

# Rick Warren and the Hot Potato of the Decade

*Many Christians misjudged the California pastor after his recent interview with CNN's Larry King.*

My switchboard almost short-circuited last week after California pastor Rick Warren appeared on *Larry King Live* to discuss the hot potato issue of the decade—same-sex marriage. Some concerned Christians called or e-mailed immediately to tell me that Warren had, just in time for Easter, denied his faith in true Judas style. They even lifted a quote from Warren's April 6 interview with King to prove that the pastor of the largest church in our country no longer believes in evangelical morality.

People who had not even seen the broadcast were hyperventilating. "How can Rick Warren do this to us?" they asked me. I decided to stay calm, breathe deeply and actually watch the broadcast instead of believing some slanted conservative blogs. (Note to readers: In this amazing age of TiVo and YouTube, you can actually check the facts easily before jumping to conclusions.)

**"It's time for American Christians to develop steel backbones, unwavering commitment to Scripture and tough skin to handle the brutal battle ahead."**

After watching the interview, I realized that somebody pulled a false alarm. Warren has not changed his views on the Bible or Christian sexuality. He may have fumbled a few sound bites

in the interview, but he does not deserve the flogging he got from some churchgoers who haven't trusted Warren since he said the invocation at Obama's inauguration in January. Let's look at the facts:

First, Warren stood firmly on the side of biblical morality during the last election season. He told Larry King that he sent a note to all members of Saddleback Church asking them to support Proposition 8, the ballot issue that stopped same-sex marriage in California. He told his church: "We should not let two percent of the population change the definition of marriage that has been supported by every single culture and religion for 5,000 years. ... I urge you to support Proposition 8 and pass the word on."

Second, Warren restated this position during the Larry King broadcast. The pastor told the CNN audience that he asked his church to support Proposition 8 because it was the right thing to do. "I don't think the definition of marriage should be changed," Warren said, even though he tried to be diplomatic by adding that he is neither an anti-gay activist nor an anti-gay marriage activist.

When a caller complained that Warren's position was offensive, he responded firmly: "Well it's not my opinion. As a pastor I just have to do what the Bible tells me to do. The way I interpret it, I believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. And that's good for society. That doesn't mean people don't love each other. It just means that marriage is for a man and a woman."

Third, Warren's mention of an "apology" to gay activists was not a retraction of his previous support of Proposition 8 or a reversal of his views on homosexuality. According to Kristin Cole, Saddleback's media representative, Warren's apology was delivered to some gay activists who were offended when he "unintentionally" compared gay sex relationships to incest or child molestation in an interview with BeliefNet, an Internet

journal. Cole added: "Throughout his pastoral ministry spanning nearly 30 years, Dr. Warren has remained committed to the biblical definition of marriage as between one man and one woman, for life—a position held by most fellow evangelical pastors."

Many people who heard the vague comment about an apology may assume Warren has flip-flopped on this issue when that is not the case. I'm sure Warren wishes he could go back and edit his words, but that's never possible on live television. The fact that those few bumbling sentences were so misunderstood by Christians should challenge him to be absolutely clear the next time he takes the national microphone.

Was Warren waffling? Was he caving in to pressure? I don't know what's in his heart, but I think we should pray for the man, not attack him. Let's remember that he is arguably the most high-profile pastor in our country, and he was vilified by activists and politicians after the 2008 election because he stood for biblical morality. After Obama picked him to pray on the steps of the Capitol for his swearing-in ceremony, Massachusetts senator Barney Frank and a chorus of gay-rights leaders demanded that Obama pick someone who represents their religious views.

Then journalist Leah McElrath Renna told *Newsweek* that the selection of Warren to pray at the inauguration "amounts to an act of spiritual violence against gay and lesbian Americans" because he believes the Bible. It's obvious that powerful forces are at work in Washington and in the mainstream media to redefine our vocabulary, manipulate people's words and push godly people into compromise. We cannot bow our knee to Baal in an hour when our nation needs fearless voices that will stand for truth.

This whole fiasco should put every one of us on alert. Are you ready to articulate your views publicly on this subject? Would you do a better job than Warren did if Larry King pitched this

hot potato in your direction? Would you take hold of it, remain gracious and reflect the attitude of Jesus while giving a firm, biblical response? It's time for American Christians to develop steel backbones, unwavering commitment to Scripture and tough skin to handle the brutal battle ahead.

J. Lee Grady is editor of *Charisma*.