

HELL'S BELL

A response to the book *Love Wins*, by Rob Bell.

(www.hellsbell.net)

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Preface

The Growing Few of Us

To begin with,
a bit about this critique.

First, I believe the truth about Jesus Christ is first and foremost about the glory of God and His love for the world. It is a love that rescues men from perishing in their sins and gives them eternal life at the cost of the suffering and death of God's only Son. This love and truth of God in Jesus Christ is so wide, so deep, so contrary to the ways of this world that it is foolishness to those who are perishing but life to those who believe. This love is so vast, so far reaching, so encompassing that it can save anyone, anywhere, no matter what they've done in their past. This God of love is ready and willing to forgive and accept into His eternal family all who turn to Him and put their faith in His only Son - Jesus Christ.

That's the story (at least part of it anyway).
"For God so loved the world,
that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whosoever believes in Him should not perish,
but have everlasting life."
That is why Jesus came.
That is His message.
That is where life is found.

Yet today, the world is ever growing with teachers who love to tell other stories. Love stories. Fictional stories. Like bedtime stories. Stories that make you feel good and leave you with warm fuzzies. Stories that aren't actually true but do draw from THE true story. Stories that are:

Not true,
Not black.
Not white.
Just grey.
Open to the imagination,
and interpretation.
Having space for additions,
for expansion,
for new interpretations.

Stories that avoid those old, outdated, archaic, troubling, divisive words like:

Right.
Wrong.
Truth.
Absolute truth.
Factual history,
and the like.

Specifically stories that have to do with the “fate of every person who ever lived.”

In the words of Rob Bell:

There are a growing number of us who have become acutely aware that Jesus’s story has been hijacked by a number of other stories, stories Jesus isn’t interested in telling, because they have nothing to do with what he came to do.

As for that statement, I agree with Rob Bell.

The Jesus Story.
Hijacked.
In the name of Love.

I’ve written this critique for all those, everywhere, who have just recently read Love Wins – a version of the Jesus story that is not found in their Bible – for those who are considering reading the story called Love Wins, and for those who don’t know the scriptures well enough and might be swept away into delusions by following their emotions and what “sounds and feels” good and right to their own eyes and ears. It is a story that denies the truth while claiming to present it; it’s a story that uses scriptures but fails to comprehend them; it’s a story about *a* Jesus but not the one found in the scriptures. It’s a story titled “Love Wins” by Rob Bell. It’s a story that is causing those who read their Bibles and believe them to say “I could never believe that.”

You are not alone.

Though most of Christendom is in and is headed deeper into apostasy, there are a growing number of us who love God and read our Bibles and believe what God has said.

This love for God and His truth compels us to question some of the stories being told about Jesus. In this critique, we will look at the story that has just been told and retold by Rob Bell. In the truest sense of the word – it is a story. It’s a story that draws from factual events and retells them in a way to give the events new meaning, meaning the original author never intended. It’s a story about

Questions.
Doubts.

Emotions.
Insinuations.
Exaggerations.

And at the core.....Humanism.

And so, this critique.

In this critique, I shall go through the chapters of Love Wins. My intent is not to go through every error and subtle deception that Rob Bell teaches but to examine the overall teaching of each chapter. In doing so, I will quote statements made by Rob Bell and his explanations of different passages of scripture. I will then look at these quotes in light of what the word of God says. To go over everything Rob Bell says in his book would require more than I will be presenting here. It is my aim that as you see the twisting of scripture, the nature of deception, and the love of humanism; you will be part of the growing few who “test all things” and believe what God says about Himself and His plan, even if the perishing world around you considers it foolishness.

I am glad that Rob Bell has said:

Some communities don't permit open, honest inquiry about the things that matter most. Lots of people have voiced a concern, expressed a doubt, or raised a question, only to be told by their family, church, friends, **or tribe**: ‘We don't discuss those things here.’ I believe the discussion itself is divine.

Thankfully my tribe has shown no objections to the discussion, so I will now enter into this “divine” discussion about God and Jesus and salvation and judgment and heaven and hell and the words of Rob Bell in his book Love Wins.

And, if this critique keeps you from being “deluded with persuasive speech” (Col 2:4) – well, I'd be thrilled.

Introduction

The New, Same as the Old

“That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done:
and there is no new thing under the sun.” (Ecc. 1:9) ASV

While in context, this verse has to do with the course of nature and the condition of man, it is also most certainly true of the nature and workings of Satan. Starting in Genesis, the historical account of God creating man, we find Satan actively at work seeking to deceive and destroy man and ultimately destroy the work and kingdom of God. A quick look at Genesis chapters two and three will give one light and understanding on how the devil craftily seeks to turn men away from the truth, which ultimately turns them away from God.

In Genesis 2, God creates Adam. He puts him in the garden He had made in the east part of Eden. God placed Adam in a literal paradise. It was a place where grew “every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food;” the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” were in the midst of the garden; there was a river that went through the garden and watered it; it was a place where God walked in the cool of the day and a place that was free from sin and the effects of sin. It was a place of life, one created and established by God. Adam was given the responsibility of working and keeping the garden. God gave Adam a command and said:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,
but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen. 2:16-17)

Following, we find God creating Adam a helpmate from his own body. God takes one of Adam’s ribs and fashions it into a person which Adam calls Woman, and later Eve. Genesis chapter two ends with the statement that:

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (Gen. 2:25)

So you have Adam and Eve, created by God, placed into a paradise, both naked and not ashamed. There was no stain of sin, no shame in their nakedness, no disobedience to God, nothing defiled or unfaithful about them. They were living in the paradise of God and keeping the commandment of God.

Now on to chapter three and continuing it says:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And He said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. (Gen. 3:1-3) KJV

Genesis 3 details how Satan came and brought spiritual ruin to man and a curse to God's creation. Notice how Satan initiates the conversation with a question.

Not just any question.

A question about God.

More specifically.

A question about what God has said.

The ESV puts it this way.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1)

With a simple question, Satan seeks to put doubt into Eve's heart about the goodness and rightfulness of God's command.

I like what one commentator says on this verse:

"Is it true?" surely it cannot be true, that a God of such goodness could ever deny you such a benefit, or restrain you from such happiness; he can never be your friend that can lay such an injunction on you."

It is the device of the devil to have men question the goodness of God and to judge Him by their own human reasoning. The question the devil puts to Eve is one that ultimately brings into question the character of God and the righteousness of His commandments. Questions in and of themselves are not always wrong. However, it's the direction that the one asking the question seeks to lead you that is the problem. The question that Satan asked was designed to put a seed of doubt about God's character, care, and intention into Eve's mind. One that would open the door for Satan to then introduce a complete lie that, if believed and acted upon, would bring Adam and Eve into spiritual ruin. Eve responded to Satan by stating what God had commanded:

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" (Gen. 3:1-3) ESV

Satan (the serpent) immediately replies:

But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:4-5)

Satan moves from questioning God to calling God a liar. God had told Adam that he would die if he ate from the tree, yet Satan has said that they would not die. Satan then goes on to imply that God is withholding good from them. That God does not want them to have their eyes opened and to become like Him.

Can you see how Satan works?

He knows the word.
He has men question the word.
He puts doubts in their minds.
Doubts about God.
Doubts about His goodness.
Doubts about His character.
He tells them a lie.
A lie that sounds better than what God has said.

Smooth. Deceptive. Destructive.

Eve reacted:

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” (Gen. 3:6)

She cast aside the word and commandment of God and believed a lie.

And with that, the whole human race was plunged into sin and ruin. You can still see the effects of it today.

This is how Satan works.
His methods have not changed.
There is nothing new under the sun.

I want you to remember this. Meditate on it. Understand the craftiness of Satan and how he works to bring about doubt, deception, and ultimately destruction. If you can see how Satan works, then you will be able to see him at work in the book Love Wins by Rob Bell. It's so obvious. You will find Rob Bell asking questions;

Questions about emotions.
Questions about the Bible.
Questions about God.
About His justice.

About His character.
About His reasonableness.

Again, questions on these topics are not inherently wrong or bad. As Rob says, “There is no question that Jesus cannot handle, no discussion too volatile, no issue too dangerous.” The problem is not with the question. The problem is where Rob Bell wants to lead you with his questions. He will lead you away from scripture and its clear meaning and lead you to a humanistic lie. He leads you to the same place that Satan led Eve... “Surely you will not die.” He will present an outcome that, by human reasoning, seems better than the one God has given. In doing so, he will follow the same roadmap that Satan led Eve down, and no doubt in some people it will have the same result:

Spiritual ruin. Spiritual death.

No, there is nothing new under the sun. Satan continues to seek to destroy God’s plan and His creation.

His methods are the same.

Only His messengers have changed. Remember this as we move forward.

On with our discussion.....

CHAPTER 1

SETTING UP THE SPIKE – DID GOD ACTUALLY SAY?

Have you ever played volleyball? If you're like most people, you've probably played it at least once in your life. In the game, you will often have one player position the ball so another player can "spike" or smash it down on the other side of the net to score a point against the other team. The person positioning the ball is said to be "setting up the spike." Their job is strategically important so that the next event, spiking the ball, can take place.

Chapter 1 of Love Wins, titled "What About The Flat Tire" is the chapter that "sets up the spike," so to speak, for all that Rob Bell wishes to address in the following chapters. In the same way that Satan puts a question of doubt into Eve's mind, setting her up for the spike, Rob Bell fills the chapter with questions that are supposed to have you questioning what you've read in the Bible or what you have been taught. The purpose is to fill your head with doubts.

Doubts about God.
About His love,
His righteousness,
His goodness,
His character.

...questioning your understanding of these very topics.

To do this, he will take a biblical truth (at least to many of us anyway), present only a portion of the truth, reduce it to its shallowest form (like how your four-year-old child might explain something), and then question how it could be true.

The chapter is filled with question after question designed to raise doubt after doubt, with the goal of appealing to your emotions, to your sense of what should be right or what should be wrong. He appeals to your emotions in hopes of gaining access to your mind, so that you will question the goodness and character of God in what you believe. In other words, a whole chapter of questions to basically quote Satan and say "Did God Actually Say?" At the end of the chapter, he'll even insinuate that if you think you have this "salvation thing and Jesus" figured out, you might just be like a demon.

To thoroughly refute everything Rob Bell says with detailed scripture and explanation would probably take a book the size of the Bible. In fact, if I wanted to thoroughly refute everything he says with scripture, I would just hand someone a Bible and tell them to read it. But again, in this critique, I'm going to just quote different things Rob says and look at

them in light of a few scriptures conveniently not covered in Love Wins. As we look at a few of the things Bell says, notice how he insinuates something without actually saying it. The questions he asks, in the way that he asks them, are almost an answer unto themselves. But in asking questions the way he does, he endeavors to lead you down a path and put doubts in your mind, without actually having to answer all the questions he raises. .

Let the questions begin.

The chapter starts out by questioning someone's belief and statement about Ghandi being in Hell. Here's the quote:

Several years ago we had an art show at our church. I had been giving a series of teachings on peacemaking, and we invited an artist to display their paintings, poems, and sculptures that reflected their understanding of what it means to be a peacemaker. One woman included in her work a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, which a number of people found quite compelling.

But not everyone.

Someone attached a piece of paper to it.

On the piece of paper was written: "Reality check: He's in hell."

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 the world know?

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? (pages 1, 2)

So begins the planting of seeds of doubt regarding the love of God. Notice the question is not based on a scripture, or many scriptures. It's based solely on what Rob Bell feels to be right. The obvious answer he's leading you to is "No, God would never accept this! God could not be a God of love if so many people are going to spend eternity in hell!" And why is that the right answer? Well, because if Rob Bell were God, that is how he would operate. If that's how he thinks, then surely God must be the same way. God's love is not ultimately defined by what the scriptures teach; love is defined by what makes sense to his emotions. In fact, if you've read the Bible, you are probably thinking of many scriptures that teach that there will indeed be few saved, such as:

And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow door. **For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.** When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.” (Luke 13:23-28)

And

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day **many** will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Mat. 7:21-23)

You might also be thinking of passages that teach who will and who won't be in God's kingdom and who will suffer and be damned; such as:

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; **but he that believeth not shall be damned.** (Mark 16:16)

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, **that every soul**, which will not hear that prophet, **shall be destroyed from among the people.** (Acts 3:22-23)

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, **In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;** When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. (2 Th. 1:7-10)

Just a few verses out of many.

So we have Jesus saying many will not enter God's kingdom.

Those who believe not will be damned.

Those who don't listen to what Jesus says will be destroyed.

Jesus will take vengeance on those that don't know God or obey the gospel.

And there will be people who call Jesus “Lord” that He doesn’t know.

Like pastors, and book writers, and false teachers, and those who lead little children of God astray (1 John 2:12).

But if you’ve read the book, you might be saying, “Well, he does answer some of the questions later.” He does attempt to do so with select passages, while he disregards the multitude of passages that refute what he’s saying; and then he tries to give new meanings to the words and concepts that the Bible never gives. But we’ll get to that later. Because again, chapter one is not about looking to the scriptures. It’s about asking questions and causing you to question what you’ve been taught or what you’ve read in the Bible about God’s goodness and character.

