

A review of, Love Wins, by Rob Bell
May 11, 2011
Jeremy Vance

In the preface of his book, Rob Bell states why he wrote it, "I've written this book for all those, everywhere, who have heard some version of the Jesus story that cause their pulse rate to rise, their stomach to churn, and their heart to utter those resolute words, "I would never be a part of that.""¹

I appreciated that Rob Bell was not afraid to think outside the box. I appreciated that he was willing to stretch the envelope when it comes to our understanding of Scripture. However, after reading his book, Love Wins, I can only say that his conclusions to "heaven, hell, and the fate of every person who ever lived,"² strayed away from what the Bible says clearly.

The opening page of chapter one caught my attention when Mr. Bell challenged someone's view that Mahatma Gandhi was in hell, saying, "Really? Gandhi's in hell? He is? We have confirmation of this? Somebody knows this? Without a doubt? And that somebody decided to take on the responsibility of letting the rest of us know?"³ He went on to say,

Of all the billions of people who have ever lived, will only a select number "make it to a better place" and every single other person suffer in torment and punishment forever? Is this acceptable to God? Has God created millions of people over tens of thousands of years who are going to spend eternity in anguish? Can God do this, or even allow this, and still claim to be a loving God?⁴

However, I kept turning the pages waiting for pastor Bell to defend his hinting through the questions that God didn't send Gandhi to hell; or at least clarify what he was trying to say. In his desire (in my opinion) to be edgy and somewhat poetic there was an endless rambling of questions and challenges and stories of people who have struggled with the fundamental traditional Judeo-Christian view of who Jesus is and how people will end up in eternity with him, without clear-cut answers or opinions given.

Finally, challenging the thought that it is only in this life that we get to say "yes" or "no" to Jesus, Rob Bell stated his position: he held out the possibility that people get a "second chance" if they did not believe in Jesus in this lifetime, saying,

At the heart of this perspective is the belief that, given enough time, everybody will turn to God and find themselves in the joy and peace of God's presence. The love of God will melt every hard heart and even the most "depraved sinners" will eventually give up their resistance and turn to God.⁵

Rob Bell just cannot imagine that our loving God would send countless billions of people to never ending punishment. He minimized—dare I say eliminated—the justice of God against our sin. The Bible teaches that the love of God and the characteristic of His judgment are not in tension. God loves the wicked and finds no pleasure in their eternal state away from Him (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11). Those who, throughout their

¹ Page viii, in the preface.

² part of the subtitle.

³ 1-2.

⁴ 2.

⁵ 107. This was after Rob suggested that if people continued to reject God there would be an ebbing away to the point of a complete removal of the image of God from who we are as human beings. Therefore, some people would become "in essence "formerly human" or "post-human" or even "ex-human?" (page 106). This would be a form of annihilationism (where people would cease to exist).

lives want God to leave them alone, God allows them to have their way. "Hell, the absence of God, is God's simply giving man at last what he has always asked for. It is not God, but man's own choice that sends man to hell."⁶

In handling a passage related to Jesus being the only way to come to the Father (John 14:6), Rob Bell said,

What he doesn't say is how, or when, or in what manner the mechanism functions that gets people to God through him. He doesn't even state that those coming to the Father through him will even know that they are coming exclusively through him. He simply claims that whatever God is doing in the world to know and redeem and love and restore the world is happening through him.⁷

He goes on to say that there is both exclusivity and inclusivity in understanding salvation. What I gather he means is that Jesus came to be the way to God the Father and in that there is exclusivity, however, at the same time he "holds tightly to the assumption that the all-embracing, saving love of this particular Jesus the Christ will of course include all sorts of unexpected people from across the cultural spectrum."⁸

Immediately following that statement he says these words:

As soon as the door is opened to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baptists from Cleveland, many Christians become very uneasy, saying that then Jesus doesn't matter anymore, the cross is irrelevant, it doesn't matter what you believe, and so forth.

Not true.

Absolutely, unequivocally, unalterably not true.

What Jesus does is declare that he,
and he alone,
is saving everybody.

And then he leaves the doorway, way open. Creating all sorts of possibilities. He is as narrow as himself and as wide as the universe.⁹

From what I can gather, trying to sift through Rob Bell's inability to make a point-blank statement of his view of eschatology, is that he does hold to a Universalists view of salvation (i.e. that everyone will be saved) for those who continue to bear the image of God. Even if it takes a long, long time after they have died, God's love will eventually woo them to himself. Rob Bell avoided some key passages that indicate that the unrighteous will spend an eternity in a literal place of torment (cf. a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth—Matt. 13:42, 50; being cast into an eternal fire—Matt. 25:41, 46; cast away from the face of God—2 Thess. 1:6-10; a place of torment—Rev. 14:9-11; this is called the second death—Rev. 21:8).

I found nothing in his book that spoke of the ugliness and depravity of our sin, and how it had to be atoned for through the horrific sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 9:1-28). He said nothing about the predestination of some to eternal life (Rom. 9-11). He really did not highlight any passages relating to becoming adopted children of God through faith in Jesus alone (cf. John 1:12; Rom. 8:15; Eph. 1:5). 1 John 5:11-12 seems to sum up well what Rob Bell missed, "¹¹ And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."

⁶ Erickson, Millard J., *Christian Theology*, (Backer Book House Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1985), 432.

⁷ 154.

⁸ 155.

⁹ 155.