

Exclusive: Michael Brown Opens Up About His Upcoming Debate With Matthew Vines on 'Gay Christians'

Dr. Michael Brown is author of *Can You Be Gay and Christian? Responding With Love and Truth to Questions About Homosexuality* and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show *The Line of Fire* on the Salem Radio Network. He is also president of FIRE School of Ministry and director of the Coalition of Conscience. And on June 28, he'll be directly debating Matthew Vines on Moody Radio's program "Up for Debate."

Matthew Vines has recently become the face of the current "gay Christian" movement, publishing *God and the Gay Christian* after his speech advocating Christian acceptance of homosexuality went viral in 2012.

Charisma News spoke with Dr. Brown to get some insights into this weekend's upcoming debate.

Your latest book, *Can You Be Gay and Christian?*, in several ways, is a response to Matthew Vines' *God and the Gay Christian*. What was your heart behind writing the book?

Actually, it was providential that my book came out two weeks after Matthew's book, since I had been planning to write mine for a few years and this just happened to be the time I was able to finish it.

As for my motivation in writing the book, there were some excellent, scholarly studies refuting the idea that you can follow Jesus and practice homosexuality at the same time, but I felt it was necessary to combine biblical scholarship—which

is my field of academic training—with a popular presentation, and then drench all of it with the compassion of the Lord. This is a massively important issue confronting the church today, and so I wanted to write a book for pastors, individual believers and those who identify as LGBT that would meet this critical need.

As for Matthew's book, while I appreciate his zeal for his cause, even though it is a terribly wrong and deceived cause, his book actually makes no new scriptural arguments but rather seeks to reinterpret the Bible through the lens of his sexuality. So, my book serves as an excellent rebuttal to his book simply because of the content involved, not because I intended to rebut him when I wrote mine.

You have stated publicly that homosexual sin is a central, gospel issue. In my own life, I've known at least one person who has turned their back on the gospel because of the Bible's stance on homosexuality and used Vines' material to justify that decision. What words would you have for someone who has rejected Christianity over this issue?

Actually, what drew me into the this issue was the impact of homosexual activism on our society, but the more I talked with those who identify as LGBT and the more I read their stories—especially those who professed to be followers of Jesus—the more my heart broke for them.

So, it's very painful to hear about your friend's experience, but we'll be hearing it more and more in the coming days. The problem is when I start with "me" and then go to the Word, I will be deceived; if I start with God and then go to "me," I'll find truth and freedom. Everyone needs to give himself or herself to Jesus unconditionally to be a disciple, and in doing so, we find the path to life. But if we say, "This is who I am, and God must satisfy my needs," then we will create a new and alien faith.

What first prompted you to have an open debate with Vines?

To be perfectly clear, I've always been willing to have civil, public debates on any controversial issues of the faith that I'm focused on, which is why I've been debating rabbis for decades as a Jewish follower of Jesus. So, I've been open to debating Matthew or any other qualified representative of the "gay Christian" position for many years, and I'm pleased to have this opportunity through Moody Radio.

In fact, if Matthew feels that the one-hour radio format doesn't allow us sufficient time to plumb the issues in sufficient depth, as a follow up to this radio debate, I'd love to help set up a formal, multi-hour debate where he could be joined by an academic colleague like Dr. James Brownson and I would be joined by Dr. James White, and we could spend a few hours together, in public, and recorded for the world to see on YouTube.

I feel that events like this radio debate and other types of fair, moderated debates can only advance the cause of truth.

What do you want this debate to accomplish?

By God's grace, I want listeners to realize that there is zero scriptural support for the idea that God ever blesses or approves of committed, same-sex relationships, that homosexual practice is always sinful in His sight, that there is really no debate at all in term of what the Bible says. At the same time, I want listeners to realize how deeply God loves LGBT people, how Jesus shed the same blood for them and offers the same salvation to them, and how following Jesus unconditionally is the path to life and freedom.

From what you know, would you consider Vines a brother in Christ or an apostate? How does that effect the way you will interact with him?

Well, he is absolutely not representing the cause of Christ

and is actively engaged in deceiving others, which puts him in a very serious category scripturally, but I will reach out to him based on his profession and let God be his judge. Without a doubt, he denies the authority of the Word and does not have a high view of Jesus or the Bible—that can be easily demonstrated—but has he ever known the Lord or has he crossed that line of apostasy yet, only God knows right now.

Do you expect to be able to persuade Vines at all?

He's familiar with the arguments which means he has hardened his heart to them, but I'm absolutely praying that the Spirit will convict and point him to the truth and that, perhaps this debate will be the beginning of a brand new journey for him. That being said—and I do not mean this in a condescending way, since I respect Matthew as a serious, thinking young man—he's closer in age to my oldest granddaughter than to my youngest daughter. So of course, I have a tender place in my heart for him and want to help him really know the Lord and make Him known, thereby bringing freedom and salvation to many LGBT-identified people.