Rob Bell then says:

Does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite, eternal torment for things they did in their few, finite years of life? (page 2)

Surely that can’t be true? How could God do such a thing? Of course that doesn’t make sense to anyone unless they read the scriptures. We might as well ask, how could God bring a curse – including sickness, and disease, and death – on all humanity just because two people ate a piece of fruit? How unfair, how mean! (Picture a five year old throwing a tantrum.) That’s what it amounts to. Not because the question is wrong, but because Rob Bell will later try to answer these questions without looking at God’s full character. Love will be the only character trait God has, and it will be defined by what Bell believes is right, just like a child does. It’s all about them and what they think is right. But these questions, and more importantly the answers to these questions, make sense only when one understands the fallen nature of man and the character of God – His full character.

Rob Bell goes on to say:

If there are only a few who go to heaven.....
What kind of God is that?

It’s the God of the Bible. The one Rob Bell hates.

Can you hear the voice of Satan behind the questions?
“Has God really said?”

Bell continues:

Several years ago I heard a woman tell about the funeral of her daughter’s friend, a high-school student who was killed in a car accident. Her daughter was asked by a Christian if the young man who had died was a Christian. She said that he told people that he was an atheist. This person then said to her, “So there’s no hope then.”

No hope?

Is that the Christian message?

“No hope?”

Is that what Jesus offers the world?

Is that the sacred calling of Christians – to announce that there’s no hope? (pages 3, 4)

Actually it reminds me of something Jesus said.

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:1-5)

Come on, Jesus! What type of love is that?

Is that the sacred calling of Christians, to announce that some people will perish, similar to how others had just perished?

And this from its founder?

How is that love?

How is that grace?

How can God have His Son say such a thing and still be good?

You know, Bell’s analogies and questions would make sense, if it wasn’t for all those pesky things Jesus said – all those Bible verses that get in the way. But, we continue on...

Bell says:

If what Jesus does is get people somewhere else – then the central message of the Christian faith has very little to do with this life other than getting you what you need for the next one. Which of course raises the question: is that the best God can do? (page 6)

Again, an extreme example of what people believe the Bible teaches followed by a question to tear it down. Do you see the pattern? Would any serious follower of Jesus, who has read the Bible, say that you’re to get saved and then sit around and wait for the next life? Of course not. But Bell isn’t interested in that. He’s interested in making extreme cases, tearing them down, and in doing so have you question God, and then present the wonderful answers that he has come up with. But he is also belittling something here, because a lot of what Christ and the gospel do is prepare you for the next life as well.

Bell continues:

Which leads to a far more disturbing question. So is it true that the kind of person you

are doesn't ultimately matter, as long as you've said or prayed or believed the right things? (page 6)

While there might be some who think that, the vast majority of believers I know, who read the scriptures, do not believe that. However, the first part of that statement is true for what Rob Bell believes. Again, he questions, "So is it true that the kind of person you are doesn't ultimately matter?" The answer to that question, for what Rob Bell believes, is, "NO! In the grand scheme of things, it doesn't matter. If you don't let the love of God change your heart in this life, He'll do it in the next."

Bell continues:

If this understanding of the good news of Jesus prevailed among Christians, the belief that Jesus's message is about how to get somewhere else, you could possibly end up with a world in which millions of people were starving, thirsty, and poor, the earth was being exploited and polluted: disease and despair were everywhere: and Christians weren't known for doing much about it. If it got bad enough, you might even have people rejecting Jesus because of how His followers lived. (page 6, 7)

Actually, the condition of the world is attributed to unconverted man, the curse, the devil, and demonic spirits. Jesus never attributed the terrible condition of His day to the lack of His disciples' practicing social justice. Can you hear Jesus, "Peter, why didn't you dig those people a Jesus Well so they could have water?" "Andrew, where's your Green Earth Day ribbon, and why aren't you using recycle bins?" "Matthew, I showed you how to feed a lot of people with a couple fish; why are there people still hungry?" "Thomas, you know how some of the small countries owe a lot of debt to Rome. How about you go get Rome to forgive their debt." "If you don't do these things, people might not want to follow me."

Apparently, the book of Acts is filled with faith-filled followers of Jesus, who forgot to start non-profit organizations to address the things Rob Bell feels that a Christian should be doing. What happened in Acts?

The results were tragic.

Thousands of people were saved and had their sins forgiven.
People met daily for prayer and voluntarily and gladly shared their goods with each other.
People were healed and set free from demons.
Churches were planted all over the world.

Oh, wait. That's a good thing....what Jesus wanted. Interesting.

But, let's continue with Rob Bell putting God and His followers on trial.

Bell says:

One way to respond to these questions is with the clear, helpful answer: all that matters is how you respond to Jesus. And that answer totally resonates with me, it is about how you respond to Jesus. But it raises another important question: Which Jesus? (page 7)

Here Rob Bell contradicts himself. Because according to what he will be espousing later in the book, it doesn't matter how you respond to Jesus, at least not in this life anyway. Bell then goes on to give uncommon examples of the type of Jesus that people get presented with, as if it was the norm. Again, he wants to put doubts in your mind that the Jesus you believe in, who punishes people for their sin, might be in the same category as those he just listed.

Sowing doubt.
Like the devil.

Bell continues:

Often times when I meet an atheist and we talk about the god they don't believe in, we quickly discover that I don't believe in that god either. (page 9)

Most atheists that I've met do not want to believe in a Jesus who said:

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mar 16:16)

They do not want to believe in a God who will judge them for their sins and ultimately for their unbelief in Jesus and the gospel message. To which, Bell would also agree. Bell would have Jesus say:

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall eventually be saved because the fire of God's love will have its way in their heart and God will get what He wants.” (2 Opinions 16:16)

It's hard to know when to stop. Chapter one goes on and on continuing to bring questions about how one is saved by bringing up different accounts in the scripture. The goal is to cloud your mind and make you think there are so many ways that God can save someone, how could I possibly know what the right one is? Maybe all kinds of people are saved and I'm just too stuck in what I believe to see it. Maybe the Muslims are saved because they do some of the same things I see believers do in the Bible. Maybe they know Jesus and don't know it. The questions try to reduce the subject to its most basic understanding without taking into account the great portions of scripture that bring and connect all these questions together. So, without looking at the greater portions of scripture, Bell will lead you to his own conclusions, which clearly contradict the scriptures. As you will see later, he will use scripture but will also attempt to impose new meaning to support his theory.

The crown jewel of chapter one is how Rob Bell ends it. In typical Bell fashion, he says

and implies something without flatly out saying, “This is what I’m saying.”

(Remind you of the ways of anyone else mentioned in the Bible? “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.” Gen. 3:1)

Rob Bell implies that if you think you’ve got this Jesus guy and salvation figured out, then you might just be like the demons, because they knew who He was and what He was doing.

Bell says:

What we see in these passages and many others is that almost everybody, at least at first, has a difficult time grasping just who Jesus is.

Except for one particular group.

In Luke 4 a man possessed by an “evil spirit” yells at Jesus, “I know who you are – the Holy One of God.”

And in Matthew 8, when Jesus arrives on the shore in the region of Gardarenes, the demon-possessed men shout at him, “What do you want with us, Son of God?”

And in Mark 1, Jesus wouldn’t let demons speak.
“because they knew who he was.”

In the stories about Jesus a lot of people, including his own family, are uncertain about exactly who Jesus is and what he’s up to – except demons, who know exactly who he is and what he’s doing.

As James wrote: “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder” (chap. 2)

And then in Luke 7, a woman who has lived a “sinful life” crashes a dinner Jesus is at and pours perfume on his feet after wetting his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. Jesus then tells her that her “sins have been forgiven.”

So demons believe,
and washing Jesus’s feet with your tears gets your sins forgiven? (page 18)

Can you see it? Can you see the doubt and confusion and questioning that he is trying to put in your mind? So demons knew what Jesus was doing, like many believers today, but the lady who washed Jesus’s feet with her tears had her sins forgiven. Maybe you, in your narrow-mindedness are really just like the demons because you think you know what Jesus wants and what He is doing.

Bell will continue to insinuate things in his book, without actually saying that is what he is saying.

I wonder if Rob Bell knows who Jesus is and what He's up to?
From reading his book, he seems to think he does.
Does that then put him into a certain category?

And there is a brief look at chapter one. It's hard not to go through every single thing he says. The clear goal of the chapter is to plant doubts in your mind about the love and character of God. Bell doesn't do so by his deep look at scripture but does so by asking questions that appeal to your emotions in order to trouble your mind. He's trying to appeal to what men think is right and wrong. Humanism at its core. He then tries to look at all the different ways that people are saved, without tying together what is common in all of their accounts. Nor does he look past the cross at the commission given to the disciples, or to the book of Acts to see how they understood and put into practice Jesus's commands.

But that's his goal.
A goal of saying "Has God really said?"
A goal of leading you down a road.
A road that leads to a lie.
A lie that says "Surely you will not die."

The spike has been set, on to chapter two.....

Chapter 2

Again, where to start?

It's really hard to know just how much to write when Rob Bell has 41 pages dedicated to redefining heaven and making it something that the scriptures never intended it to be. But I'll try to cover enough of it so one can see how little of an understanding of the scriptures he has, and hopefully you'll also be able to see the nature of his deception. In this chapter of his book, there are a couple things said that are good and may make one think about certain aspects of their Christian walk. Nevertheless, it is for the most part another attempt to distort what the Bible teaches by taking scripture out of context and giving new meanings to ideas and truths that have already been defined in the Bible. Simply because one can find a few good things Bell says in this chapter is no reason for someone to endorse him or what he teaches. If you found a small piece of good bread sitting in the middle of a pile of cow manure, would you eat it? Or would you tell others to go get their food there? I would hope not.

In talking about heaven and hell, you often end up talking about eschatology. Eschatology is the study or topic of "end time" things. There are many different views on this topic that cover a wide spectrum of ideas. I personally don't have it all figured out. My purpose though is not to outline how the "end of time" events fully play out. My main goal is to help people see how Bell craftily twists the scriptures, giving them new meanings in order to introduce new ideas, ideas that are not found in the Bible, ideas that change the focus and meaning of the "Good News" and make it into something else. Something that is very in vogue today.

End time apostasy?

Who would have thought?

Bell starts out the chapter by talking about this photo that was in his grandmother's house as he was growing up:



He describes this picture by saying:

It's as if Thomas Kinkade and Dante were at a party, and one turned to the other sometime after midnight and uttered that classic line, "You know, we really should work together sometime..." (page 22)

He then says:

When I asked my sister Ruth if she remembered this painting, she immediately replied, Of course, it gave us the creeps. (page 22)

So here is a picture that, when looking at the scriptures as a whole, can and does certainly represent some biblical truth. In fact, if you know the scriptures, you can probably think of many passages that this painting could represent. But Bell doesn't go there. In talking about the picture, he goes on say:

One of the only violent images Jesus ever uses is when he speaks about those who cause children to stumble. With a shocking hyperbolic flourish, he declares that the only fitting punishment is to tie a giant stone around their neck and throw them into the sea (Matt 18). Death by drowning – Jesus's idea of punishment for those who lead children astray. A haunting warning if there ever was one about the sponge-like nature of a child's psyche. I'm not saying that my grandmother's painting did that, but it clearly unnerved at least two of us. (page 22)

So Bell uses this picture, that actually conveys spiritual truth found in the scripture, to begin to tear down what people believe about heaven and later hell. How does he do this? He does this by insinuating something but then denying that he's insinuating anything! Almost sounds like a politician, doesn't he?

Bell says this picture gave him and his sister "the creeps" when they were children. Then he tells about how Jesus will kill those who make children stumble. Then he denies that he is relating the passage about Jesus killing those who offend children to those who hold a traditional view of heaven and hell, which is what the picture conveys. Do you see how he's working to sow fear into people? He wants to subtly sow into people the fear that if they believe what the Bible says – what many hold as the traditional view of heaven and

hell – and teach it to their children, they might cause them to stumble and are therefore worthy of death.

But of course, in typical Bell fashion, he then denies that's what he's saying. He says:

I'm not saying that my grandma's painting did that, but it clearly unnerved at least two of us. (page 22)

But if that's the case, then why bring up the passage in Matthew 18? Is it just to fill the pages, to make his book longer? Why bring something up and then say it doesn't relate to what you are saying? It's easy actually, because it IS what he is saying. He may deny it if he likes, but he deliberately put it there to place doubt and fear into those who hold to a traditional view of heaven and hell. Fear of what? Fear of offending a child and being killed by God. Again, doesn't he sound like a politician? When politicians want to pass a piece of legislation that they know might run up against objections, what do they do? Well, if they can, they will say, "This is for the children." After all, who could deny something good to children? Does anyone want the label of being against children? Of course not. So the objections go away and the legislation passes. Do you want to possibly offend children and be in jeopardy of having a stone tied around your neck and then being drowned in the sea? Well then, leave your traditional view of heaven and hell behind, and let Bell teach you the new understanding.

Crafty.

Like the devil.

Subtly sowing doubt.

Subtly sowing fear.

And that is how he begins chapter 2.

