

Accommodating the Culture

The author of *Sex God* endorses same-sex marriages [1]

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” James 4:4, KJV

As one who has followed Rob Bell’s career for almost a decade, from the time he was the youth pastor at the church I grew up in, Calvary Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and then as the founding pastor of the Mars Hill Bible Church in suburban Grandville of the same city, I wondered when he, as he seemed so bent on being culturally relevant, would finally out what he really thought about same sex marriages.[2] Well, now he has, and not surprisingly, at least to me (I spotted him as a false teacher a decade ago, for false teachers always seem engaged to the culture more than to Christ), he recently endorsed same sex marriages in the friendly confines in of all places, the liberal Grace Cathedral in San Francisco during a forum held Sunday, March 17, 2013.[3] In this endorsement he has taken cue from political leaders (the President comes to mind, as also recently, Hillary Clinton), for they too are ever testing the political winds of fortune to see which direction they’re a’ blowing. When asked about his position on homosexual marriage, Bell stated:

I am for marriage. I am for fidelity. I am for love, whether it’s a man and woman, a woman and a woman, a man and a man. I think the ship has sailed and I think the church needs—I think this is the world we are living in and we need to affirm people wherever they are.[4]

Biblical Integrity versus . . .

Now in addressing Bell’s endorsement, so to speak, I want to make my position on homosexuality clear, and do so by way of a story. Years ago in my first pastoral ministry during the mid-1970s, in of all places, Grand Rapids, I was approached by a church member regarding some men who had just moved into the neighborhood, men who at least from outward appearances, were living together in a homosexual relationship. Bob (not his real name) approached me about the same-sex couple who lived in the neighborhood. (Actually, it was on the opposite side of the street I lived on, but several houses away.) He wondered what I thought about it and what I, as a pastor, was going to do about it. He was a burly man and he was angry about the same-sex couple living in the neighborhood. Calmly, I addressed him regarding his concern. I said, “Bob, Let me ask you a question. You work in a factory, don’t you?” “Yes,” he answered. “Then let me ask you another question,” I continued. “Do you know men you work with who commit adultery and are unfaithful to their wives?” Again he answered, “Yes.” Then I proceeded, “Bob, do you get as upset with the adulterers you work with as the gay guys down the street?” He pondered, and honestly responded that he didn’t. Then I remarked to him, “Well, you should, because in the Bible God always uses the sin of adultery, not homosexuality, to describe people who are unfaithful to Him.” (See Jeremiah 5:7-9; 9:2; 23:10; Hosea 4:2;

James 4:4.) In short, though I believe homosexuality is sin, it is no worse a sin than adultery, nor for that matter, any other of the nine vices listed by the apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth (an ancient city where homosexuality was common), that if habitually practiced, would disqualify the practitioners from inheriting the kingdom of God (i.e., “fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, swindlers,” 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, NASB). As do the other sins listed, habitual homosexual practice disqualifies people from God’s kingdom, and no amount of linguistic and interpretive sugarcoating can make it anything less the sin that it is (See Genesis 19:5; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Timothy 1:10).[5]

Cultural Relevancy

This aside, what concerns me is not Bell’s endorsement (I always had this gut instinct he one day would do so.), but rather the reasons he explicates for concluding that same-sex marriages are okay (“I’m okay, you’re okay!” Remember that quasi-psychological dictum?). Bell, I am sure, knows the plain language of the Bible (as has been pointed out in footnote 5) and Scripture’s meaning regarding this sexual issue. Yet for the sake of getting along with the culture, he chooses, like the editors of the *The Queen James Bible: a Gay Bible* (QJB), to ignore and deny the meaning of the plain biblical language and the contexts in which the language occurs, and all this with a view toward making Christianity culturally relevant.[6] Note the “relevancy motif” in Bell’s answer to the question posed to him at the Grace Cathedral forum about what he thought the future holds for the Evangelical Church. You should note in his answer how he obfuscates as he accommodates as he communicates. His answer [bracketed comments added]:

