

Controversial Teacher Rob Bell Endorses Same-Sex Marriage

Former megachurch leader Rob Bell has caused controversy again. In a recent stop on his book tour, he came out in support of same-sex marriage.

"I am for marriage," the best-selling author said Sunday at The Forum at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. "I am for fidelity. I am for love, whether it's a man and a woman, a woman and a woman, a man and a man. I think the ship has sailed and I think that the church needs to just ... this is the world that we are living in and we need to affirm people wherever they are."

The controversial former pastor and founder of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Mich., was replying to a question asking if he was in favor of "marriage equality." His comment reportedly received brief applause from the live audience.

He continued, saying that while it was fair to equate evangelicals with social conservatism in the past, that assumption is no longer true.

"I think we are witnessing the death of a particular subculture that doesn't work. I think there is a very narrow, politically intertwined, culturally ghettoized, evangelical subculture that was told, 'We're gonna change the thing,' and they haven't. And they actually have turned away lots of people.

"And I think that when you're in a part of a subculture that is dying, you make a lot more noise because it's very painful," he added. "You sort of die or you adapt. And if you adapt, it means you have to come face to face with some of the

ways we've talked about God, which don't actually shape people into more loving, compassionate people. And we have supported policies and ways of viewing the world that are actually destructive. And we've done it in the name of God and we need to repent."

When answering how one can negotiate the differences between truth and honesty while respecting and loving citizens throughout the world, Bell said: "The powerful revolutionary thing about Jesus' message is He says, 'What do you do with the people who aren't like you? What do you do with the other? What do you do with the person who is hardest to love?'

"That's the measure of a good religion," he continued. "You can love the people who are like you, that's kind of easy. What Jesus does is take the question and talks about fruit, he's interested in what you actually produce and that's a different discussion."

He added: "I think people are drawn to your message when they realize that you don't have an agenda and that you are actually interested in them and you do want to serve them. ... Serving actually does change the game."

Bell also reflected on his journey into ministry, founding Mars Hill Bible Church and theological crises he went through that often affected the congregation membership.

Bell founded the church in 1999. According to *The New Yorker*, Bell said he left Mars Hill Bible Church in "search for a more forgiving faith" after fallout with the congregation surrounding his previous book, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. The congregation lost 3,000 members over the controversy.

Love Wins has been largely criticized by evangelical leaders for challenging traditional teachings on a literal, eternal hell. His views on the exclusivity of Christ have also caused some to call him a Universalist.

When asked specifically about the book, which was a *New York Times* best-seller, Bell said he had been used to constant criticism, and eventually he blocked it out and focused on what he felt was his calling.

“When *Love Wins* came out ... I had gotten used to pretty much everywhere I would go in public, I would run into people who at some point were part of the church and left because they thought I was going off the rails. That was pretty much anytime I would leave the house, because it’s a small city. That was just a part of life,” he explained.

The Christian author concluded the forum by discussing his current projects and focus—primary of which is being a good husband to his wife and father to his three children.