

Joshua Harris: 'I Am Not a Christian'

I Kissed Dating Goodbye author Joshua Harris announced today that he is not a Christian according to traditional definitions of Christianity. His announcement comes days after announcing he and his wife are separating.

"The information that was left out of our announcement is that I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus," Harris writes on Instagram. "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."

Several days ago, Harris and his wife, Shannon Bonne, announced they were separating after 19 years of marriage.

"In recent years, some significant changes have taken place in both of us," he and Shannon wrote on their respective Instagram accounts. "It is with sincere love for each other and understanding of our unique story as a couple that we are moving forward with this decision."

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.

Last year, he wrote an official statement apologizing for the books, saying he spent two years talking to people who said the books greatly hurt them. He stepped down as lead pastor from Covenant Life in 2015 and became a brand and marketing

strategist.

In his latest post about his faith, Harris also says he has learned that “no group has the market cornered on grace.” He describes the grace and kind words he has received after his divorce announcement, coming from Christians, atheists, evangelicals, “exvangelicals” (those who have abandoned their evangelical upbringing), heterosexual people and LGBTQ people.

“Of course there have also been strong words of rebuke from religious people,” Harris says. “While not always pleasant, I know they are seeking to love me. (There have also been spiteful, hateful comments that have angered and hurt me.)”

Harris says he regrets and even repents for his former “self-righteous, ... fear-based approach to life, the teaching of my books, my views of women in the church, and my approach to parenting to name a few.”

Now, Harris adds one more prominent regret: His beliefs on LGBT issues.

“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.”

Harris ended his announcement by addressing his Christian friends: “I am grateful for your prayers. Don’t take it personally if I don’t immediately return calls. I can’t join in your mourning. I don’t view this moment negatively. I feel very much alive, and awake, and surprisingly hopeful.”

Read the full post below:

[View this post on Instagram](#)

My heart is full of gratitude. I wish you could see all the messages people sent me after the announcement of my divorce. They are expressions of love though they are saddened or even strongly disapprove of the decision. ☹️ ☹️ I am learning that no group has the market cornered on grace. This week I've received grace from Christians, atheists, evangelicals, exvangelicals, straight people, LGBTQ people, and everyone in-between. Of course there have also been strong words of rebuke from religious people. While not always pleasant, I know they are seeking to love me. (There have also been spiteful, hateful comments that angered and hurt me.) ☹️ ☹️ The information that was left out of our announcement is that I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. 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.[] [] Martin Luther said that the entire life of believers should be repentance. There's beauty in that sentiment regardless of your view of God. I have lived in repentance for the past several years—repenting of my self-righteousness, my fear-based approach to life, the teaching of my books, my views of women in the church, and my approach to parenting to name a few. But I specifically want to add to this list now: 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. 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. I hope you can forgive me.[] [] To my Christians friends, I am grateful for your prayers. Don't take it personally if I don't immediately return calls. I can't join in your mourning. I don't view this moment negatively. I feel very much alive, and awake, and surprisingly hopeful. I believe with my sister Julian that, "All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

A post shared by Joshua Harris (@harrisjosh) on Jul 26, 2019 at 12:04pm PDT

In the last several years, a growing group has spoken out against Harris' former ideals on purity and courtship—and against the overall so-called purity culture that books like Harris' cultivated.

But cultural commentator Michael Brown says just because Harris walked away from his former beliefs doesn't mean they are outdated or unbiblical.

"And it certainly doesn't mean that we should give up our ideals and dreams about purity and marriage," he says. "Perish the thought."

On the contrary, Brown says, believers must use the Word of God alone to define their morals regarding sexuality: "Purity before marriage is still the will of God. It's still the wisest course to take. It's still the best way to avoid a host of problems and issues. And, speaking in general terms, as lived out over the years, I believe that those who abstain from sex before marriage will be happier than those who don't."