I think we are witnessing the death of a particular subculture that doesn’t work [pragmatism]. 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 [Christian Dominionism]. And they actually have turned away lots of people [culture wars]. 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. You sort of die or you adapt [accommodate]. And if you adapt [accommodate], 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 [Our talk about God shapes people? Oh, really? I thought that was the Word and the Spirit’s work.]. And we have supported policies and ways of viewing the world that are actually destructive [Sin destroys, at least that’s what the Bible says.]. And we’ve done it in the name of God [A kind of Christian Jihad] and we need to repent [Any controversy surrounding homosexuality is our fault.].[7]

As regards Bell’s ending caveat, such feigned repentance, of course, needs itself to be repented of. Yet Bell’s words serve notice of his accommodation of, if not outright capitulation to, the culture. And this is ominous. As noted in my book *Church on the Rise* (And I don’t like quoting myself; in fact, this is the first time I recollect doing so):

The face of evangelicalism has changed, but so too, I believe, has the movement’s heart. It is my view that in evangelicalism’s attempt to keep up with a debased and

debasing culture, there will come a reckoning when the “relevant” church will be irrelevant to Christ. That will be a dangerous condition to be in, and for that matter, we may already be in that state as the ministry of the Word is under siege.[8]

It’s my view that, if Bell’s views are any indication of what might be lying beneath the surface among the citizens of the evangelical nation, we have now arrived at that point—relevant to the culture (wag the dog), but irrelevant to Christ. Seems to me . . . Scripture is adamant against compromising the faith, either in beliefs or behavior, with the culture. In case we have forgotten, the Bible calls it “worldliness,” and for reason that the majority within evangelicalism have only been exposed to the dumbed-down brand of “seeker-sensitive, audience-driven, user-friendly” religion being peddled by mega-church Christianity, they have forgotten the word “worldliness” and its meaning. But Francis Schaeffer explained how compromise with worldly values works. He analyzes:

First one starts questioning, based upon what the world about us is saying, then looks at Scripture, then theology, then scientific study—until finally what the Scriptures teach is completely subjected to whatever view is currently accepted by the world.[9]

Pointedly, the Apostle John warns against such compromise, telling his readers that whoever allows the culture’s value system to adulterate their Christian faith via the lust of the eyes (materialism), the lust of the flesh (eroticism) and the pride of life (egoism), does not, despite whatever passion might be ginned up in worship celebrations, does not love the Father—let it be repeated, **does NOT love the Father!** (1 John 2:15-17) James tells us that the Christians’ snuggling-up with the pagan culture (And there’s no question that we have become a pagan nation.) is hostility toward God (James 4:4). That’s right, **HOSTILITY toward God!** Then in the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor, the living and ascended Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church, reserves His severest strictures for compromised congregations. Read it (Revelation 2:1-3:22). Yet despite all these warnings, and Yahweh’s warnings to Israel not to allow the surrounding culture to “Canaanize” them, the contemporary church continues to play around with, and in many instances commit harlotry with, the pagan mores of the culture.[10] Decades ago Francis Schaeffer noted the nascent compromise already at work amongst the “neo-evangelicals.” In *The Great Evangelical Disaster* he wrote [bracket comments added]:

Accommodation, accommodation. How the mindset of accommodation grows and expands. . . . For the evangelical accommodation to the world of our age represents the removal of the last barrier against the breakdown of our culture. And with the final removal of this barrier will come social chaos and the rise of authoritarianism [An American Reich and Fuhrer?] in some form to restore order.[11]

Schaeffer then adds, “To accommodate to the world spirit about us in our age is the most gross form of worldliness in the proper definition of the word.”[12]

In that the church, including many former evangelicals, has become “culturized,” I suspect that

Bell's endorsement of same-sex marriages is just but one of others that will follow. The "Dominees" are just beginning to fall.[13] Other emergent-evangelical pastors and religious leaders will soon follow Bell's suit.

