

# I Kissed the Church Goodbye

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Whether you realize it or not, there is a brutal war being waged against you. The battleground is your mind. Your foe? Not a physical army seeking your death, but the philosophies of this world. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). The philosophies of the world seek to turn you away from the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). These philosophies call upon you to put your trust in things other than God. Some of them tempt you to place your trust in yourself: your own mind, thoughts, or strengths.

What is your position in this war? There is no neutral stance you can hold. You cannot be a pacifist because you are already in the heat of battle. The life of the Christian is never a flat line. There is either positive development in the way of sanctification or there is backsliding.

Joshua Harris was a pastor and well-known author. You may recognize him by the title of his controversial book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. He also wrote an excellent little book called *Humble Orthodoxy*. On July 26, Harris, just after announcing to the world his impending divorce, declared through his Instagram account that he is no longer a Christian. I quote his post in full because it is worth reading in order to get a grip on the magnitude of the shift in his beliefs.

My heart is full of gratitude. I wish you could see all the messages people sent me after the announcement of my divorce. They are expressions of love though they are saddened or even strongly disapprove of the decision.

I am learning that no group has the market cornered on grace. This week I’ve received grace from Christians, atheists, evangelicals, evangelicals, straight people, LGBTQ people, and everyone in-between. Of course there have also been strong words of rebuke from religious people. While not always pleasant, I know they are seeking to love me. (There have also been spiteful, hateful comments that angered and hurt me.)

The information that was left out of our announcement is that I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is “deconstruction,” the biblical phrase is “falling away.” By all the measurements that I have for defining a

Christian, I am not a Christian. Many people tell me that there is a different way to practice faith and I want to remain open to this, but I'm not there now.

Martin Luther said that the entire life of believers should be repentance. There's beauty in that sentiment regardless of your view of God. I have lived in repentance for the past several years—repenting of my self-righteousness, my fear-based approach to life, the teaching of my books, my views of women in the church, and my approach to parenting to name a few. But I specifically want to add to this list now: to the LGBTQ+ community, I want to say that I am sorry for the views that I taught in my books and as a pastor regarding sexuality. I regret standing against marriage equality, for not affirming you and your place in the church, and for any ways that my writing and speaking contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry. I hope you can forgive me.

To my Christians friends, I am grateful for your prayers. Don't take it personally if I don't immediately return calls. I can't join in your mourning. I don't view this moment negatively. I feel very much alive, and awake, and surprisingly hopeful. I believe with my sister Julian that, "All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

There are many things we could talk about in this Instagram post, but we will try to examine it broadly. From all outward appearances, not long ago you would have seen Harris as a faithful pastor, talented writer, and genuine disciple of Jesus Christ. His book, *Humble Orthodoxy*, is still a good, helpful read, regardless of his current, changing views of the book's contents. Harris has not only turned his back on the beautiful things he has written but more importantly he has turned his back on his Master. Harris has kissed the church goodbye.

Nine days after Harris' declaration of unbelief, he marched in Vancouver's annual gay pride parade. Harris' description of himself having gone through a massive shift in regard to his faith in Jesus is an understatement. Not only has he kissed the church goodbye, but also he has attempted to deface the walls of Zion with perverted graffiti. How does one do a complete one-eighty as Harris has in regard to his faith?

Maybe your response to reading this sad story is that you really have nothing to worry about because you are safe within the walls of a solid, Reformed church. Consider for a moment the period of the judges. Over and over it took only one generation for the church to fall back into the ways of wickedness. The same sad history repeated itself during the period of the kings. History has shown us that the mighty fall. But surely we solid, Reformed Christians would never

come close to such a deed as the judges, or the kings, or especially Harris? On the contrary, every child of God must in honesty admit that he is capable of such sin. Every one of us can point to times in our lives where we could be described as a “back-sliding Christian.”

Looking at a timeline of Harris’ ministry, divorce, declaration of unbelief, and participation in the gay pride parade, you might be tempted to think that all of this happened relatively quickly. Let’s not pretend that in June he believed that the Bible prohibited homosexual behavior and then in July he decided he needed to apologize to the LGBTQ community for not affirming their place in the church. These things do not happen overnight. They begin by questioning God and what he has written in his word. Foolish questioning leads to doubts about God and his Son, Jesus Christ. Soon, passages of scripture and entire books are being torn out the Bible. What is left is an untrustworthy book about a God who is not in control of all things. The one who has started with foolish questioning now has the gall to say that unbelief is freedom. In the words of Harris, “I don’t view this moment negatively. I feel very much alive, and awake, and surprisingly hopeful.” Those are words that make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.

How do we respond when we hear of once seemingly godly men turning their backs on the truth? We could talk all day about the horrible things Harris has done. We can question the legitimacy of his credentials as a pastor because he never went through formal seminary training. We could read all of his writings with suspicion because we didn’t like his book on dating. But in the end, none of that matters. What matters is how we examine our own lives in response. Do we with the Pharisee say, “God, I thank you that I am not like Joshua Harris”? Or do we with Paul in humility say, “God have mercy on me because I am the chief of sinners.” In the words of Harris’ own book, we do hold the truth high, but we do so with a tear in our eye, knowing that the same God of grace who rescued us is also powerful enough to rescue them.<sup>1</sup> I hope that this article has not come across as the author taking the opportunity to smear a heretic, but as a warning for each one of us to examine our own lives and take heed lest we also fall.

There is also encouragement to be had here. Those who are truly God’s elect will not fall away. Jesus declared that “of all which he [God] hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Harris, *Humble Orthodoxy* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2013), 28.

seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:39–40). God be praised for his mercy toward us, who are undeserving sinners.

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