This past Wednesday may have been one of the more difficult days that Ohio State head football coach Jim Tressel ever had to endure, but as the eye of the storm moves on to the next big story there is no doubt that Tressel has done tremendous damage to his reputation. How long that lasts is anyone's guess but the road to redemption begins now and extends for as far as he wants to take it.

It's just that there are many people who don't want to see him on that road in the first place.

Nothing about the reaction thus far to the scandal that Tressel visited upon himself and his university has been unexpected. There are those who offer sympathy being drowned out by those that thinks he should have been immediately fired. Then there is the vast middle that doesn't quite know what to think.

No one knows better than Tressel what he needs to do to put this situation behind him. The penalties will be served of course and as they are that will only serve to stir the pot once more. But the real work in all this begins with the soul searching Tressel is undoubtedly undergoing as he tries to gain perspective over the ramifications of his own misconduct.

I have little doubt Tressel will overcome and I'm glad he's getting the chance. It's too bad, I think, that too many don't want to see him get that chance if the emails I received from my initial column on this matter and the columns I've read from others about this are any indication.

There used to be a time where we at least gave credit to someone who stepped in it deep but then stood and faced the cameras and took his medicine. And while there is a segment out there still willing to offer up that bit of a respect, the tide has certainly turned.

As I said in my initial column on this matter, as a society we simply don't value apologies. That in part is the reason that some of the reaction to this scandal has been so vicious, but not so unexpected.

Of the hundreds of columns I've written for this site, the one I offered up on Tressel easily generated the most email. Most of them were well considered, even the ones that disagreed with me. A few, naturally, were just vicious signaling to me that their authors still have some unresolved anger to worth through. Good luck with that.

On a pure numbers basis, a slight majority of the emails were supportive of the column and supportive of Tressel. But a strong minority of the messages, including ones I received from close friends and substantial Buckeyes fans, felt that Tressel should have been immediately fired, case closed.

But it's not just a numbers game in that sense. What was more striking was the consistency of themes in these messages the most common of which centered around the image Tressel supposedly cultivated and its impact on how they felt about the situation overall.

Those who felt like Tressel should have been immediately fired are from the camp that Tressel held himself out as "Mr. Clean" or "St. Tressel" and because of that he should now be punished that much more severely. Even those that didn't go that far said that this scandal has taken away any right Tressel may have ever had to claim that mantle as someone to be admired.

No one likes to see their heroes tarnished, including me. It's why the reaction to the knife LeBron James stuck in the back of his team and his town has been so unrelenting. That's the kind of territory Tressel finds himself in at the moment, a traitor to his reputation. So in that sense, I understand the rather emotional point they make.

Yet in the case of Tressel (but not so much James) what bothers me most about this theme is the underlying assumption that a person can't simultaneously stand for the right things and make a mistake. The two principles are not mutually exclusive nor does one automatically become a hypocrite from failing, even spectacularly. The entire Christian world is built on the principle that no man is perfect but every man is worthy of salvation. But when it comes to someone like Tressel the expectation was that he was perfect and now having fallen he should not be allowed to get back up.

I don't recall Tressel ever claiming he was perfect. I do recall him saying that he lived a principle-based life. That's a far, far different concept. Even the most principled among us make mistakes and if our tolerance level is such that we cannot countenance mistakes in others, then the society we get will never be the society we want.

The irony of course is in the converse. If Tressel hadn't tried to publicly live so virtuously, people would be more forgiving. Lane Kiffin, now at USC, left a bunch of NCAA violations in the wake of his one year tenure at the University of Tennessee, not to mention the underhanded way he left Tennessee in the first place, and it generates a shrug because, well, no one expects much different from Kiffin.

But Tressel handles a situation poorly and all of the sudden people act as if the man should forever lose the opportunity to engage in his chosen line of work, something he's very good at, by the way. If that's the case, then the coarsening of our society is nearly complete. Far better to be Kiffin than Tressel, at least in the court of public opinion.

The other key theme being advanced, not only in the emails I've received, but in numerous columns in the wireless world, is the supposition that Tressel did what he did out of self-interest. These writers then turn this supposition into fact and react to it accordingly by trying to hold Tressel accountable for it forgetting completely that there are no real facts to support what they're even saying.

I don't want to pick on our own Dan Wismer because I have tremendous respect for him. But his column on the subject is typical. Dan, like so many others, wrote that he's bothered by the fact that Tressel's hasn't yet owned up to that self-interest, never mind the fact that there isn't a shred of evidence that self-interest underlies anything of what took place.

It's fine if you want to speculate as to motivation, but let's not turn it into fact. And while we're at it, let's ponder for a moment why it is that we have to dig so deeply into the motives, why it is that we can never take someone at their word but instead assume they are shading the truth. Why, in this case do we so casually dismiss a more obvious explanation and the one advanced, that Tressel handled a complicated situation, one that he probably never before faced, poorly?

For me, I'm comfortable in the notion that sometimes things are just as they seem. I look at the situation and imagine myself in Tressel's shoes, having the shit storm that was dropped into his lap dropped into mine instead and trying to figure out what I'd do in response. It's a question I can't honestly answer. None of us can.

The head slap moments we all have in our life only visit us in retrospect. Things that seem so obvious now weren't always that obvious then, especially when there is no big book titled "How to Handle Every Situation Ever Imaginable" sitting on our bookshelf. We like to think someone in Tressel's position is smarter than the rest of us but really what's the basis for that anyway?

If we allow ourselves the luxury to handle something wrong, and we all do, why can't Tressel be similarly afflicted? Anyone, and I do mean anyone, who can tell you definitively that they would have handled this situation the right way from the outset is a liar.

Any Buckeyes fan is disappointed that their team has been dragged through this. Any fan of Tressel is similarly disappointed at his failure here. But yet as I let the hours continue to roll by, processing everything about this situation, I can't help but shake the feeling of how hard the point has been driven home through the reactions of so many to the failures of a good and decent man that we really are a society of cynics that holds itself out as wanting the best in everyone but secretly relishes when we get the worst.

Maybe the real problem for most is that we just don't want to admit that someone like Tressel represents the best of what we see in ourselves and when that image doesn't quite measure up, we feel a little less about ourselves.