

Love Wins, by Rob Bell

[by Matt Slick](#)

<http://carm.org/love-wins>

Love Wins, the book by Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Michigan, caused a firestorm within Christianity when it was released, and rightfully so. It is full of the false teaching of universalism - the idea that everyone will be saved. As an apologist, I had to read it. So I did.

It took me a while to plod through the pages of a question-after-question-approach that had no real answers, contained direct contradicts to scripture, and essentially reconstructed God into a more palatable, kinder, gentler, Being – something more suitable for the self-centered appetites of the masses.

It is obvious to me from reading the book that Rob Bell denies eternal damnation, and in order to make the unpleasant biblical truth go away, he ignores important scriptures and misrepresents the Majesty and Holiness of God as he sacrifices it at the altar of “love,” a love that is stripped of righteousness and justice. Therefore, *Love Wins* is a feel-good message that fits right in to the current trend of theological fluff pieces offered by so many not-quite-biblical preachers of today.

There is so much wrong in the book that it would take another book to adequately address the numerous errors. However, since I don't have the time to do that, I have selected representative quotes to address. Let's get started.

He says in the preface,

"A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better.... This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus's message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear."

Before even getting to the first chapter, Rob Bell contradicts Jesus. Consider these words from Christ.

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it, 14 For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it," ([Matt. 7:13-14](#)).

I can only conclude that Rob Bell thinks the words of Christ are “misguided and toxic.” After all, Jesus said the very thing that Bell condemns.

There is no excuse for this incredible blunder on Rob Bell's part - and we aren't even in chapter one yet! Anyway, as the TV pitch man says, "But wait, there's more!"

When we get to pages two and three of his book we find this quote:

"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?...Does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite, eternal torment for things they did in their few finite years of life? This doesn't just raise disturbing questions about God; it raises questions about the beliefs themselves...If there are only a select few who go to heaven, which is more terrifying to fathom: the billions who burn forever or of the few who escaped this fate?... What kind of faith is that? Or, more important: what kind of God is that?"

Bell goes on to make comments without answering the questions he raises. He leaves a negative taste in your mouth, and then asks emotionally laden questions before giving you something else to chew on. He does this repeatedly in his book. He is subtly leading the reader to conclude, in contradiction to what Jesus said in [Matt. 7:13-14](#), that the teaching that a majority of people will go to hell is “misguided and toxic.”

Rob doesn't answer the questions he raises. I'll do it for him. “What kind of faith is that?” It is faith in the truth of God's word. “What kind of God is that?” It's the God of the Bible. It is the God of Christ who taught the truth.

Sure, people want to hear about the love of God. Who doesn't? But that is not all that God is. He's also righteous, holy, and just, and people will be judged for their sin and we Christians should be busy presenting the saving gospel to everyone. What Rob Bell does in his book is reconstruct God into a more palatable version that will make people feel good not only about the Divine Holy One, but also about their own destiny.

Check this out. At the bottom of page three Bell recounts a short dialogue about an atheist who died and had no hope of salvation. Bell then asks, "Is that the Christian message? 'No hope'? Is that what Jesus offers the world?"

Obviously, first of all, our hope is in Christ. Second, Rob Bell needs to be informed that if anyone, atheists included, reject Christ, they will face the eternal judgment of God. After all, Jesus said in [John 8:24](#), "Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins." Bell implies that atheists who reject the truth of Christ have an afterlife "hope." Consider what he says on page 106.

"In a letter Martin Luther, one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, wrote to Hans von Rechenberg in 1522 about the possibility that people could turn to God after death, asking: 'who would doubt God's ability to do that?' Again, a good question. And so space is created in this 'who would doubt God's ability to do that?' perspective for all kinds of people -- fifteen-year-old atheists, people from other religions, and people who rejected Jesus because the only Jesus they ever saw was an oppressive figure who did anything but show God's love."

This is an extremely dangerous teaching since atheists, and other unbelievers, who hear this message can be lulled into a false sense of security and not worry about receiving Christ in this life - because they are being taught they will have a chance to do so in the next. I know for a fact this occurs, because in my many discussions with atheists and their interactions with universalists in the CARM discussion forums, this is exactly what has happened.

He continues in his pro-universalist stance. On page 107 he references Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Eusebius who believed in universalism. On page 155 he says, "What Jesus does is declare that he and he alone is saving everybody." Again, Rob Bell, according to his book, is teaching universalism.