Bell continues:

"From what we see, the people in the painting are going somewhere, somewhere they've chosen to go, and they're leaving something behind so that they can go there."
(page 23)

Hallelujah! It's like he can almost see some biblical truth! Almost.

So what does he almost see?

People, going somewhere.

Like pilgrims and strangers. (1 Peter 2:11, Heb. 11:13)

People, looking for a city which God built. (Heb. 11:10, 16)

People that have chosen to go. (John 3:16, Luke 9:23)

People that have forsaken all. (Luke 14:33)

People that have left something behind.

Like sin. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10)

And the love of the world. (James 4:4)

And the wisdom of the world. (1 Cor. 1:20, 21)

Getting from one place to another by that foolish cross. (1 Cor. 1:18)

Bell continues his discussion about the painting, saying:

“Giant crosses do not hang suspended in the air in the world that you and I call home. Cities do not float. And if you tripped and fell off the cross/sidewalk in this world, you would not free-fall indefinitely down into an abyss of giant red caves and hissing steam.” (page 23)

To that I would answer, “Well, obviously.” It seems interesting that Bell would take this photo so literally since he’s such a promoter of “redemptive art” in all its obscure, widely interpretive forms. But this discussion about the painting wasn’t written to treat it like he would other art; it was written to put fear and doubt in your mind about what is traditionally taught and then to point out how unrealistic that is in the “real” world. He does this by saying something that no one else believes either.

Bell then begins to ask questions about what heaven will be like. He says:

And then there are those whose lessons about heaven consist primarily of who will and who won’t be there. And so there’s a woman sitting in a church service with tears streaming down her face, as she imagines being reunited with her sister who was killed in a car accident seventeen years ago. The woman sitting next to her, however, is realizing that if what the pastor is saying about heaven is true, she will be separated from her mother and father, brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends forever, with no chance of any reunion, ever. She in that very same moment has tears streaming down her face too, but they are tears of a different kind.

When she ask the pastor afterwards if it’s true that, because they weren’t Christians, none of her family will be there, she’s told that she’ll be having so much fun worshipping God that it won’t matter to her. Which is quite troubling and confusing, because the people she loves the most in the world do matter to her. (page 25)

I wish I could play a sad violin sound, with an accompanying big neon light that flashes “humanism” every time Rob Bell plays to human emotions for determining and judging what is right and wrong. I’m afraid though that if I were able to do that, it would play on almost every page of the book. Notice there is no appeal to scripture, no explanation of what the cross means, no mention of what God requires, just an appeal to a person who’s sad – an appeal to their emotions. If Bell would take his time to read, just as plain as day, say for instance, the book of Romans, all this matter could be cleared up (not that he hasn’t read it; he just doesn’t believe it). It’s no different than how Bell starts off his book in his

preface. He says:

“For God so loved the world...”

“That’s why Jesus came.”

Notice he conveniently leaves out the rest of John 3:16, which says:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Why does he leave it out?

Because that actually IS why Jesus came.

To save those who believe, from perishing, by demonstrating the love of God, giving them eternal life.

Bell’s glaring problem is that he doesn’t understand, or more likely doesn’t believe, what the crucifixion of Jesus means and says about both God and man. Nor does he understand how the benefits of the cross are received by those who receive eternal life. Actually, as far as I can tell, he does understand what the Bible teaches; he just rejects it. He rejects it because he’s a humanist. What ultimately matters to him is not what God has said on the matter, but what seems right in his own eyes. Since people love their relatives, and God is love, then there must be another explanation that allows for everyone to go to and partake of heaven.

In fact, Bell says:

Are there other ways to think about heaven, other than as that perfect floating shiny city hanging suspended there in the air above that ominous red and black realm, with all that smoke and steam and hissing fire? I say yes, there are. (page 26)

I would say that the author of that painting didn’t mean for every detail to be taken literally, as Bell implies; BUT nevertheless, from Bell’s assumption, we now move on to see what Bell believes about heaven.

To do this, Rob Bell uses the story of the rich man, out of Matthew 19. The rich man says to Jesus, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

Bell says:

The rich man’s question, then, is the perfect opportunity for Jesus to give a clear, straightforward answer to the only question that ultimately matters for many. First, we can only assume, he’ll correct the man’s flawed understanding of how salvation works. He’ll show the man how eternal life isn’t something he has to earn or work for; it’s a free gift of grace. Then, he’ll invite the man to confess, repent, trust, accept, and believe that Jesus has made a way for him to have a relationship with God. Like any

good Christian would do. (page 27)

Here again, we have Bell questioning what it is for one to be a believer, how it is that they “get saved.” At the beginning of Love Wins, Bell talks about all the different ways people either had their sins forgiven and/or were saved or accepted by God (chose your terminology). But the fact is, no matter what the event, in each case you have someone that exhibits saving faith in Jesus. That is what Jesus is attempting to lead this rich man to do. Jesus, standing there in the flesh, is leading this man to a life of “leaving all to follow Him.” (You will notice however that, after Christ’s resurrection, Jesus clearly tells the disciples what to say and teach people. Then, if you read the book of Acts, you will see how the disciples and apostles understood Jesus by what they said to those they preached to. Bell never addresses this, because it would throw much of his book underwater and render many of his examples useless. More on this later).

Jesus, however, doesn’t do any of that. He asks the man: “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

“Enter life?” (page 27)

Entering life is the same as eternal life. Jesus told this man that if he wanted to enter life, he needed to keep the commandments. However, this guy hadn’t kept the commandments of God, just like everyone else hadn’t either.

Jesus refers to the man’s intentions as “entering life”? And then he tells him that you do that by keeping the commandments? This wasn’t what Jesus was supposed to say. (page 27)

Actually, that’s exactly what Jesus was supposed to say. He was showing this man that he, in fact, had not kept the commandments and was a lawbreaker in God’s sight.

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. (Rom. 2:12)

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (Rom. 3:19)

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3:20)

Bell continues:

Jesus then tells him, “Go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven,” which causes the man to walk away sad, “because he had great wealth”. Did we miss something? The big words, the important words – “eternal

life,” “treasure,” “heaven” – were all there in the conversation, but they weren’t used in the ways that many Christians use them. (page 29)

Notice how Bell leaves out the part where Jesus says... “and come and follow me.”

Bell continues:

The man says he’s kept all of the commandments that Jesus mentions, but Jesus hasn’t mentioned the one about coveting. Jesus then tells him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor, which Jesus doesn’t tell other people, because it’s not an issue for them. It is, for this man. The man is greedy – and greed has no place in the world to come. He hasn’t learned yet that he has a sacred calling to use his wealth to move creation forward. How can God give him more responsibility and resources in the age to come, when he hasn’t handled well what he’s been given in this age?

Jesus takes the man’s question about his life *then* and makes it about the kind of life he’s living *now*. (page 41)

Bell says that “greed” has no place in the world to come. But the Bible doesn’t say that. It says that no “greedy person” has a place in the world to come (or Kingdom of God). A greedy person will be excluded from God’s Kingdom. The point of the story is not that the man “hasn’t learned yet that he has a sacred calling to use his wealth to move creation forward.” The point of the story is that this man’s greed is the idol in his life that is keeping him from receiving eternal life and following Jesus. Jesus was leading this man to repentance for his sin and to faith in Jesus Christ (come and follow me). Bell implies that this man just needs to modify his behavior and help the poor when in fact, this man needs to get rid of his idol, his greed and selfishness, and then leave all to follow Jesus.

Bell continues:

When the man asks about getting “eternal life,” he isn’t asking about how to get to heaven when he dies. This wasn’t a concern for the man or Jesus. This is why Jesus doesn’t tell people how to “go to heaven.” It wasn’t what Jesus came to do. (page 30)

That’s only partially true. The primary message Jesus came to give was not “how to get to heaven,” IF you want to put it into those terms. Jesus came to give people life – eternal life. He came to reconcile men to God (2 Cor. 5:19). He came that men might have eternal life (John 3:16), which is more than just living in this age and the age to come (as Bell puts it). Eternal life is most accurately summed up in John 17:3:

And this is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

Eternal life is not simply getting rid of certain sins that will not be permitted in the “age to come.” It is knowing God and knowing Jesus Christ, who themselves are eternal. When one has God dwelling IN them, they have eternal life, as God is eternal.

And Jesus did tell people what would exclude them from heaven, and what they needed to enter heaven:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mat. 5:20)

Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mat. 18:3)

Heaven.

Life.

Eternal life.

They are all connected in what Jesus came and taught. To say that He did not teach this is to disregard scripture and not be truthful.

Bell then talks about different passages that talk about the “age to come.” He uses different passages from the prophets to talk about this new day/time coming when ALL will be saved (more on that later). Of course Bell is not consistent with the word ALL, nor is he faithful to some passages.

For instance, Bell says:

The prophet Isaiah said that in that new day “the nations will stream to” Jerusalem, and God will “settle the disputes for many peoples;” people will “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” (chap. 2) (page 33)

Continuing he says:

First, they spoke about “all the nations.” That’s *everybody*. (page 34)

Here, Bell begins to sow the seeds of universalism. He believes that “all the nations” means that every single person will stream to Jerusalem and that God will bring peace on earth, meaning that they are all saved. First, “all nations” does not mean everyone in that nation. If all the nations are gathered at the UN, does that mean that every, single person in the world is gathered at the UN? Secondly, and more importantly, one of the truths that anyone who reads the Bible will know is that when the word ALL is used, it doesn’t always mean ALL, as in every single one. Bell recognizes that there are different meanings for words such as eternal (olam) and forever (aion) but doesn’t realize that the same is true for the word ALL. There are countless places in the Bible where ALL doesn’t mean “every single one/person.” (This will come up later in his book, and I’ll address it more there.)

The chapter then shifts to Rob Bell explaining what Jesus meant by the word “heaven.”

Bell says:

Jesus consistently affirmed heaven as a real place, space, and dimension of God's creation, where God's will and only God's will is done. Heaven is that realm where things are as God intends them to be. (page 42)

I agree with that, because the scriptures agree with it. Heaven is a place where only God's will is done. However, what I disagree with is what Bell also implies and says about heaven. That as we do God's will, we are bringing heaven to earth and helping create the new earth that God desires. Why? Because Jesus never said that as we do the will of God, we bring heaven to earth. He said, "May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Distinctly two different places, even when the will of God IS being done on earth.

In the middle of this discussion, Bell talks about possessions. He says:

(By the way, when the writer John in the book of Revelation gets a current glimpse of the heavens, one detail he mentions about crowns is that people are taking them off [chap. 4]. Apparently, in the unvarnished presence of the divine a lot of things we consider significant turn out to be, much like wearing a crown, quite absurd.) (page 44)

I personally have a feeling that the Lord is not going to allow anything absurd into His eternal kingdom. In fact, it's not as if these men went to the local market in heaven and bought their crowns. They were given to them by THE LORD. Are you comfortable saying that something the Lord gives His people is absurd? While people might have a different understanding of why these elders are casting their crowns at the feet of the Lord, the reason is certainly not because the crowns are absurd. I personally like what one commentator says on this subject:

And cast their crowns before the throne – They are described as "crowned" (Rev. 4:4), that is, as triumphant, and as kings (compare Rev. 5:10), and they are here represented as casting their crowns at his feet, in token that they owe their triumph to Him. To his providential dealings, to his wise and merciful government, they owe it that they are crowned at all; and there is, therefore, a propriety that they should acknowledge this in a proper manner by placing their crowns at his feet.

Here are some passages on "crowns". See if the Lord thinks they are absurd:

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, **which the Lord**, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:8)

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. (Jas. 1:12)

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
(1 Peter 5:4)

And lastly, from the mouth of Jesus Himself:

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. (Rev. 3:11)

Bell continues:

When Jesus tells the man that there are rewards for him, he's promising the man that receiving the peace of God now, finding gratitude for what he does have, and sharing it with those who need it will create in him all the more capacity for joy in the world to come.

Actually, that's not true. Nothing that Bell says above is found in that passage. Jesus told the rich man to give away his idol, his possessions, to the poor and then to come and follow Jesus. He said nothing about increasing the man's "capacity for joy in the world to come." Again, Bell leaves out that important detail of "come and follow me."

Bell continues:

Taking heaven seriously, then, means taking suffering seriously now. Not because we've bought into the myth that we can create a utopia given enough time, technology, and good voting choices, but because we have great confidence that God has not abandoned human history and is actively at work within it, taking it somewhere. Around a billion people in the world today do not have access to clean drinking water. People will have access to clean water in the age to come, and so working for clean-water access for all is participating now in the life of the age to come. (page 45)

So let me get this straight. In heaven, there will be no dandruff, so we should work to make sure there is no dandruff today? In heaven, everyone will wear white robes, so we should make sure everyone wears white robes today? Are we pulling heaven into the present if we do such things?

Can you find any of the disciples or apostles laboring for such things in the book of Acts? Surely these men, who walked and talked with Jesus, must have understood what Jesus meant. I think though that their concern was that something greater would take place. In heaven, everyone has faith in God and has no sins laid to their account. The men who "most" understood Jesus and what He wanted us to do went about preaching a foolish message that reconciled men to God. It's called the gospel, the good news. They didn't run around drilling Jesus Wells and teaching sustainable living or redemptive art. They taught men how to be saved, how to fellowship as believers, how to walk a holy life, how to love their brethren, and how to reach the lost. Maybe they should have read Love Wins so they could have spent their time really bringing "heaven to earth."

