

## *Is Breaking Bad* Breaking Good for Ann Coulter?<sup>1</sup>

Ann Coulter's essay<sup>2</sup> on "AMC's smash TV series," *Breaking Bad*, is a must read – for perplexed fans and for practicing Christians.

Having seen neither the series nor the finale, I cannot comment on the show itself.<sup>3</sup> But Ann's articulated theology – and the psychological dynamics underlying so much of her public life – are readily discernible in her paean to God. (Sadly, Ann's tweet advocating Second Amendment rights drew the attention of the media, thus detracting from the theology in her essay.)

Stylistically, I found her essay exquisitely written, smoothly flowing, and enjoyable to read.<sup>4</sup> Her reverence for God and His Word appears genuine and is expressed with zeal. Yet, Ann's doctrines are not entirely Scriptural. Moreover, Ann's most emphatic and pertinent points seem to reveal more about Ann than about the subject of her essay.

### Promoting Christianity



From her second sentence onward, Ann extols the God of the Bible, forgiveness, and the godly character His children should be developing. Strangely, she ignores repentance and how to actually live a godly life.<sup>5</sup>

Ann begins by equating *Breaking Bad* with Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*,<sup>6</sup> claiming that *Breaking Bad* contains both conservative and Christian themes,<sup>7</sup> and exhorting her readers to "READ

<sup>1</sup> Series creator Vince Gilligan defines "Breaking Bad" as "to raise hell." Has the series "raised heaven" in Ann's life?

<sup>2</sup> Ann Coulter, "Breaking Bad: A Christian Parable," 10/2/13.

<sup>3</sup> My analysis deals exclusively with Ann's expressed theology and in no way, shape, or form validates anything she claims about the show itself.

<sup>4</sup> I also found Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and some of his other books highly entertaining despite their theological heresy (which was soul-wearying). One major drawback to books like his, and essays like Ann's, is the blurring of fact and fiction, the merging of orthodoxy and heresy. Unless one is careful, discerning the truth can become extremely problematic.

<sup>5</sup> See my (audio) sermon, "Living the Resurrected Life," at <http://www.brotherwatch.com/files/Living%20the%20Resurrected%20Life.mp3>.

<sup>6</sup> It does seem strikingly odd (and "counterintuitive") that Ann would claim that a show which is seemingly (indeed, deliberately) irreligious is really religious, but, again, being unfamiliar with *Breaking Bad*, I must reserve judgment. Still, equating a television series devoid of God with a movie extolling Him does seem rather odd. See Andy Graham, "The Baptism of Breaking Bad," *caffeinatedthoughts.com*, 10/2/13, <http://caffeinatedthoughts.com/2013/10/baptism-breaking-bad/>.

<sup>7</sup> A posting on *Free Republic* disputes Coulter's contention: "It isn't [religious]. It's devoid of anything religious. Walt wasn't religious. The family wasn't. The extended family wasn't religious. This is the whole reason why *Breaking Bad* goes the way it does. To me, *Breaking Bad* shows what happens when people, faced with crises, who don't have God, and follow their own moral system, attempt to deal with their problems. The unthinkable in prior times now becomes a viable option, and they are more than willing to rationalize it away. Only when it's all about to end do we finally get someone to stop running away from their mess and stop rationalizing their bad decisions away. But not having God, they die without forgiveness, without genuinely being sorry for what they've done. They are sorry they didn't pull it off, they are sorry it's ending badly for them, sorry they got certain people killed, sorry they won't be with their family. They aren't sorry for all the junkies they hate who buy their product, and their lives that they've destroyed, the families they've screwed up from their product. They are sorry they got caught. Not repentant (10/8/13)."

THE BIBLE!” Knowing that human nature has not changed since the Bible was written, Ann observes: “It’s chockablock with gore, incest, jealousy, murder, love and hate,” thus proving the Bible’s relevancy for today and confirming that there truly is nothing new under the sun, but utterly failing to prove the Christian paradigm of *Breaking Bad*.

Ann also correctly observes – counter to the prevailing moral relativism pervading our culture – that “the Bible tells the truth, the lessons are eternal,” remarking that this “also marks the difference between great literature and passing amusements.”

Next, Ann forays into the realm of forgiveness, describing the show’s Jesse Pinkman as that “sweet, soulful druggie” who “illustrates – heartbreakingly – the monumental importance of the cross.”<sup>8</sup> Ann’s word choices are flawless.

### Forgiving Oneself

Having for years heralded the importance of the cross and the forgiveness upon which her salvation rests, Ann nevertheless departs from Christian orthodoxy by suggesting that Jesse should go to the cross *to be able to forgive himself*. Instead, Ann says he enters “some godless hippie rehab center” and, consequently, “is still unable to forgive himself.”

Ann contends that – *because* Jesse has been “unable to forgive himself” – he returns to an ungodly lifestyle which intensifies his descent into darkness. Ann writes, “Mayhem, murder and disaster ensue.”

Why? Because Jesse did not “forgive himself” and, instead, accepted that he’s “the bad guy.”

