-word tagline at the end of a Super Bowl commercial that feigns Christian nobility whilst adopting the lingo of a culture that hates the gospel message.

Surely, Christ *didn't* preach hate; He preached repentance and faith in Himself as the Son of God who came to take the sins of those who believe upon Himself, that they might be forgiven of their sins and no longer fall under the wrath of God. However, that is the precise same message that this world deems hateful. You cannot faithfully portray the washing of feet for the drunkard, the homosexual, the liar, the glutton, nor any other sinner for that matter—without portraying the Savior as the One who calls sinners to repentance and faith.

In the end, Christ was not crucified because He washed the feet of the marginalized and disenfranchised. He was not crucified because He said, “He Gets Us.” He was crucified because He preached a message that every single man, woman, and child must repent and believe, or they shall perish in Hell forever. That is the message this world *despises*, and ultimately, why the He Gets Us Super Bowl commercial, and ministry as a whole, falls woefully short.

Even more sadly, all of this message is lost on an unbelieving world—not simply because the message wasn't actually preached, but they also have no concept of the significance of Jesus Christ washing the feet of His disciples. For all the effort to push aside the controversial message of the gospel in favor of winning people to Christ, as the He Gets Us campaign is designed to do—it failed to communicate outside of its own Christian bubble to those who have no clue what this act of selfless service was all about in the first place. So, even in its own purported goal, ‘He Gets Us’ not only failed to communicate the gospel to the unbelieving world—they failed to bridge a cultural-contextual gap that they have been all about to begin with.

About the Author: Grayson Gilbert completed his Masters of Divinity degree at Moody Theological Seminary and is currently pursuing church planting under the umbrella of his home church, through the North American Mission Board. He lives in the balmy Midwest with his wife and three children. Grayson enjoys reading, writing, designing and producing artwork.

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