I have personally been a missionary in both India and Mexico. In India, I have seen Christian groups come in and put Jesus Wells (water wells) in Hindu villages. This was an attempt to show the “love of Jesus.” While I’m sure these people appreciated the well, what they really needed was the gospel – the very thing Jesus said to preach. They needed the good news of what the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ means for them. They needed life, eternal life, which is only found in Christ. Yet when I went to these villages, they were still in bondage to idol worship, which God says is demon worship (1 Cor. 10:20). Instead of Living Water, they were given literal water. If these people end up perishing in their sins and standing before God, I’m sure at that point they will realize that they would have much more appreciated having the Living Water that Jesus Christ gives than the literal water that Rob Bell advocates giving.

Many times, groups that believe like Bell will say that when they do these good works, they have “no agenda,” which really is absurd. Of course they have an agenda, even if they say they don’t. And that’s ok. Jesus had an agenda. His agenda was to do the will of the Father and give life to those who would BELIEVE. The apostles also had an agenda, and it wasn’t to start a bunch of non-profits to rid the world of injustices. They were interested in ridding people of the injustices that they had been committing against God, which is the greatest injustice there ever was. They were peacemakers in the truest sense.

Bell continues:

It often appears that those who talk the most about going to heaven when you die talk the least about bringing heaven to earth right now, as Jesus taught us to pray: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” At the same time, it often appears that those who talk the most about relieving suffering now talk the least about heaven when we die. (page 45)

Actually, that’s because Jesus never gave anyone a commandment to bring heaven to earth. Jesus taught people to pray, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” So there’s this place called heaven where only the will of God is done. Then there’s this place called earth where God’s will is almost never done. Jesus tells people to pray that God’s will would be done ON earth as it is IN heaven. There is nothing said about bringing heaven to earth. The issue is about seeking to have God’s will done in this place called earth like it is in this place called heaven. What is God’s will? It is that we would believe in His Son Jesus Christ and keep His commandments. What about relieving suffering? Was that the main focus in the last great commission that Jesus gave to His disciples before He ascended to heaven? Was His commission that His people become nothing more than a glorified Red Cross? Let’s look at some of the last words of Jesus and see what He says.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mat. 28:18-20)

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:15-18)

Notice that the primary instruction/command from Jesus has to do with making disciples, preaching a gospel that must be believed for salvation, baptizing these believers, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. How does Jesus tell His disciples to deal with suffering? He tells the disciples to cast out demons and to lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover. It sounds like Jesus is telling them to do the same works that He did while He was on earth. Notice that He didn't tell them to bring clean water to the world, but Jesus did tell people where they could get living water that wells up into eternal life (John 4:14). He said nothing about working together with Hindus and Muslims to promote human rights or working to end injustice. He said to proclaim the gospel, make disciples, baptize them, teach them to obey what He taught, cast out demons, and heal the sick. If you will take the time to read the book of Acts, you'll see that the apostles and disciples did that very thing. They believed what Jesus said and then obeyed His commandment. (More on this later.)

Bell continues:

If you believe that you're going to leave and evacuate to somewhere else, then why do anything about this world? A proper view of heaven leads not to escape from the world, but to full engagement with it, all with the anticipation of a coming day when things are on earth as they currently are in heaven. (page 47)

Bell subtly implies that this earth gets to the “new earth” status because of what the saints do while we are here. That sounds nice, but it's certainly not what God teaches. This earth does not get to its new, glorified form because believers somehow make heaven on earth. The earth becomes the “new earth” because God brings this one to an end and makes a new one. Whether you believe that God totally destroys this earth and creates a new one or that God uses the same earth but makes everything new (renovating it, in a sense), it is God who brings this about by bringing this corrupt world to an end.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (2 Peter 3:10-13)

So basically, this earth is going to be burned up; therefore, live a holy and godly life and

look and wait for the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. (Rev. 21:1)

What is the goal? This earth OR the new earth where righteousness dwells? Are you able to discern? Are you trying to save the planet that God will destroy or renovate?

Bell continues:

In Matthew 20 the mother of two of Jesus's disciples says to Jesus, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." She doesn't want bigger mansions or larger piles of gold for them, because static images of wealth and prosperity were not what filled people's heads when they thought of heaven in her day. She understood heaven to be about partnering with God to make a new and better world, one with increasingly complex and expansive expressions and dimensions of shalom, creativity, beauty, and design. (page 47)

You'll find nothing of what the mother of Zebedee's children thought about heaven in Matthew 20:20-23. Rob Bell just makes this part up, *clearly adding to the word of God.*

Then Bell transitions back to talking about the rich man and his need to have a heart change. Then Bell says:

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor. 3 that "the Day" the prophets spoke of, the one that inaugurates life in the age to come, will "bring everything to light" and "reveal it with fire," the kind of fire that will "test the quality of each person's work." Some in this process will find that they spent their energies and efforts on things that won't be in heaven-on-earth. "If it is burned up," Paul writes, "the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved, even though only as one escaping through the flames." (page 49)

This is a favorite passage of those who believe that ALL will be saved and ultimately be reconciled to God. Notice how Bell uses it. He talks about the rich man who walks away from Jesus because he is full of greed. Ephesians 5:5 and 1 Corinthians 6:10 say that "no greedy/covetous person will inherit God's kingdom." So Bell claims that this verse in 1 Corinthians 3 says that the flames will burn up their greed, because it won't survive in the new "heaven-on-earth" but that the man will ultimately be saved...yet saved as through fire. So the fact is, with Bell's misunderstanding, the man ultimately gets to keep being greedy and eventually still inherit God's kingdom.

So what is Paul actually saying in 1 Corinthians 3? Well, let's look at the verse "in context." (Now, there's a thought!)

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are

God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 Cor. 3:6-16)

First of all, the letter is written to a church; it is written to believers who have the spirit of God dwelling in them (1 Cor. 3:16). Paul is talking about himself and Apollos as those who plant, water, and build in the field of God, which is the church. Paul then talks about how each person builds on the "foundation of Jesus Christ." Paul says that this work, this building on the foundation of Jesus Christ, will be tested by fire to see what sort of work it was. If the building on this foundation survives, then the man will receive a "reward." If it doesn't survive the fire, the man will lose the reward, or suffer loss, yet he himself will be saved – because he is a believer, part of the temple of God in which the spirit of God dwells. There is nothing in the context of this verse that says it would apply in any way to a non-believing, covetous, greedy, idolater. This verse has nothing to do with an unbeliever at all. It only has to do with believers, their rewards or loss of them, and how they BUILD on the FOUNDATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

It's interesting how many things will get cleared right up if one reads them in context.

Bell continues:

Imagine being a racist in heaven-on-earth, sitting down at the great feast and realizing that you're sitting next to them. Those people. The ones you've despised for years. Your racist attitude would simply not survive. Those flames in heaven would be hot. (page 50)

Actually, there won't be any racists in heaven, because followers of Jesus aren't racist. You cannot hate people, which is murder, and inherit God's kingdom. No murderer has eternal life (1 John 3:15).

Bell continues:

Jesus makes no promise that in the blink of an eye we will suddenly become totally different people who have vastly different tastes, attitudes, and perspectives. Paul makes it very clear that we will have our true selves revealed and that once the sins and habits and bigotry and pride and petty jealousies are prohibited and removed, for some there simply won't be much left. "As one escaping through the flames" is how he put it. (page 50)

Again, God says totally the opposite. The Spirit of God says through the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:

And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1Cor. 15:49-53)

This passage says exactly the opposite of what Bell says. It says we will bear the image of the heavenly and that this corruption must put on incorruption. As we have borne the image and nature of Adam: being sinful, sick, weak, flesh and blood, having an earthly body; we will then bear the image of the heavenly: without sin, without sickness or weakness, in a spiritual body. When does this happen? “In the blink or twinkling of an eye;” that quickly we are changed. Praise God for that! Our corruption puts on incorruption. Why is our body corrupted? Because of sin. Then, we will put on incorruption and be without sin. When you are free, totally free, from the effects of indwelling sin, your desires will be changed. They will be totally pure. As the scripture says:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

That is one of the blessed hopes of every saint, that one day we will be like Him! When we are like Him, all of our desires will have changed; they will be perfect and undefiled.

Bell continues:

Much of the speculation about heaven – and, more important, the confusion – comes from the idea that in a blink of an eye we will automatically become totally different people who “know” everything. But our heart, our character, our desires, our longings – those things take time. (page 51)

Again, that is completely false. The scripture teaches that we will be changed in the blink of an eye. Can you hear that voice saying, “Has God really said?” (Gen. 3:1)

Bell continues:

The flames of heaven, it turns out, lead us to the surprise of heaven. Jesus tells a story in Matthew 25 about people invited into “the kingdom prepared for the [them] since the creation of the world,” and their first reaction is....surprise.

They start asking questions, trying to figure it out. Interesting, that. It's not a story of people boldly walking in through the pearly gates, confident that, because of their faith, beliefs, or even actions, they'll be welcomed in. It's a story about people saying.

What?

Us?

When did we ever see you?

What did we ever do to deserve it?" (pages 51, 52)

Bell gets it wrong again. Let's look at the passage to see what it really says.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was [hungry], and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Mat. 25:31-40)

Bell says these people are surprised to be in heaven. Yet the passage says nothing about them being surprised that they are in heaven. What they were surprised at was the fact that they had fed, given a drink to, took in, and clothed THE LORD, and visited THE LORD when He was sick and in prison. That is what they were surprised at. They were surprised that they had done all these things to the Lord Himself when they had never, in fact, seen the Lord. Then Jesus tells them, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these MY BRETHREN, ye have done it unto me." So when believers serve and love other believers, they are in fact doing it to Jesus Himself.

This passage is so often used as a passage to promote good works to the lost. Yet this passage says nothing of doing good works to the lost. (There are other passages though that do.) This passage clearly speaks of doing good works to the brethren of Christ. The brethren of Christ are those who believe in and follow Christ. If one does not have the spirit of God dwelling in them from being born again, they are not "the brethren of Christ."

The other interesting thing about this passage is the fact that Bell does not tell the whole story. At the end of this account, you have a whole group of people, who did not love Christ by serving the brethren, getting cast into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into

everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: (Mat. 25:41)

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.
(Mat. 25:46)

That doesn't sound like they are being reconciled to God, now does it?

Let's look at a couple more quotes from Bell in which he twists the meaning of scripture to put doubt into the reader as to who will be accepted by God. If he can blur the lines enough, and get you to believe it, then he can ultimately get you to accept what he is teaching.

Bell says:

In other stories he tells, very religious people who presume that they're "in" hear from him: "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Mat. 7)

So are these people "evildoers" because they are religious? You see, Bell intentionally doesn't provide those details. If he did, it would clear up the meaning of Matthew 7, and therefore, he could not use it to promote what he is promoting. Here's the full story from Matthew 7:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Mat. 7:21-23)

Notice how Bell leaves out the first part of the passage that says only "he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven."

Sounds exclusive.

Narrow.

Like only some people will make it.

But that part doesn't fit with Bell's theology, so he doesn't bring it up. Now, here you have some people, calling Jesus, "Lord." They had prophesied in His name, cast out devils, and had done many "wonderful works" (Jesus Wells perhaps?) in His name. But the key is that they are those "that work iniquity." These are people who take the name of Jesus, call Him Lord, and yet live in willful sin. They are not just religious. They are religious hypocrites. There is a difference. Jesus does not know them because they are not His.

But that's ok. If we believe what Bell is teaching, then these people will not have to "depart from Jesus" for very long, because they can go through the "fires of heaven" and be purged of their sinful ways and then enter the kingdom of heaven, even though they did not

do the will of the Father, as Jesus said they must.

Bell continues to misrepresent scripture by saying:

In a story Jesus tells in Luke 18 about two men going up to the temple to pray, it's the "sinner," the "unrighteous man," who goes home justified, while the faithful, observant religious man is harshly judged. (page 52)

So Bell would have you believe that if you are a faithful and observant religious man that you just might be harshly judged while unrighteous sinners get justified.

Here's what Luke 18 says – in full.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14)

Can you see some important details that Bell has intentionally left out again? After a while, you really do have to question Bell's motives. As the scripture says, this parable was spoken to those who TRUSTED IN THEMSELVES THAT THEY WERE RIGHTEOUS and DESPISED OTHERS. Believers in Christ trust that they are "the righteousness of God through faith in Christ" (Romans 3:22) and righteous not because they are sinless but because they believe God (Romans 4:3, 5). They certainly do not despise others. The Pharisee in this passage was being prideful and exalting himself before God. He trusted "in himself" and "despised" others. That's a far cry from Bell's description that this was a faithful man. He certainly wasn't faithful to God "in the inward parts." But can you see what Bell is doing? He's trying to sow the seeds of doubt that maybe the unconverted will be accepted by God, while you religious people, who think you know what Jesus is saying, might be harshly judged. And of course, he says all this without actually directly saying it.