Reformation by Subjugation

Today's evangelical mass—which is shrinking—has utterly failed to influence our paganizing culture. The Evangelical-Dominionists have tried. Their tactic has been one of *reformation by subjugation*—Christian values must be asserted by conquering the Seven Mountains of the culture—"the stick". But if the last election has shown us anything, it's that Dominionism is viewed by non-Christians—and the number is growing—as intruding upon their turf.[14] The evidence of cultural depravity is all around us because it still remains in us.

Reformation by Accommodation

So now Evangelical-Emergents like Rob Bell are trying to get a hearing from the culture by extending "the carrot". In the name of being relevant, they're now trying to achieve *reformation by accommodation*. Bell so much as said so at the Grace Cathedral forum. But neither will this cultural overture work. The church cannot influence the world when it's under the influence of the world. The resulting mess is that sinners are left "having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12).

Reformation by Regeneration

Is it not time to go back to God's formula; to the biblical basic of evangelizing to achieve *reformation by regeneration*? Is not that what the word evangelical means, one who believes in the power of the Gospel to change a person's life, something neither dominionist legalism nor emergent libertarianism can do? Christian laws, however valuable they might be to live under for the common good, do not in the end, make Christians. Neither will the denial of law serve as a basis for the common good. Who wants to live in anarchy, which is where this society and nation, absent any absolutes, are headed. A long time ago Jesus told a man that in order to see the kingdom of God persons must be born from the outside in, or from the upside down. Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to see the kingdom of God, to experience the reign of God in his heart, that he had to be born from above (John 3:3, 7). If God truly rules within us then He can rule among us. But His rule will come neither by Christian subjugation nor accommodation. In part, God's reign will only arrive as persons are regenerated by the Holy Spirit (In popular parlance, it's called being "born again."). And then if enough persons experience God's rule inside them, their number might reach critical mass and society will experience relative transformation, though that will still fall far short of the one that will accompany Christ when He comes to establish His kingdom in the world (See Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-9; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 20:4-6). Only as people's constitutions are changed will change occur around us. That's the message of the biblical prophets; that is of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

A truly compassionate response to those in sinful bondage is to tell them about Jesus Christ and His salvation. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

"The word of the truth of the Gospel [has] come unto you, as it is in all the world;

and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth . . .” Colossians 1:5-6, KJV

ENDNOTES

[1] Rob Bell, *Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). In this book, Bell makes a couple of statements indicating that his **pan-spiritual** worldview is **pan-sexual**. “We reflect what God is like and who God is. A divine spark resides in every single human being.” (19) “Sex carries within it the power of Life . . . Something divine.” (197)

A little bio about Bell: In 2011, Time magazine named Bell to its list of the 100 Most Influential People in the World. The “hip” Bell has authored many books, in the past published by the evangelical Zondervan Publishing House, with other books on the horizon—What We Talk About When We Talk About God and Love Wins: For Teens. In January 2012, Bell left Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan. It may be surmised that the resignation resulted from his big-hit book Love Wins, in which he postulates that there’s no hell and everybody’s, even the despots in history, going to heaven. See my review of it referenced in the next footnote, footnote 2 below.

[2] See Larry DeBruyn, “Love Loses: A Review of Love Wins by Rob Bell,” May 9, 2011 (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2011/05/09/love-loses/#more-1774>) and “Everything is not Spiritual: A Critique of Rob Bell’s Pan-Spiritual Worldview,” February 12, 2011 (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2011/02/12/everything-is-not-spiritual/#more-1567>), both of which available online at the Guarding His Flock Ministries website. I have also discussed Bell in my books *Church on the Rise: Why I am not a “Purpose-Driven” Pastor* (2007, pages 73-75) and *Unshackled: Breaking Away from Seductive Spirituality* (2009, pages 97-114). Both books are available from Discernment Ministries (<http://home.etcable.net/hestervanboven/index.htm>) P.O. Box 520, Canton, TX 75103, Tel: 903 567-6423.