Furthermore, for Bell, hell is not an eternal place of torment. Consider this quote:

"In a good number of English translations of the Bible, the phrase '*aion of kolazo*' gets translated as 'eternal punishment,' which many read to mean 'punishment forever,' as in never going to end. But 'forever' is not really a category the biblical writers used." [Italics in the original] (pp. 91-92)

Rob Bell hasn't done his homework. In [Matt. 25:46](#) (which is what he is referencing), the words "eternal punishment" are *kolasin aionion*. The verse says:

"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life," ([Matt. 25:46](#)).

Remember, Bell said "forever is not really a category the biblical writers used." If that is true, then when Jesus said the unrighteous "go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous go into eternal life," we must conclude that Jesus did not really mean that there is eternal life because, according to Bell, forever is not a category the biblical writers used. I guess eternal life isn't forever, according to Bell's reasoning. Do you see the problem?

Unfortunately, Bell's lack of critical thinking and sufficient biblical examination is repeated throughout his make-you-feel-good-about-God writing.

Rob seems to reject the idea of eternal suffering when he says that "...no one can resist God's pursuit forever, because God's love will eventually melt even the hardest of hearts," (page 108). Immediately after on the same page he says,

"Could God say to someone truly humbled, broken, and desperate for reconciliation, 'Sorry, too late'? Many have refused to accept the scenario in which somebody is pounding on the door, apologizing, repenting, and asking God to be let in, only to hear God say through the keyhole: 'Door's locked. Sorry. If you had been here earlier, I could have done something. But now, it's too late,'" (Page 108.)

Bell's sentiment is just plain unbiblical. Will the door be locked? Yes it will! Consider what Jesus said in [Matt. 25:1-13](#)

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and *began* to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet *him*.' 7 Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 "But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you *too*; go instead to the dealers and buy *some* for yourselves.' 10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."

Remember, Bell denies eternal punishment with implied ridicule when he says, "Door's locked. Sorry. If you had been here earlier, I could have done something. But now, it's too late." Yet, in direct contradiction to Rob Bell, Jesus said, "and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you,'" ([Matt. 25:10-12](#)).

Let me imitate Bell's style of writing for a moment and ask questions without answering them. "How can Rob Bell miss so blatant a point in Christ's teaching?" "Did he just overlook it?" "Did he purposely ignore the words of Christ?" "Is his omission just gross carelessness?" "Does he not know the Bible very well?" "What kind of a pastor is he who would contradict the very words of Christ?"

I leave it to you to supply your own answers, but before we end this, let's take a look at a couple more things from his book.

On Page 75 he says,

"God is doing a new work through Jesus, calling all people to human solidarity. Everybody is a brother, a sister, equals, children of the God who shows no favoritism."

There are two problems here. First, what is this "new work"? Isn't the same old work of God saving people through the preaching and teaching of the gospel message of Christ's sacrifice good enough, or does there need to be something new? Is this "something new" consistent with what is already revealed in scripture? If so, why is it new? If it isn't consistent with scripture, why should we consider it?

Second, we are not all God's children. [John 1:12](#) says, "but as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." The Bible says that in order for people to become children of God, we must receive Christ. This means that all people are **not** already children of God.

Let me tackle one more thing I found worth mentioning. On page 36 he says,

"This participation is important, because Jesus and the prophets lived with an awareness that God has been looking for partners since the beginning, people who will take seriously the divine responsibility to care for the earth and each other in loving, sustainable ways."

And again on page 178,

"This God whom Jesus spoke of has always been looking for partners, people who are passionate about participating in the ongoing creation of the world."

Really? God is looking for partners? The problem with phrasing it like this is the implication of equality. Partnering is fine for things like marriage, where my wife and I partner in raising our children. It is great for business where two partners work side by side to get something done.

But, God doesn't need partners. He is carrying out his sovereign will and he is calling his people to love, who will glorify him through the work of Christ who died on the cross so he could give us eternal life and save us from eternal damnation. See [1 Cor. 15:1-4](#); [1 Pet. 2:24](#); [John 3:16](#). Furthermore, there is absolutely no equality between God and ourselves. As one of my seminary professors once said, "There is a God. You are not him."

To me it is obvious. Bell is not a competent theologian and he should not be writing books that deal with serious theological issues. Reading through his work is an exercise in frustration and heartache, especially when you realize how many people are being influenced by his liberal, unbiblical teaching about hell and universal salvation. Sure, the message sounds good, but it isn't biblically true.

Would I recommend the book? Not at all! But then again, maybe I would if you are into researching bad teaching styles that use scripture to support an agenda that promotes faulty conclusions while tickling the ears of those who don't really know what the Bible is teaching. If that's the case, then it's great.