Bell continues:

Think about the single mom, trying to raise kids, work multiple jobs, and wrangle child support out of the kids' father, who used to beat her. She's faithful, true, and utterly devoted to her children. In spite of the circumstances, she never loses hope that they can be raised in love and go on to break the cycle of dysfunction and abuse. She never goes out, never takes a vacation, never has enough money to buy anything for herself, she gets a few hours of sleep and then repeats the cycle of cooking, work, laundry, bills,

more work, until she falls into bed late at night exhausted.

With what she has been given she has been faithful. She is a woman of character and substance. She never gives up. She is kind and loving even when she is exhausted.

She can be trusted.

Is she the last who will be first?

Does God say to her, “You’re the kind of person I can run the world with?” (page 53)

Wow, what a sad story.

Can you feel the strings of your heart being pulled? Can you feel the humanism? Do you notice that the whole story is “man-ward” and there is nothing “God-ward”? So here’s a single mom trying to raise kids, working all the time, beat by her ex-husband or boyfriend; she slaves day and night for her children, never thinks of herself (and apparently never about God either because He’s not mentioned once), doesn’t get any sleep, and then falls into bed every night just exhausted. Sure, she’ll be in heaven, right? I mean, can’t you see she’s practically sinless? Surely God will overlook His word about the sinfulness of all men and their need for faith in Christ to save them, and He will save this woman because of her tough circumstances and her love for her kids, right? That’s what Bell is implying. Then Bell conveniently sneaks in something from the Bible. He says:

She’s been faithful with what she’s been given.

When Bell says that, you’re supposed to think, “Oh yeah, I remember Jesus saying something like that. Bell must be right.” But let’s look at the passage where that quote comes from:

He said therefore, “A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’ Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ He said to him, ‘I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’ And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give it to

the one who has the ten minas.’ And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas!’
‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.’” (Luke 19:12-27)

Can you see who the nobleman called? He called His servants. His servants who call him “Lord.” He gives them money (or “talents”) which they must use and increase so that the Lord may receive them when He returns. This is clearly speaking of the gifts and resources that the Lord gives His disciples, the ones who call Him Lord, to use to expand His kingdom while He is away. This parable has nothing to do with a woman raising her kids, as Bell would have you believe. In fact, in Bell’s story, there is nothing about this woman’s faith in Christ or submission to Him. It’s just a story of a woman raising her kids. But notice what else Bell leaves out in the above parable:

“But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’”

“‘But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.’”

Those people who did not want the “Lord” to reign over them are called “His enemies.” What did the Lord do to these enemies? They were brought before the Lord and slaughtered. Now that doesn’t sound like they were reconciled to God, does it?

So in Bell’s story above, the woman has not been given a “talent” by God because it does not appear that she even serves Him. So no, she has not been faithful with what she has been given, because she hasn’t received anything. And no, God will not say to her, “You are the kind of person I can run the world with.”

Rob Bell likes to throw out emotional stories to pull at your heart and throw in half a verse to justify what he’s trying to say, but ultimately, he is leading you down a path that the scriptures do not. How is that any different than what Satan seeks to do?

So, the whole chapter is spent trying to convince you that you are supposed to bring heaven to earth, and that all kinds of people, who God says will be excluded, will in fact be included in heaven. And the fear that Bell seeks to lay on you is that you who think you know what the Bible says might actually be the ones who receive the harsher judgment. He wants you to doubt what the word of God says, by using partial verses to justify what he’s teaching. He takes verses out of context to make them say something totally different. It’s the only way he can get you to doubt God’s word and believe what he wants to teach instead. He can’t directly say what he wants to say and use scripture in context because he knows people will reject it outright. That is why he will say something without really saying it, either by asking a leading question or by insinuating something by making up a story and using a verse out of context. Can you see the nature of deception? It’s Genesis chapter three played out all over again.

So let's move on to his next chapter...Hell.

Chapter 3

HELL – NEW & IMPROVED

So we've finally come to the topic that men like Bell, atheists, and others cannot stomach to think about. According to Bell, multitudes of people have been turned off from God because of this topic. Since that is the case, then surely the common understanding of hell must be incorrect. After all, how could a truth about God have such a negative effect on people? Surely there are other ways to "understand" hell that are more palatable to the masses of people who are led by their fallen emotions. And the truth is, if we redefine scripture and give biblical words and parables new meanings, we can understand age-old truths in new "light," however dim that light may be.

So let's begin this chapter.

Bell starts out saying:

Hell. That's all part of the story, right? Trust God, accept Jesus, confess, repent, and everything will go well for you. But if you don't, well, the Bible is quite clear...

Sin, refuse to repent, harden your heart, reject Jesus, and when you die, it's over. Or actually, the torture and anguish and eternal torment will have just begun.

That's how it is – because that's what God is like, correct? God is loving and kind and full of grace and mercy – unless there isn't confession and repentance and salvation in this lifetime, at which point God punishes forever. That's the Christian story, right?

Is that what Jesus taught? (page 64)

Here again, we have Bell's deep explanation, along with plentiful citation of scripture, to talk about a huge, multi-layered subject. Actually, what you have is Bell taking biblical truth, reducing it to its lowest common denominator (again, like your four-year-old child would), and declaring that "the Christian story." Of course, Bell mentions nothing about God's character, His justice, His holiness, His righteousness, etc., etc. The truth is, you cannot have a real discussion about these issues WITHOUT talking about God's nature and character. Rob Bell seems to think you can do so by talking about only one of God's attributes – Love. Yet if anyone will take time to read the scriptures, they will see that God has many other, equally important, attributes. In fact, it might surprise some that the seraphim in Isaiah 6 and the creatures in Rev 4:8 (heavenly beings that are about as close to God's throne as one can get) don't fly around the throne of God saying, "Love, Love, Love is the Lord God Almighty." From the Old Testament to the New, these heavenly beings continue to cry out the same message.

And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole

earth is full of his glory. (Isaiah 6:3)

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. (Rev 4:8)

You would think that these heavenly creatures knew at least as much as Rob Bell. I mean, they're right there at the throne! Yet apparently, they haven't received their copy of Love Wins yet, but I'm sure once they do they will immediately correct their proclamation to reflect the only real attribute that God has, the one that overrides all the other attributes of God that we read about in the Bible.

You see, this is the fallacy of Rob Bell's whole book. It is a book that magnifies one of God's attributes while totally ignoring all the other attributes we read that God has. Of course God is love, but God's love must be understood in light of all His other attributes. Since the creatures around God continually cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy," it might be a good place to start by trying to understand God's love in light or in view of God's holiness. (Again, for those who are really interested in understanding this, you should do a study of the book of Romans.)

But again, Bell's goal is not to bring these topics to light. If he can reduce biblical truth to a partial or incomplete truth, then he can get you to question the message that many are telling, including God, and that he disagrees with.

Bell then goes on in his chapter on hell to discuss the use of the word "hell" in both the Old and New Testaments. But in talking about hell, he relies heavily on the unsubstantiated "fact" that Gehenna was a garbage dump during the time of Jesus. This "fact" is accepted by many; however, no one ever seems to have any proof that this indeed was the case. In fact, if one does a little research, you can actually find citations that state that this is a myth. However, let's just assume that Gehenna was a trash dump during the time that Jesus walked the earth. If Jesus was making a comparison between a place where trash is utterly consumed, and hell; you would still never come up with the conclusions about hell and salvation that Bell comes up with later.

Bell continues by saying:

For many in the modern world, the idea of hell is a holdover from primitive, mythic religion that uses fear and punishment to control people for all sorts of devious reasons. And so the logical conclusion is that we've evolved beyond all that outdated belief, right? (page 70)

So in other words, if you're part of the "modern world," you've evolved past those archaic, dark-aged beliefs. But if you still believe in what is held as the traditional view of hell, then you are a person who's stuck in the dark ages, trapped by a teaching that's been used to control people, and you yourself are still under "its" control. Here, Bell is again trying to insinuate something without having to really say it.

Bell continues:

I get that. I understand that aversion, and I as well have a hard time believing that somewhere down below the earth's crust is a really crafty figure in red tights holding a three-pronged spear, playing Pink Floyd records backward, and enjoying the hidden messages. (page 70)

Yes, that's exactly how Jesus described hell, isn't it? Of course not. But as his pattern is, Bell has to make light of the subject, set up a false idea of hell, make it look stupid, so he can then tear it down and teach you the "real" truth. No one who reads the Bible in a sincere way believes that there is a devil in red tights, holding a three-pronged spear, that sits around playing Pink Floyd records backwards. I hope that by now you can see the patterns in which Bell works and how he is trying to deceive you. If you can see this, then you can read through Bell's book without being deceived. Can you see it?

Bell continues:

So how should we think,
or not think,
about hell? (page 70)

Now Bell will begin to redefine the word "hell" and give it a meaning that the scripture never does. Interestingly enough, the definition that Bell gives for hell is often the very same one you hear unconverted people use for hell.

Bell then goes on to recount a trip he once took to Rwanda. He talks about seeing kids who had missing limbs from the genocide that took place there. Bell says:

My guide explained that during the genocide one of the ways to most degrade and humiliate your enemy was to remove an arm or a leg of his young child with a machete, so that years later he would have to live with the reminder of what you did to him.

Do I believe in a literal hell?
of course.
those aren't metaphorical missing arms and legs. (page 70, 71)

Now there's no doubt that what these children in Rwanda experienced was absolutely horrible. But what they experienced was not what the BIBLE calls hell. Words have meanings, and biblical words are defined by the Bible. Nowhere in the Bible will you ever find the word "hell" attributed to what people experience here on earth. Hell, like Heaven, is someplace else. What Bell is seeking to do is redefine Hell and make it something that people experience here on earth, through their choices of living apart from God. How better to do this than to paint a tragic picture of suffering and then call it "hell." Again, he does this not because scripture says it's this way but because the story pulls at your heart. It's such a terrible story that it MUST be hell. If you study the different

passages on hell, you will find that hell is a place of punishment for sins. It's interesting to note though that Rob Bell's description of hell is the same thing you hear from many unconverted people. They too often say that hell is here on earth. This is a teaching that the devil would love to have people believe, because it misrepresents the reality of what hell is.

Bell continues:

Have you ever sat with a woman while she talked about what it was like to be raped? How does a person describe what it's like to hear a five-year-old boy whose father has just committed suicide ask: "When is daddy coming home?" How does a person describe that unique look, that ravaged, empty stare you find in the eyes of a cocaine addict?

I've seen what happens when people abandon all that is good and right and kind and humane. (page 71)

Notice the appeal to your emotions again. Obviously, those incidents are so terrible, the only word to describe them must be "hell," right? That's what you're supposed to believe. Yet that is not what the scripture teaches. What Bell is describing is SIN and the effects of sin, the very thing Christ came to free men from.

Bell continues:

God gives us what we want, and if that's hell, we can have it. We have that kind of freedom, that kind of choice. We are that free. We can use machetes if we want to.

So when people say they don't believe in hell and they don't like the word "sin," my first response is to ask, "Have you sat and talked with a family who just found out their child has been molested? Repeatedly? Over a number of years? By a relative?" (page 72)

Here, Bell is talking about a sin that has been committed and is using this story to say that what this boy has experienced is hell. According to Jesus, hell was created for the devil and his angels, into which unconverted men are also thrown.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: (Mat. 25:41)

As you can see from the above passage, hell is a place of punishment which Jesus Himself sends people to. So it's a pretty degrading thing to say this boy has experienced hell. It would imply that what he has experienced was a punishment that was given to him by Jesus Himself. That is utterly blasphemous and wicked, and that is what it boils down to, if you hold to Bell's definition of hell. This is what happens when you redefine biblical words and give them meanings that God never gave them. You can end up attributing great evils to God, even if that wasn't your intention. That is why works like Love Wins by Rob Bell

are so dangerous.

Bell continues:

But when you've sat with a wife who has just found out that her husband has been cheating on her for years, and you realize what it is going to do to their marriage and children and finances and friendships and future, and you see the concentric rings of pain that are going to emanate from this one man's choice – in that moment Jesus's warnings don't seem that over-the-top or drastic; they seem perfectly spot-on.

Gouging out his eye may actually have been a better choice.

Some agony needs agonizing language.
Some destruction does make you think of fire.
Some betrayal actually feels like you've been burned.
Some injustices do cause things to heat up. (page 73)

Here again, we have Bell seeking to redefine what hell is. He is confusing sin and its consequences with hell itself. Bell then takes the passage where Jesus says to “pluck out your eye” if it causes you to sin and relates it to this situation, implying that because this man didn't do so, he has now brought “hell on earth.” But take a minute and read the passage and see what it says:

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. (Mat. 5:29)

This passage has nothing to do with what Bell describes. Jesus said if your eye is causing you to sin, it is better to pluck it out than for your WHOLE BODY to be CAST into hell. The passage has to do with what happens after death. This passage in Luke says the same thing:

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. (Luke 12:4-5)

God has the power to kill the body and then to cast you into hell. It's quite clear that Rob Bell's definition of hell is found nowhere in the Bible. Again, you can see how Rob Bell is slowly trying to redefine this biblical word and make it something it's not.

