

Walking the Line Between Westboro Baptist and Rob Bell

Westboro Baptist Church has made a name for itself by protesting funerals, naming their website , and telling lots of different people that God hates them and is going to send them to hell. Rob Bell has made a name for himself by taking the traditional doctrine of hell and making it more palatable. In his highly controversial book *Love Wins*, Bell essentially said that everyone will end up in heaven, even those who reject Jesus Christ during this life. According to Bell, God's love will win over everything else.

Westboro Baptist commits the error of saying everybody and everything is wrong, evil and doomed to hell. Rob Bell makes the error of taking hard truth and bending it so it becomes more palatable. And the reality is, we too can fall into both errors.

When we see something in our culture that we don't like, such as homosexuality or cohabitation or Hollywood or the music industry or declining education standards, we can simply rail against it, declaring it to be evil and from the devil. Or we can fall off the other side of the horse and apologize for what the Bible has to say regarding a particular subject. Neither approach is helpful and neither approach will effectively win people to the Lord.

In his book *Center Church* Tim Keller says: "We must both enter the culture sympathetically and respectfully (similar to [mining] drilling) and confront the culture where it contradicts biblical truth (similar to blasting). If we simply 'blast' away—railing against the evils of culture—we are unlikely to gain a hearing among those we seek. Nothing we say to them will gain traction; we will be written off and dismissed. We may feel virtuous for being bold, but we will

have failed to honor the gospel by putting it in its most compelling form.

“On the other hand, if we simply ‘drill’—affirming and reflecting the culture and saying things that people find acceptable—we will rarely see anyone converted. In both cases we will fail to ‘move the boulder.’ We may feel virtuous for being sensitive and open-minded, but we will have failed to honor the gospel by letting it speak pointedly and prophetically.

This is SO important. If we want to reach people we must first relate to them sympathetically and respectfully. We must understand what makes them tick. What drives them. What motivates them to engage in a particular lifestyle. What resonates with them. It is only when we truly understand people and their deepest desires that we can present the gospel in its most compelling form. A gospel presentation to a skater should look different from a gospel presentation to an artist, actor, accountant or CEO. Each person sees life differently and yet the gospel addresses the deepest fears and desires of each person.

The most effective gospel presentations are those that are simultaneously respectful and confrontational. We should be respectful of the good things we see in a person. Skaters often value independence and freedom, which in its best form can be a reflection of God’s independence. Homosexuals often value community, which in its best form can be a reflection of our relational God. Artists value creativity, which in its best form reflects our creative God. We should be respectful when we see these things in other people.

But we must also be confrontational. The gospel confronts our independence, self-sufficiency, and idol worship. The gospel confronts us at the deepest levels. The gospel tells us that we desperately need a savior. If we are going to share the gospel effectively it isn’t enough to just affirm people. We

must also confront them.

By God's grace, let's grow in "drilling" and "blasting." Let's grow in our respect for others and our boldness in proclaiming the gospel. Let's pray that God would help us to share the gospel in its most compelling form.

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