But is that what the cross is all about? No. It is about receiving forgiveness *from God* and then living a *transformed* life. The problem for Jesse was not a failure to forgive himself but a failure to *repent*, thereby receiving forgiveness from *God*.

But Ann continues with her nonsense, writing, “There’s only one thing in the world that ever could have allowed Jesse to forgive himself.” Except, once again, the cross *isn’t* about *self-forgiveness*. Indeed, even forgiven Christians – those who have genuinely repented with godly sorrow – should still feel a measure of *guilt* until they have done all they can do to right the wrongs they have committed (Matthew 5:23-24). (Making amends is one of the principal recovery steps, after all, in Alcoholics Anonymous and other addiction treatment programs.)

Ann is absolutely right “that God sent his only son to die for Jesse’s sins, no matter how abominable.” But she woefully misses the mark when she insists, “To not forgive himself after that would be an insult to God, dismissing what Jesus did on the cross as not such a big deal.”<sup>9</sup> Self-forgiveness is *not* biblical.



<sup>8</sup> To reiterate, these and subsequent references regarding *Breaking Bad* derive from Ann’s essay and her observations, perspectives, and paradigm – not mine.

<sup>9</sup> It is great that Ann deeply values the “monumental importance of the cross.” Sadly, many Christians diminish the significance of the cross and the One who sacrificed everything for us. But it is imperative to *accurately* grasp that significance.

Evangelist and biblical scholar John MacArthur observes, “I realize there are some who teach that a kind of self-forgiveness is necessary. I find this nowhere in Scripture.”<sup>10</sup>

With his over 40 years of ministerial experience, MacArthur has observed a commonality among those claiming and proclaiming self-forgiveness, traits which Ann ironically addresses later in her essay. MacArthur writes, “I’ve met many people who *claim* to be unable to forgive themselves, but on careful examination this usually turns out to be a kind of sinful pride exacerbated by modern self-esteem philosophy.”

He continues, “The person who complains about not being self-forgiving is often simply looking for flattering or consoling words from others as a way of salving the hurt that guilt has caused to their pride.” In essence, self-forgiveness salves the conscience without changing the behavior that caused the guilt in the first place. It is a way in which ego and pride can carry on without actually admitting to specific sins or repenting of those sins.

In essence, self-forgiveness is a placebo which does nothing to solve the underlying problem of sin. Only the cross cures the problem – with true repentance and forgiveness leading to spiritual transformation.

The external *behaviors* never change because the internal *heart* has not been changed. Repentance – not self-forgiveness – is the catalyst for that transformation. And God offers us His peace – His un-surpassing peace – as a consequence of yielding our lives to Him.

## Walking with God

Therein lies the dilemma for those seeking to do God’s will but still loving the sins to which they are addicted. Whom will they serve? Jesus and the disciples frequently asked that question. In the Old Testament, Joshua answered, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Ann recognizes there is only one Master, yet she fails to place her own life into the biblical perspective of that reality. She introduces Jesse’s wife, Skyler, as a perfect illustration of “why Scripture instructs us to flee evil and admonishes: ‘You shall have no other gods before me.’”

Discovering Jesse’s criminal activities – and hating them – Skyler keeps his secret and even becomes a “partner in crime.” Ann writes, “Her husband and son have become her ‘gods,’ whom she values more than the one true God.”<sup>11</sup>

The one character in the series who *is* walking with God is Hank Schrader, “Walt’s DEA agent brother-in-law,” whom Ann describes as “something of a buffoon at the beginning of the series.” However, “because of his godly choices – the polar opposite of Walt’s – he ends up becoming not only an extremely likable person, but a deeply good and heroic one. Even his stupid jokes get funny.”

Ann emphasizes, in a five-word paragraph: “He is the manly one.”  
But why is Hank the godly and manly one? Ann’s answer:

Along with some normal human imperfections, Hank embodies all the Christian virtues -- patience, diligence, humility, kindness.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Hank is the only character who always

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<sup>10</sup> John MacArthur, “Answering the Hard Questions About Forgiveness,” *Grace to You*, <http://www.gty.org/resources/positions/P05/answering-the-hard-questions-about-forgiveness>.

<sup>11</sup> The subject of idolatry is addressed in several chapters of *Vanity: Ann Coulter’s Quest for Glory*, available as a free PDF download at [www.coulterwatch.com/vanity.pdf](http://www.coulterwatch.com/vanity.pdf).

seems to be helping everyone else with their problems – shoplifting, marital separation, cancer, “fugue” states – rather than burdening them with his own.

It is certainly admirable that Ann promotes godliness, however, the qualities contained in her short list of Christian virtues is suggestive and seem to be “the polar opposite” of Ann’s own confrontational style.

## Pride



Then Ann segues to “the greatest sin of all: pride,” which she calls “the most incessantly proved lesson” of this television series, contending “there is no better study of the sin of pride than ... Walter White.”<sup>13</sup>

For Ann, “Walt starts out as a sympathetic character ... But throughout five seasons, we watch him become irredeemably evil because of his pride.”