Bell then goes on to talk about Lazarus and the rich man. Bell does seem to affirm that the rich man is in hell but then makes statements that are not scriptural. He says:

He's alive in death, but in profound torment, because he's living with the realities of not properly dying the kind of death that actually leads a person into the only kind of

life that's worth living. (page 77)

That sounds nice, but you cannot find that in the scripture. The rich man says:

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. (Luke 16:24)

The rich man was tormented because he was "in the flames." Bell is again trying to give new meanings to words like hell, fire, torment, etc. Bell then shifts the story to say that the meaning of the story has to do with the hells people create here on earth by rejecting God. But the story of Lazarus and the rich man has nothing to do with creating hell here on earth, because that is an impossibility. It has to do with the type of punishment people will receive who are "lovers of money," while ignoring those in need around them.

Bell says:

What we see in Jesus's story about the rich man and Lazarus is an affirmation that there are all kinds of hells, because there are all kinds of ways to resist and reject all that is good and true and beautiful and human now, in this life, and so we can only assume we can do the same in the next. (page 79)

If you read the story of Lazarus and the rich man, you will see that it does not tell us that there are all kinds of hells. It does show us that there are sins that, if continued in, will lead a person to hell. This is very different than what Bell is saying though.

Bell then shifts his focus to the other passages in the Bible that don't talk about hell but do mention judgment and punishment.

To summarize, Bell says that Jesus, when talking about the judgment and punishment, he is talking about the soon-coming destruction of the Jews by the Romans. He also says that Jesus was primarily talking to the Jewish covenanted people of God, and he insists that those passages that deal with judgment and punishment must only be looked at in that light. But then Bell does not quote the passages from the Bible and show their context. He skips them and goes right on to his next thought.

Bell says:

Because of this history, it's important that we don't take Jesus's very real and prescient warnings about judgment then out of context, make them about someday, somewhere else. That wasn't what he was talking about.

Other than interactions with a Roman centurion and a woman by the well in Samaria and a few others, he's talking to very devoted, religious Jews. He's talking to people who saw themselves as God's people. Light of the world, salt of the earth, all that. His audience was people who were "in." Believer, redeemed, devoted, passionate,

secure in their knowledge that they were God's chosen, saved, covenant people. (page 81)

What Bell says in these two passages is true for some of the parables and warnings that Jesus gave. Some of them deal directly with the Pharisees, their rejection of Jesus, and the coming destruction they would soon face. Yet there are many passages that simply talk about what the kingdom of God is like. It relates to all men, even to us today. These passages about the kingdom have clear warnings in them about the judgment to come, some referring to the end of the age, and eternal punishment. So they are not simply warnings about the coming judgment to the Jewish people, nor are the warnings to be understood as relating only to God's people both then and now. Here are a few of the passages. (It would be good for you to take your Bible and read each of them in depth, as they are not covered in Love Wins).

The Wheat and the Tares – you can read this parable in Matthew 13:24-30

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Mat. 13:36-43)

It's quite clear. The harvest is at the end of the world. Jesus sends his angels to gather out all things that "offend and do iniquity." They are then cast into the fire, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.

The fish and the net

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Mat. 13:47-50)

Again, it's very clear, this happens at the "end of the world". At the end of the world, the wicked are separated from the just, and they are then cast into a furnace of fire.

Offending a Child & Hand, Foot & Eyes

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. (Mat. 18:6)

Well, we know Rob Bell thinks this verse applies to today, because he brought it up in the second chapter of his book as a warning to those who believe in the traditional view of hell. And he's right; this passage is applicable to all until the end of the world. The interesting thing is that immediately following this verse are some very clear warnings dealing with sin and the reality of being cast into hell. If Matthew 18:6 applies to today, then surely these verses also apply to today:

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. (Mat. 18:7-9)

Obviously, these passages are all connected and therefore apply to every person, whether they lived in Jesus's time or today.

The parable of the talents – found in Matthew 25:14-30

His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mat. 25:26-30)

Bell mistakenly believes that unconverted people can be given talents too. He tells us this in the story he shares of the single mother who works like a slave trying to take care of her kids. He says she has been faithful with what she has been given. Yet this passage is actually one that is directed to God's people, His servants. So in one instance, when Bell says the parables are directed to God's people, he's partially right. This one is. But on the other hand, he is wrong because he thinks this particular parable applies to all people, even the unconverted.

Sheep and the Goats – found in Matthew 25:31-46

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. (Mat. 25:31-33)

Clearly, this passage is talking about the return of Christ. Jesus then says of the goats:

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: (Mat. 25:41)

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Mat. 25:46)

Again, these passages are warnings about the judgment and punishment of the wicked that is applicable to us today. Another interesting truth that contradicts what Bell is teaching on the nature of hell is found in the above passage, Matthew 25:46. In this passage, the goats go into everlasting punishment. Rob Bell would have us believe that “everlasting” is only for an “age” or a “period of time” and is not eternal. Yet if that is the case, then the righteous only get life for an “age” or a “period of time.” So the righteous don’t really get to live forever but only for a period of time. Can you see the problem? The same Greek word “aionios” is used in both places when referring to the sheep and the goats. So you either have punishment and life for a short period of time, or you have punishment and life for a perpetual, never-ending period of time. The scripture teaches the latter.

Fear Him – found in Luke 12:4, 5

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. (Luke 12:4, 5)

In this passage, we are warned to fear God because He has the power to not only kill the body but also, after He has killed the body, is able to cast you into hell. This passage was spoken to the disciples, but are we to understand that it applied only to them? Jesus told his disciples to go into “all the world” to “make disciples” and to “teach all that Jesus had commanded.” Again, this truth about God and His ability to cast men into hell and is applicable to all.

These are just a few passages out of the gospels that show that when Jesus was speaking of judgment and punishment, He was not always speaking only to the Jews of His time and to His followers. And we haven’t even looked at passages in the Epistles. Rob Bell fails to touch on those, which contain very clear warnings of Christ returning to take vengeance on those who don’t know God. So I can’t say, by any means, that Rob Bell has been honest about what he has said the Bible says about judgment and punishment.

Bell continues:

Jesus did not use hell to try to compel “heathens” and “pagans” to believe in God, so they wouldn’t burn when they die. He talked about hell to very religious people to warn them about the consequences of straying from their God-given calling and identity to show the world God’s love. (page 82)

I’ve already demonstrated that Jesus gave warnings about judgment, punishment, and hell that apply to all, everywhere, no matter who they are or when they live. In His earthly

ministry, Jesus was not sent to the “heathen” and “pagans.” As He said, He was sent “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mat. 15:24). So of course, Jesus wasn’t warning the pagans. However, later on, the apostles and believers were commanded to teach everything Jesus had taught them, which would include the topics of hell, judgment, and punishment. In fact, speaking of judgment, Peter says exactly that:

And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. (Acts 10:42)

Bell then continues and speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah. He uses a passage out of Ezekiel to say that they will one day be restored. However, the passage is clearly not talking about the people that God has already destroyed. Then Bell continues by saying:

But that still isn’t the last we hear of these two cities. As Jesus travels from village to village in Galilee, calling people to see things in a whole new way, he encounters great resistance in some areas, especially among the more religious and devout. In Matt. 10, he warns the people living in the village of Capernaum, “It will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for you.”

More bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah? He tells highly committed, pious, religious people that it will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than them on the judgment day?

There’s still hope? (page 84)

No, there is no hope for them. Because their judgment will be more “bearable” does not mean they will be restored. It simply means that the punishment they receive will be of a lesser degree than that of those who rejected Christ and received His teaching directly. Surely, there is greater accountability for those who personally had the Son of God teach them and live among them compared to those who never had such an opportunity. I like what this commentator says regarding this:

it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha, in the day of judgment, than for that city. The inhabitants of the land of Sodom and Gomorrha are the rather mentioned, because, as they were very notorious and abominable sinners, so their temporal punishment was well known, exemplary and awful, though not that, but their future damnation is here regarded, of which the Jews made no doubt; for they say,

the men of Sodom have no part in the world to come; as it is said, Gen. 13:13 “the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners, before the Lord exceedingly”: they were “wicked” in this world, and “sinners” in the world to come;

meaning, that by this passage is designed their double punishment in this, and the other world. But though their punishment was very tremendous, and they will suffer also “the vengeance of eternal fire,” as Jude says; yet, their punishment will be milder, and more tolerable, than that of the inhabitants of such a city, that rejects the Gospel of the grace of God: as there are degrees in sinning, for all sins are not alike, as the Stoics say; so

there will be degrees in suffering; the sins of those that are favoured with the Gospel, are greater than those who only have had the light of nature, and so their torments will be greater. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha, though they sinned against the light of nature, despised the advice and admonitions of Lot, and ill treated the angels, yet will be more mildly punished than the wicked Jews, who rejected Christ, and his Gospel, and despised his apostles, and ministers; because they sinned not against so much light, and such means of grace, and knowledge, as these did; see Lam. 4:6 which is thus paraphrased by the Targumist, and may be aptly applied to the Jews in Christ's time;"

Bell continues:

In Jeremiah 32, God says, "I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety."

Israel had been exiled, sent away, "banished" to a foreign land, the result of God's "furious anger and great wrath." But there's a point to what the prophet interprets and understands to be God's "anger and wrath." It's to teach the people, to correct them, to produce something new in them. (page 85)

That is true. But most of the time, the exact people that have been banished are not the ones who later return. They are not the ones God gathers. Many times, God wipes out entire disobedient generations and then shows mercy to a new generation of the same people group, as God continually did with Israel. God told Israel when He delivered them from Egypt that he was taking them to the "promised land." Yet God killed off an entire generation of unbelieving Israelites in the process. However, God still brought the Israelites to the promise land. Just because God says He's going to do something with a nation does not mean that He will do it with everyone in that nation. The scripture is quite clear on this. Yet Bell is using this premise to attempt to build His case that God is working to restore and save all people everywhere, something the scripture does not teach.

Bell continues:

The prophets are quick to point out that this isn't just something for "God's people," the "chosen," the "elect." (page 88)

That is partly right and partly not right. Yes, the prophets are saying that salvation would be extended to those who were not God's chosen people at the time – the heathen nations, those who were not part of Israel – the chosen nation. In fact, that is what Paul says is the "mystery of the gospel."

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:" (Eph. 3:3-6)

Yet, what Rob Bell states is that it's not only the believers, God's chosen and elect people, but everyone that will ultimately be saved. He twists what the scripture teaches, that salvation will be available to the gentiles, and says that salvation will come to all and that all will be saved.

Bell concludes the chapter by going back to Matthew 25 and talking about the sheep and the goats. Bell says:

The goats are sent, in the Greek language, to an aion of kolazo. Aion, we know, has several meanings. One is "age" or "period of time;" another refers to intensity of experience. The word kolazo is a term from horticulture. It refers to the pruning and trimming of the branches of a plant so it can flourish.

But "forever" is not really a category that biblical writers used. (pages 91, 92)

As I stated previously, if Bell translates "aion" to mean "a period of time" when the scripture talks about the goats, then he has also to translate it as "a period of time" when talking about the sheep. I don't think Jesus came to give us life for a period of time. Jesus came to give us "eternal," "never-ending" life – the same life He Himself has, since He lives in those who believe. And while the word "kolazo" can mean "to prune" or "trim," it also means "to inflict" and "punish," which is consistent with the rest of scripture on this topic.

So in this chapter, at the beginning we have Bell mocking the gospel by simplifying it without any real explanation; then we have Bell changing the meaning of hell to make it something scripture never says it is; next we have Bell omitting many passages on judgment and punishment that apply to everyone; then we have Bell twisting Old Testament scriptures to say that everyone will be saved; and lastly, we have Bell saying that the life Jesus gives His followers will only last for a period of time or an age.

What Bell is continuing to do is muddy the waters of biblical truth so that he can then clear them up with his new interpretations and solutions. I say the water was never muddy to begin with and we can keep with what the scripture plainly teaches.

On to the next chapter.

Chapter 4

DOES GOD GET WHAT GOD WANTS?

The title says it all, doesn't it? Of course, God is God, He is all powerful, anything He wants to come to pass He can bring to pass, so God always gets what God wants. Therefore, since God wants all to be saved, in the end all must somehow be saved or God does not get what God wants, and therefore He would not be God. That sums up what Bell teaches in this chapter, with the addition of a few partially quoted scripture verses, many of which are taken out of their immediate context.

The truth is, how can you have a discussion about a title like, "Does God Get What God Wants," without taking into account multitudes and multitudes of verses that all speak on this subject? How can you tackle a question like this in 24 pages that are primarily filled up with the words of Rob Bell instead of countless scriptures?

The truth is...

you can't,
and he didn't.

The actual answer to that question is both yes and no. It cannot easily be discussed without going through countless verses, taking into account God's nature as revealed in scripture and determining if God has different types of "wills" or desires. Can God will something in the absolute sense in the sense that it absolutely will come to pass? The short answer is yes. Can God will something that He would like to come to pass, as it is in agreement with His nature, but He does not ordain it to come to pass in an absolute sense? The short answer is yes. These questions can absolutely be answered from scripture, but that would be a rather long discussion and would take away from the purpose for writing this critique. Again, my goal is not to present the truth on this matter by examining every single scripture on the subject, which would be the right thing to do if we really and honestly want to CLEARLY see what the Bible teaches on this subject. But my goal is to show you how the overall teaching of Rob Bell is wrong and doesn't take into account the entirety of scripture, how he twists verses to say what they don't say, how he adds to God's word, and how the nature of deception works. So with these goals in mind, let's go through some of the things Bell says in this chapter.