[3] “Rob Bell Supports Same-Sex Marriage,” March 19, 2013, www.woodtv.com (http://www.woodtv.com/dpp/news/local/kent_county/Rob-Bell-supports-same-sex-marriage). The church is a member of the Episcopal Diocese of California.

[4] Ibid.

[5] The two words listed which denote same-sex sexual activity in the KJV are “effeminate” (Greek, *malakos*) and “abusers of themselves with mankind” (Greek, *arsenokoites*). The former word (*malakos*) is variously translated “boy prostitutes” (NAB, NLT, NRSV); “effeminate” (NASB, ASV); “male prostitutes” (NIV); and “homosexuals” (NKJV). The latter word (*arsenokoites*) is variously translated “abusers of themselves with men” (ASV); “abusers of themselves with mankind” (KJV); “practicing homosexuals” (NAB); “homosexuals” (NASB, NLT); “homosexual offenders” (NIV); and “sodomites” (NKJV, NRSV).

Of the two Greek words and as an adjective *malakos* carries the meaning of “soft,” and was used in the ancient world to describe “catamites, men and boys who allow themselves to be misused sexually.” See Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986): 226. The latter word *arsenokoites* is a compound word consisting of “male” (*arsane*) and “bed” (*koite*). The resultant meaning is “one who lies with a male as with a female, a sodomite.” See Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, Reprint of 1889 Edition): 75.

In his excellent commentary and after consulting numerous ancient sources, Garland concludes that the former word (*malakos*) refers to “those males who are penetrated sexually by males,” and the latter word (*arsenokoites*) to “those males who sexually penetrate males.” See David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2003): 214. The point is that contra *The Queen James Bible*, the words the Apostle lists in tandem and contextually associates with “fornicators, idolaters, and adulterers” in his partial list of sins, can only refer to *inter-masculine sexual activity*, whether it be pederasty (homosexual intercourse with a boy, which was common in the ancient Greco-Roman civilization) or between two consenting adult males. And only by linguistic contortion can the plain meaning of Scripture be altered on this point.

[6] One promo states that the QJB, with its rainbow cross on the cover, “has sought to resolve interpretive ambiguity in the Bible as it pertains to homosexuality by editing those eight verses in a way that makes homophobic interpretations impossible.” Then the promo exhorts: “You can’t choose your sexuality, but you can choose Jesus. Now you can choose a Bible, too.” See “A Gay Bible,” (<http://queenjamesbible.com/>). Under Editor’s Notes, the translators cover the verses they have changed and provide their “interpretations” for their having done so.

[7] Emphasis added. “Rob Bell Supports Same-Sex Marriage,”

[8] Larry DeBruyn, *Church on the Rise: Why I am not a “Purpose Driven” Pastor* (Indianapolis, IN: Moeller Printing Company, 2007): 10.

[9] Francis A. Schaeffer, “The Great Evangelical Disaster,” *The Complete Works of Francis A Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, Volume 4, Second Edition (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985): 398.

[10] Though disavowing his theology, Richard Quebedeaux noted the infiltration of worldliness into evangelicalism through its leaders. See his *The Worldly Evangelicals: America’s Born Again Christians—and where They’re Headed* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978).

[11] Schaeffer, “Evangelical Disaster,” 401. Erwin Lutzer traces the history of the majority-accommodating church during the rise of Hitler and the Reich. The characteristics look eerily familiar. See Erwin W. Lutzer, *Hitler’s Cross: the Revealing Story of How the Cross of Christ was Used as a Symbol of the Nazi Agenda* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995): 101-156.

[12] Ibid. 402.

[13] “Dominee” is a Dutch word referring to a Protestant clergyman.

[14] See Pastor Larry DeBruyn, “Dominionism’s Fatal Flaw: The Depravity of Humanity, Including ‘Us’,” *Herescope*, April 13, 2010 (<http://herescope.blogspot.com/2010/04/dominionisms-fatal-flaw.html>).