

Joshua Harris: Christian Support of Trump Is 'Incredibly Damaging to Gospel, Church'

Former pastor and purity advocate Joshua Harris recently opened up about his views of Christians supporting President Donald Trump—and they weren't favorable.

He tells Mike Allen on HBO's *Axios* that he believes evangelicals have made a mistake by aligning with Trump.

"I think it's incredibly damaging to the gospel and to the church," he says. "... I don't think it's going to end well. And I think you look back at the Old Testament and the relationship between the prophets and really bad leaders and kings, and oftentimes it's not something you unwind because it's actually in the Scriptures presented as God's judgment on the false religion of the day."

When asked if he believed Trump-supporting Christians were due for a judgment, Harris responded: "I think it is the judgment. It's part of the judgment.

"... To have a leader like Trump, I think is in itself part of the indictment that this is the leader that you want and maybe deserve. That represents a lot of who you are."

Harris offers this advice to the church a little over two months after publicly renouncing his Christian faith.

"I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus," Harris said on July 26. "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."

In addition to renouncing his faith in Jesus, he also declared he had changed his prior traditional views on sexuality, marriage and gender.

"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," he says. "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."

Several days prior, he and his former wife, Shannon Bonne, announced they were separating after 19 years of marriage.

Harris rose to prominence in conservative Christian circles when he wrote his book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* in 1997 and, three years later, *Boy Meets Girl: Say Hello to Courtship*. In the books, he encouraged Christians to avoid the dating scene and instead pursue a group- and family-oriented approach he called courtship.

But in 2015, he stepped down as lead pastor from Covenant Life and became a brand and marketing strategist.

Last year, he wrote an official statement apologizing for the books. In 2018, Harris helped create a documentary called *I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, directed and produced by Jessica Van Der Wyngaard. In the film, Harris interviews people who say the books greatly hurt them as they dissect what they call the "purity culture" of conservative evangelical Christians.

About a month after Harris announced he was no longer a Christian, Exploration Films stopped distributing *I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye*.

Stephen Penn, spokesman for Exploration Films, says Harris was not transparent with the company about his faith while working on the film, according to Christian Newswire.

“Unfortunately, Josh did not tip off his film team partners of these surprising changes before his public post—nor how this would change our company’s distribution efforts of the film he had worked with us on to promote,” he says.

Exploration Films President Steve Greisen said: “Regular interactions occurred with Josh and the film team on a daily and weekly basis to coordinate our efforts as part of the agreement. Exploration Films just finished recording a podcast with Josh slated for later release, so these statements only days later caught us off guard and damaged our efforts together.”

John L. Cooper, frontman for the Christian rock band Skillet, offered some insight to Christians whose faith relies heavily on Christian influencers. In a Facebook post, he wrote:

“My conclusion for the church (all of us Christians): We must STOP making worship leaders and thought leaders or influencers or cool people or ‘relevant’ people the most influential people in Christendom. (And yes that includes people like me!) I’ve been saying for 20 years (and seemed probably quite judgmental to some of my peers) that we are in a dangerous place when the church is looking to 20 year old worship singers as our source of truth.

“... I implore you, please please in your search for relevancy for the gospel, let us NOT find creative ways to shape Gods word into the image of our culture by stifling inconvenient truths. But rather let us hold on even tighter to the anchor of the living Word of God. For He changes NOT. ‘The grass withers and the flowers fade away, but the word of our God stands forever’ (Isaiah 40:8).”