Bell begins the chapter by stating how many church websites have statements about judgment, hell, and the torment of unbelievers, and then at the same time these websites have statements talking about a God who is:

"mighty,"
"powerful,"

“loving,”
“unchanging,”
“sovereign,”
“full of grace and mercy,”
And “all-knowing.” (pages 96, 97)

He continues:

I point out these parallel claims: that God is mighty, powerful, and “in control” and that billions of people will spend forever apart from this God, who is their creator, even though it is written in the Bible that “God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2)

So does God get what God wants? (page 97)

So again, Bell puts up one truth about God against another truth about God, and insinuates that one truth about God can't be right because of one verse found in 1 Timothy 2. What Bell is trying to say is that God cannot possibly be considered “full of grace and mercy,” “loving,” “mighty,” and “powerful,” if God sends people to hell forever. Why? Because to him, and others like him, love is the only real attribute that God has; and it triumphs over every other attribute of God, instead of working together with His other attributes in a perfect way. But what do you see in the cross of Christ? You see God's holiness, His justice, and His love fully displayed in the crucifixion and death of Christ for our sins. Let's also ask this question. If God had wanted to forgive our sins without sending His only Son to die for us, could He have done it? The answer is no. Yes, there are certain things that God cannot do. God cannot tell a lie (1 Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18); God cannot tempt people with evil (James 1:13); and God could not forgive our sins without Christ satisfying the just wrath of God for our sins (Isaiah 53:4-6, 10). Love was not the only attribute of God being displayed when Christ was crucified. God's hatred for our sin and God's wrath toward our sins were also being displayed and satisfied when Jesus was crucified. Not one of God's attributes was “put aside” or considered “less important” when God accomplished salvation for those who would believe. When one begins to understand the nature of God, there is no need to put one attribute of God up against another attribute of God. When you are able to do this, you will be able to more easily reconcile verses in the Bible that seem to say different things about God's character. However, if you are like many people today who are led by their emotions and what they believe God should do and by what they believe is right and wrong, then you will be easily led astray. You will find yourself in a ditch called humanism on one side of the “narrow road.” Humanism is the primary philosophy behind the book Love Wins. That's why each chapter asks the leading questions that it does and why each chapter is so shallow when dealing with verses on the topic that is being discussed.

Again, Rob Bell says:

So does God get what God wants? (page 97)

Let's ask a few similar questions:

Did God want Israel to fall into apostasy and backslide from keeping God's commandments?

Did God want Israel to distort His image and character to the nations around them?

Did God want King David to commit sin and sleep with Bathsheeba?

Did God want the Pharisees to be baptized by John the Baptist? How does the scripture answer this question?

But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. (Luke 7:30)

Does God Get What God Wants? Obviously, there are different types of "wills" of God. One that God will most certainly bring to pass and one that God desires should happen, as it is in accordance with His nature, but that is not guaranteed to come to pass. Again, this topic would require a very lengthy discussion.

But let's continue. Bell says:

How great is God?
Great enough to achieve what God sets out to do,
Or kind of great,
Medium great,
Great most of the time,
But in this,
The fate of billions of people,
Not totally great.
Sort of great.
A little great. (page 98)

That's just blasphemous. So if God does not save everyone, according to what Bell believes, then God is really not that great. Of course, he's asking this as a question so that he doesn't have to say it outright. But he's saying it without saying it. It's very deceptive.

Bell continues:

According to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, "God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear" (chap. 6) (page 98)

Rob Bell is using this verse to state that God's unchanging nature and purpose is for all to be saved. Let's look at this verse in context:

“so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Heb. 6:12-20)

So God, wanting Abraham (and us) to know the unchangeable nature of His purpose, guaranteed it with an oath. God swore by Himself. Therefore, we to who have fled to Christ for “refuge” might have strong encouragement to hold fast the hope set before us. What is our hope?

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

That is our hope that is founded on God’s “unchangeable nature of his purpose.” It is founded on an oath and on the fact that God cannot lie. It has nothing to do with the ultimate salvation of every person who ever lived.

Bell continues:

[Does this magnificent, mighty, marvelous God fail in the end? \(page 98\)](#)

And the answer is no. Everyone that believes that Jesus is the Son of God, is born-again by the Spirit of God, and who has the Spirit testifying that they are His child will receive eternal life. God most certainly does not fail.

Bell continues:

[The prophet Malachi asks, “Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? \(chap. 2\). Paul says in Acts 17, “We are God’s offspring,” and in Ephesians 3 he writes, “I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.” The writers of the scriptures consistently affirm that we’re all part of the same family. \(page 99\)](#)

Here Rob Bell is saying that we all, all of humanity, have the same Father. God is the Father of us all. Therefore, would a Father let any of His children perish? But is that really what the scripture teaches? Are we all children of God in the sense that Rob Bell would have us believe? Are there other scriptures that show a distinction between who

are the children of God and who are not the children of God? First, let's look at the passages above that Bell quotes.

Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. (Mal. 2:10-11)

Here, God is speaking to the children of Israel about how they treat each other. God is rebuking the chosen people of God and not the heathen nations. The prophet, speaking to Jews, says, "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?"

It is the same sort of thing God says in Isaiah:

But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. (Isa. 43:1)

At that time, the Israelites were the chosen people of God. They had a different relationship with God that the rest of the nations did not have. God was their "Father" in a way He was not with the rest of the nations.

Bell then quotes Paul from Acts 17:

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. (Acts 17:29)

Notice Paul uses the word "offspring" and not "child of God." While they can mean the same thing in other uses, in a biblical sense they do not. The scriptures I post below will show the difference.

Then Bell quotes Ephesians 3:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, (Eph. 3:15)

I believe Bell uses the NIV when quoting this verse, and it says, "from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name." The King James Version makes the understanding of this passage more clear when it says, "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." So the whole family of God, all the children of God through faith (as we shall see), whether they be in heaven or earth, derives its name from the Father and/or Jesus Christ. This passage is not saying that every pagan family is part of the family of God. Scripture never teaches such a thing. Here are some other verses that help bring to light WHO the children of God are:

“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. **By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil:** whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.” (1 Jn. 3:8-10)

So those who “practice,” or live a lifestyle, of sin are not the children of God.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. (1 Jn. 4:13-15)

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (Rom. 8:9)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, **but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:16-17)

Can you see the distinction? Most of humanity is not considered a child of God. God is not their Father in the same sense that God is the Father of those who believe.

So, those who are children of God

Don't practice sin.

Have the Spirit of God.

Confess that Jesus is the Son of God.

Are led by the Spirit of God.

And have the Spirit of God bearing witness that they are His child.

So why is it that Bell leaves out all these scriptures that clarify who the children of God really are? Could it be that they don't fit with what he's trying to teach? Does that concern you, that in talking about such an important topic, he would leave out important verses that bring clarity to who God's children are and who can rightfully call Him Father? Again and again, Bell continues to distort what the scripture teaches so that you'll believe what he's teaching.

Bell then continues by quoting scripture from Ezekiel 36, Isaiah 52, Zephaniah, and Philippians saying, “The nations will know that I am the Lord,” “all the ends of the earth

will see the salvation of our God,” “then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder,” and “every knee should bow...and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Bell then says:

All people.

The nations.

Every person, every knee, every tongue. (page 100)

Bell is trying to say that when the scripture says ALL people and ALL nations, it means every single person that ever lived...because all means all. But let's look at a few other ALLs in the Bible and see if ALL might have some other meanings.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35)

So using Bell's logic, if I love the brethren, every single person in the entire world will then know that I am a disciple of Christ, even the ones I've never met.

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. (1 Cor. 9:19)

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. (1 Cor. 9:22)

So did Paul literally become a servant to all people – everyone that ever lived? According to Bell's reasoning, he did. Did Paul become all things to all people? Did Paul become a transsexual to the transsexual? According to Bell's reasoning, he did.

I could go on and on, but there's no need. It's easy to see that ALL does not always mean ALL, and there are countless other examples that show the same thing.

I could in turn ask Bell, “Does Jesus only bear the sins of many? If he only bears the sins of many, then how are all saved?” Because MANY means MANY and not ALL, right?

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Isa. 53:12)

Obviously, a discussion of this magnitude cannot be undertaken without taking into account all these different verses and how certain words are used. You can't simply pull out verses that you like, that you can twist to say what you want them to say, and teach on a topic like this. It's irresponsible, and it is quite often the way false teachers operate.

Bell continues:

Is history tragic?

Have billions of people been created only to spend eternity in conscious punishment and torment, suffering infinitely for the finite sins they committed in the few years they spent on earth?

Is our future uncertain?

Or will God take care of us?

Are we safe?

Are we secure?

Or are we on our own? (page 102)

So history is ultimately tragic if some people go to heaven while others do not. The fact is, God was not obligated to save any person. He could have left the human race without redemption like He has the fallen angels. The angels have no hope of redemption (Jude 6). Their sin was not atoned for by the death of Christ. Yet God in His mercy has not left the human race in a state where none have the possibility of salvation. God has made a way for those who believe the gospel, the “good news,” to be saved. There is nothing tragic at all about the true grace of God.

Bell continues:

Will God, in the end, settle, saying:

“Well, I tried, I gave it my best shot,

And sometimes you just have to be okay with failure”?

Will God shrug God-sized shoulders and say,

“You can’t always get what you want”? (page 103)

So if you believe in the traditional Gospel, then you are calling God a failure, and therefore God will have to sing that song, “You can’t always get what you want.” Ultimately, you are saying God is not all-powerful, He is not mighty, and He cannot do what He wants to do. In other words, Bell is saying (without directly saying it) that if you do not believe like I do, then you are degrading God and ultimately calling Him a failure. The fact is, though God may desire the salvation of every man, it will not happen, as the scriptures say. Though God may desire that Rob Bell never sin, yet Rob Bell will sin. Though God may have desired the Pharisees to take John’s Baptism, they did not take John’s Baptism. Yet God did desire that those who believe in the Son of God would not perish but have eternal life, and those who believe in the Son of God DO and WILL have eternal life. The word of God is true despite Bell’s leading questions and insinuations.

Now that Bell has questioned and mocked the traditional view of salvation, he’s going to explain two other views, both very similar, one of which leads to the ultimate reconciliation of all men to God.

Bell says:

And then there are others who can live with two destinations, two realities after death, but insist that there must be some kind of “second chance” for those who don’t believe in Jesus in this lifetime. In a letter Martin Luther, one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, wrote to Hans von Rechenberg in 1552 about the possibility that people could turn to God after death, asking; “Who would doubt God’s ability to do that?” (page 106)

Bell is trying to insinuate that, “Look, even one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation held to the possibility that God could save people after death.” So even those leaders who taught salvation alone, through Christ alone, accepted the possibility that what Bell is about to teach could be true. But is that the case? Is that what Martin Luther actually said? Let’s look at the whole quote in “context” (again that pesky word that false teachers just hate).

“If God were to save anyone without faith, he would be acting contrary to his own words and would give himself the lie; yes, he would deny himself. And that is impossible for, as St. Paul declares, God cannot deny himself [II Tim. 2:13]. It is as impossible for God to save without faith as it is impossible for divine truth to lie. That is clear, obvious, and easily understood, no matter how reluctant the old wineskin is to hold this wine – yes, is unable to hold and contain it.

It would be quite a different question whether God can impart faith to some in the hour of death or after death so that these people could be saved through faith. *Who would doubt God's ability to do that? No one, however, can prove that he does do this.* For all that we read is that he has already raised people from the dead and thus granted them faith. But whether he gives faith or not, it is impossible for anyone to be saved without faith. Otherwise every sermon, the gospel, and faith would be vain, false, and deceptive, since the entire gospel makes faith necessary. (*Works*, 43, ed. and trans. G. Wienke and H. T. Lehmann [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968], 53-54; WA 10.ii, 324.25-325.11)”

So is Luther saying what Rob Bell is implying that he is saying? Is Martin Luther saying that there is a possibility for people to be saved after death? Martin Luther is not denying that God does have the ability to save someone “by faith” after they have died, but he also says, “No one, however, can prove that He does do this.” Martin Luther is correct. He is saying that God could save someone who had faith after they died, but God has not said he will do such a thing. He is using the Bible as his guide as to what God has revealed that He will and won’t do. God has not revealed that He will save people after they die. However, God has most clearly revealed that those who die in their sin, apart from receiving the salvation that is only found in Christ, will indeed be cast into hell and then judged and cast into the lake of fire, also called the second death. (Rev. 20:15)

But even if Martin Luther held to the view that Rob Bell is espousing in his book, does it even matter? Martin Luther was a man like any other man and is not the authority on biblical truth. If what someone says contradicts the scriptures, it doesn’t matter who they

are. The word of God is the only and final authority.

