

# Reflecting on the Death of Progressive Christian Rachel Held Evans

Rachel Held Evans, wife, mother, blogger and influential Christian author, is dead at the age of 37. Although we never met, and despite our serious theological differences, I am truly saddened by her passing. It was just last month she was hospitalized with the flu, and that quickly, she is gone.

My ministry reached out to her on more than one occasion to dialogue about our differences, but without success. At no point, though, did I question Rachel's sincerity. That she came to very different conclusions than I (and other evangelicals) did, especially in terms of God's view of LGBT issues, was a cause of deep concern, given her influence. But I always felt she arrived at her (wrong) conclusions after wrestling with Scripture and interacting with people.

You might say to me, "Out of respect for her family and followers, now would be a good time to be quiet. We don't need to hear about your differences."

But that's not why I'm writing this article.

I believe what I believe, based on Scripture, and I will continue to preach and teach with conviction. That is not in question. And I will continue to warn and confront.

What is in question is how we respond to news of the tragic death of this young wife and mother who leaves behind a husband two children.

When I learned about Rachel's passing, I tweeted, "I had strong differences with some of the Christian expression of Rachel Held Evans but am truly saddened and shocked to hear of

her death at age of 37. May God comfort her husband and family.”

In response, one conservative Christian wrote, “How could you be sad? I pray for these kinds of things to happen.”

I tweeted back, “Those are ugly and dangerous prayers to pray. You might find yourself the victim of your own praying one day.”

He responded with, “1 Corinthians 5 says we judge the church. The lady was misleading the church, defiling it.”

I wrote, “Paul did not teach the Corinthians to pray for the death of sinning church members. He taught them to excommunicate them. (My last comment to you. May God give you the grace to see things from His perspective.)”

He continued to defend his position, citing other scriptures, but by then I had muted him.

Sadly, he was not alone in his attacks. As a progressive pastor tweeted to me, “I appreciate your irenic words and spirit. We’ve seen some really mean stuff from the Christian Right out here today. Peace and every blessing.”

That is why I wrote this article, because the way we judge others is the way that we will be judged. Do we really want to ask God to kill those with whom we differ? Are those the kinds of prayers we should be praying?

Again, my differences with Rachel Held Evans were serious and substantial (see [here](#) and [here](#)). And my differences with the aforementioned progressive pastor are even more serious and substantial. I believe he is in serious error, and I believe that he is leading his people astray on certain key issues.

At the same time, it’s not my role (or yours) to play God, and my prayer for those with whom I differ is not judgment and destruction. It is grace and mercy: “Father, lead them into

the truth. Show them their errors. And grant them the courage and the humility to follow You and Your Word wherever it leads, regardless of cost or consequence.”

Even if I am sure they are wrong, my prayer is not for the Lord to strike them down. God forbid! Rather, I pray that He will give them space to repent and change their views.

And I also pray for myself, “Father, show me my blind spots. Show me areas where I have misrepresented You in any way. And grant me the courage and the humility to follow You and Your Word wherever it leads, regardless of cost or consequence.”

Am I 100 percent sure about the foundations of my faith? Yes, 100 percent.

Am I willing to die on these convictional hills? Yes, without a doubt.

Truth is truth. It doesn't change with each new social fad or contemporary movement. It is not relative. It is absolute.

Consequently, if the Word of God is clear to me on a subject, especially after years of study and prayer, then to compromise my convictions would be a grave sin against my Lord.

But that does not give me the right to damn others to hell or to pray for their demise. To the contrary, I pray for mercy.

It's one thing if ISIS terrorists were about to wipe out a Christian village and we prayed, “Oh God, deliver Your people,” after which lightning struck from heaven, consuming all the terrorists.

It's another thing when a brother or sister in the faith begins to go down a path we feel is wrong or even dangerous.

That's why I warned this conservative Christian about praying down judgment on those whose views he deems theologically incorrect. In doing so, he might inadvertently pray judgment

on himself.

From all I could tell, Rachel's theological shifts were due to her desire to be consistent in her Christian faith. And she was open and honest about her struggles with the Bible and her faith.

I truly hope she in the presence of the Lord today with her questions fully resolved.

As for those of us who are still in the land of the living, if we can't be civil and gracious when a 37-year-old wife and mother passes away, we had better do some serious questioning of our own faith.