Throughout the series, viewers witness “Walt’s descent into darkness,” ostensibly with benevolent motives to help his family. But, as Ann noticed, “[Walt] hadn’t made any of these increasingly depraved moral choices for ‘his family’ – as he finally admits in the last episode. It was for himself, to feed his pride.” Narcissism and pride.

The Bible repeatedly says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

## Addictive Thinking

As Ann was writing her essay, I wonder if she realized she was writing about and to herself. And about and to those family, friends, and colleagues who have enabled her own wrong behaviors.

Remember Skyler? She *enabled* (and later *assisted*) her husband in his crimes. Why? To *hide the truth* from her son. She did her family no favors by compromising the truth and enabling her husband’s sin. Beautifully understated, Ann notes the results of Skyler’s cowardice: “It worked out badly for her.”

Ann writes, “What’s so fabulous about Walt’s descent into darkness is that the audience is tricked into joining Walt’s temporizing – at least through his first few steps.” Ann provides several examples from the series to prove her point. The important thing for the fans was that Walt, portrayed as a sympathetic anti-hero/victim, “was safe.” Scene after scene, Ann shows the downward spiral of the viewers who are voyeuristically enabling Walt.

At this point, Ann makes another salient observation: “In this way, the viewers are tricked into being co-conspirators with Walt. But, luckily, we are only observers. We can escape Walt’s choices. He can’t.” Then Ann writes:

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<sup>12</sup> Two virtues missing from Ann’s short list: honesty and integrity. The Pauline virtues are faith, hope, and love (see 1 Corinthians 13). To those the Catholic catechism adds the four cardinal virtues of Greek philosophy: prudence, justice, temperance, and courage. The fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 include: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

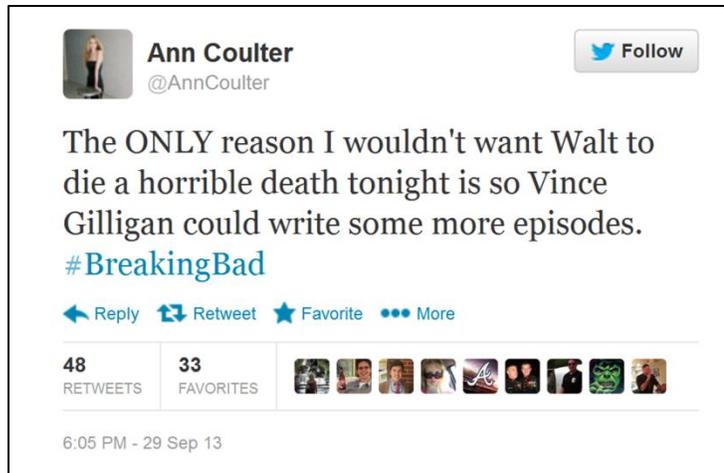
<sup>13</sup> The subject of pride is addressed in several chapters of *Vanity: Ann Coulter’s Quest for Glory*, available as a free PDF download at [www.coulterwatch.com/vanity.pdf](http://www.coulterwatch.com/vanity.pdf).

Soon, we begin to realize that Walt’s first malevolent acts – the ones we went along with! – made it easier for him to rationalize the next one and the next, until there’s no limit to what he won’t do, including violently attacking his wife, kidnapping his infant daughter, ordering the murder of his virtual-son, Jesse, and, perhaps most sinisterly, coldly informing Jesse that he had stood and watched as Jane choked to death.

Enabling, denial, rationalization, temporizing, co-conspirators – these are all traits of addictive thinking,<sup>14</sup> which keep an addict or a sinner from acknowledging their habit or sin, thus preempting any hope of liberation and healing.

### Walking by Faith

Notwithstanding my criticisms above, I wish more of Ann’s essays were like this one: confidently, conversationally, and confidingly confessing her Christian faith.<sup>15</sup> It is obvious that she has considered the Christian themes she addresses while watching the series and also that she has been wrestling with those issues in her personal life. May God enlighten her and empower her to become the person God wants her to be.



Perhaps *Breaking Bad* was a good avenue for Ann to search her own soul and discern the reality of her own relationship with the God whom she professes to follow. Ann concluded her essay with a Proverb we should all take notice of: “*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*”

[An expanded exposition on this subject can be found in Appendix 1 of the new book, [Never Trust Ann Coulter – at ANY Age](#), available as a free PDF download at [www.coulterwatch.com/never.pdf](http://www.coulterwatch.com/never.pdf).]

<sup>14</sup> Addictive thinking is addressed in both *The Beauty of Conservatism*, available as a free PDF download at [www.coulterwatch.com/beauty.pdf](http://www.coulterwatch.com/beauty.pdf), and *The Gospel According to Ann Coulter*, available as a free PDF download at [www.coulterwatch.com/gospel.pdf](http://www.coulterwatch.com/gospel.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Though rare, these essays are very worthwhile. See Daniel Borchers, “It’s a God Thing,” at <http://www.coulterwatch.com/files/Its%20a%20God%20Thing.pdf>.