So again, why did Rob Bell only pull out one sentence from the quote by Martin Luther? Why did he not want to be accurate and truthful and show the question Martin asked in its full context? Is it because the full context does not support what Rob Bell wants you to believe? Is it because Rob Bell has yet to learn to read things in context? Or, is it because the truth doesn't really matter to Rob Bell? (Maybe I'll just continue to ask questions like Rob Bell, so that later I can deny that I'm saying what I'm really saying.)

Also, notice that in Rob Bell's quote above, he says there are "those who **insist** there must be some kind of second chance." What right do we have to "insist" on anything, especially as it relates to God and what He must or must not do? God has a very clear answer to people who make statements like this:

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory – even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?" (Rom. 9:19-24)

No man can insist that God do anything or act in any way that is contrary to what God has revealed about Himself in the scriptures. To do so is the height of arrogance and shows just how little someone knows about the God of the Bible.

So now we finally get to where Bell has been leading us. Here, Bell tells you what he believes:

And then there are others who ask, if you get another chance after you die, why limit that chance to a one-off immediately after death? And so they expand the possibilities, trusting that there will be endless opportunities in an endless amount of time for people to say yes to God.

As long as it takes, in other words.

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. (pages 106, 107)

Notice that when Rob Bell begins to talk about universal salvation, or "the reconciliation of all things," he no longer asks his usual leading questions that go down a negative road. We are about to shift into the "positive" and see how glorious this position is. So again,

with the traditional view of salvation, we have all kinds of questions that make us question the character of God and which are designed to subtly put fear into us in different ways. But now that Rob Bell is talking about a different view of salvation, his view, those questions are going to silently fade away, and we are going to see how glorious and positive this position is.

Bell continues:

And so, beginning with the early church, there is a long tradition of Christians who believe that God will ultimately restore everything and everybody, because Jesus says in Matthew 19 that there will be a “renewal of all things,” Peter says in Acts 3 that Jesus will “restore everything,” and Paul says in Colossians 1 that through Christ “God was pleased to...reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” (page 107)

As I have said previously, you cannot have a discussion of this magnitude by just throwing out snippets of passages without consulting other passages or the entire passage in context. The reconciling or renewing of all things refers to the blessed condition when this age shall come to an end and all things shall be submitted unto Christ. A world without sin, the righteous with the Lord, and the unjust and unbelieving in the lake of fire. What Rob Bell is holding onto is the word “all” in the above passages. He infers that “all” means every single person that ever lived. Yet I have briefly shown already that “all” doesn’t always mean every single person; in fact, many times it doesn’t. Many times in scripture, words like “many” appear, and Rob Bell would most likely say that these words have a very different meaning, such as previously mentioned in Isaiah 53 where “he bore the sins of many.” So the fact is, each of these passages must be understood in the context of the whole of scripture. When someone can do that, it will keep them from falling into a ditch and from believing and teaching error. If one reads the Bible, taking into account the full counsel of scripture; they will see that only those who believe in Christ are saved; the unconverted, whose names are not in the book of life, are cast into the lake of fire; God creates a new heaven and earth, and ultimately everything is reconciled to God. The complete scriptures, the complete truth.

Bell then continues by talking about the different “church fathers” who have held to the belief that all people will ultimately be saved. What I’ve noticed is that no matter what people are teaching, they always seem to want to refer back to the “church fathers.” The funny thing is, it almost doesn’t matter what you believe, you can always find a so called “church father” whom you can quote and who agrees with your position. I’ve always found it best to just stick with the scriptures instead of quoting “church fathers” as some sort of authority. I think many people tend to forget the warning that the apostle Paul gave.

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. (Acts 20:30)

And what John the apostle said:

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church. (3 Jn. 1:9, 10)

There's no doubt that men like this were what some considered "church fathers" later. I'm not saying they were all that way, because they weren't. What I am saying is that Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that men, even from among themselves, would rise up and draw away disciples unto themselves. How do they do it? By speaking "perverse things." They do it by speaking and teaching things that God had not spoken or taught. In the 21st century, they might do it by asking leading questions. Questions that lead away from the truth, by questioning and degrading the character of God as revealed in the scriptures and introducing something that the Bible does not teach, and doing all these things while at the same time denying that is what they are doing.

It's a good warning.
Still applicable today.

Bell continues:

Central to their trust that all would be reconciled was the belief that untold masses of people suffering forever doesn't bring God glory. Restoration brings God glory; eternal torment doesn't. Reconciliation brings God glory; endless anguish doesn't. Renewal and return causes God's greatness to shine through the universe; never-ending punishment doesn't. (page 108)

So the reason these people believe this way is because THEY believe this is the way that God gets the most glory. Again, it's humanism. People ultimately decided on what it is that is best for God. Any time that we decide what is best instead of letting the scriptures teach us what is best, we will almost always end up in error. The scriptures teach that God gets glory when people are saved, and God gets glory when people are condemned. If love is the only attribute that you believe God really has, then of course the only way God will really get glory is if all people are saved. Yet if you believe that God is also holy, righteous, and just; you will realize that the scripture teaches that God is also glorified in wrath, judgment, and punishment as well.

With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. (Isa. 26:9)

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on

God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (Rom. 9:14-18)

And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments. (Rev. 16:7)

For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. (Rev. 19:2)

God receives glory in everything He does. He receives glory in the salvation of sinners, in the damnation of sinners, in the judging of the world, and in the renewing of the world. In everything God does, He gets perfect glory because He is perfect. In all that God does, His perfection and His attributes are gloriously and righteously displayed.

Bell continues:

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)

I guess Bell didn’t read these verses:

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” But he answered, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.” (Mat. 25:11, 12)

Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, “Lord, open to us,” then he will answer you, “I do not know where you come from.” (Luke 13:24-25)

They wanted in.

The Lord said no.

Exactly the opposite of what Bell says.

Bell continues:

As it’s written in 2 Timothy 2, God “cannot disown himself”

As Abraham asked in Genesis 18. “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right”? (pages 108, 109)

Yes, as it says in 2 Timothy, God cannot disown himself. But let's look at the verse in context.

if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself. (2 Tim. 2:12, 13)

So if we deny God, He will deny us. That doesn't sound like reconciliation, now does it? Then it says if we're faithless, He remains faithful. That doesn't mean God will save everybody. What it means is quite simple. If we're faithless to believe anything that God has said, God is still faithful. Our unbelief does not nullify God and His word being true.

Then we have Bell quoting Abraham, saying, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" For Bell and others, it means that for God to do right, He must save every person who ever lived. But let's look at that passage again in context. Genesis 18 is the story where God comes down to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. God tells Abraham what He is going to do, and Abraham says:

Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen. 18:23)

"Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:25)

As you can see, the issue is not about "saving everybody." The issue is about whether God is going to destroy the righteous with the wicked. Simply reading this verse in context will show anyone that what Rob Bell is making it say has nothing to do with what Abraham was saying. Yet this is how Rob Bell builds his case for what God should do. He takes verses out of their contexts and gives them new meanings.

Bell continues:

At the center of Christian tradition since the first church have been a number who insist that history is not tragic, hell is not forever, and love, in the end, wins and all will be reconciled to God. (page 109)

Here, Bell is again stating his position and trying to say that this position has been at the "center of the Christian tradition."

Bell, then, wants to make everyone who believes like him feel good by saying that there have always been believers who have believed all kinds of things. He says:

It is, after all, a wide stream we're swimming in. (page 110)

I think it's time for him to get out of the wide stream and onto the narrow road.

In talking about the traditional view of hell compared to his view, Bell says:

Second, it's important, that we be honest about the fact that some stories are better than others. Telling a story in which billions of people spend forever somewhere in the universe trapped in a black hole of endless torment and misery with no way out isn't a good story. (page 110)

In contrast, everybody enjoying God's good world together with no disgrace or shame, justice being served and all the wrongs being made right is a better story. (page 111)

So it's not really about what the scripture teaches; it's about what story we deem to be a better story. Again, it's humanism at the core. It might have been a happier story if God had sent presents to all the people in Noah's day instead of killing them in a flood, but He didn't. It might have been a happier story if God had rained down candy on the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, but He didn't. It doesn't matter what WE FEEL. It only matters what God has said and revealed.

Now, here's the kicker. Listen to what Bell says here:

To shun, censor, or ostracize someone for holding this belief is to fail to extend grace to each other in a discussion that has had plenty of room for varied perspectives for hundreds of years now. (page 111)

Bell obviously knows that many Bible-believing Christians are going to disagree with him. So Bell includes this statement to fend off criticism of his beliefs and from his being labeled a heretic. However, this is one of the most hypocritical statements in his book, and it reeks of Pharisee-ism. So you're supposed to accept Bell and what he says, while Bell has taken "shots", if you will, at those who hold to the traditional view of salvation. He implies that those who "think they have salvation and Jesus figured out" might be like the demons; he insinuates that those who believe in the traditional view of hell might make children stumble and risk being killed by Jesus; he insinuates that if you believe in the traditional view of hell, your God is not good or loving or powerful, etc., etc., etc.

Over and over again, Bell asks his leading questions to make you question God's character. He makes accusing statements against those who hold to the traditional view of hell, and then he denies that is what he is really saying. He does in this book what he is telling you not to do. But instead of just saying it, he asks questions and makes statements that he says don't relate to what he's saying, all so he can deny what he's really trying to say. It really is the height of deception. If that isn't just like Satan, to lie and deceive, then I don't know what is. But you're not supposed to criticize or shun this "angel (messenger) of light" (2 Cor. 11:14)

Bell then begins to bring this chapter to a close by talking about the book of Revelation. Bell points out different scenes and pictures from the book. He talks about:

Women sit on scarlet beast
Swords come out of mouths,
And the “lake of fire” death and Hades experience a “second death” (pages 111, 112)

Bell is quick to mention that death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire, but he conveniently forgets to mention the very next verse, which says:

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:15)

How can you write a book on this subject without addressing verses like this? The truth is, you can't, unless you just want to overlook them because they don't support what you are teaching.

Bell continues:

Will everybody be saved,
Or will some perish apart from God forever because of their choices?

Those are questions, or more accurately, those are tensions we are free to leave fully intact. We don't need to resolve them or answer them because we can't, and so we simply respect them, create space for the freedom that love requires. (page 115)

So you have page upon page of Bell viewing and questioning the traditional view of salvation in a negative light. Then you have pages and pages of Bell espousing what IS his view of salvation in a positive light. Then you have Bell again, in typical Bell fashion, deny that he is really saying anything at all and that we can't really understand the Bible. Do you see a pattern? I'm hoping you can see it by now.

Then Bell goes right back to talking about how Revelation shows there can still be all kinds of possibilities in the new heaven and new earth – in other words, possibilities for everyone to be reconciled to God.

He says:

This doesn't diminish God's justice or take less seriously the very real consequences of sin and rebellion, it simply acknowledges with humility the limits of our powers of speculation. (page 116)

The “powers of speculation” have not been limited in this book. It is an entire book of speculation, based on out-of-context verses and the emotions of its writer. It is a book that ultimately diminishes the word of God.

So in conclusion, Rob Bell says everything, to say nothing, to say we can't know, to say that Love Wins. Hopefully, you understood.

Chapter 5

DYING TO LIVE & THERE ARE ROCKS EVERYWHERE

I decided to combine these two chapters because there are only a couple things I wanted to point out in both. Instead of covering the overall topic for each chapter, I want to point out some things Rob Bell says and then, again, look at them in light of the scriptures. First, in “Dying to Live,” Rob Bell says:

In a different book in the New Testament, Paul writes to the Colossians that through the cross God was reconciling “to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (chap 1). “Reconciliation” is a word from the world of relationships. It’s what happens when two people or groups have had something come between them, some argument or difference or wrong or injustice, and now they’ve found a way to work it out and come back together. Peace has been made. They’ve been reconciled.

Paul takes something we experience in relationships and says, essentially, “That’s what happened on the cross.” God has made peace with “all things.” (pages 125, 126)

Rob Bell is only partly right. He again takes a truth, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and leaves out other scriptures that say this reconciliation **MUST** be received. It is not unilaterally automatic. God has dealt with our sins on the cross, but for us to receive the benefit of the cross and to be reconciled with God, we must, in faith, receive (believe on) Christ and what He has done for us.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

So God, through Christ, was reconciling the world unto Himself. However, Paul is imploring his readers on behalf of Christ, **BE RECONCILED TO GOD**. There is something that the readers must **DO** to receive the “reconciliation.” (We’ll look at this more later on when we look at what the apostles preached.)

Bell’s assumption is that this reconciliation is applicable to everyone, because God has said that He was reconciling “the world” unto Himself. Paul, the very one who said that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,” also said in 2 Thessalonians:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; (2 Th. 1:7-9)

If these unbelievers had received reconciliation as Bell implies, doesn't it seem strange that the Lord is now going to punish them with everlasting destruction? This is from the epistles, and we haven't even looked at the book of Revelation yet, which is an account of God killing most of the world for their sin and rebellion as He brings this age to a close. Obviously, these people are not reconciled to God. If they were, then we could rightly ask, "Will not the judge of all the earth do right? Will you condemn the righteous with the wicked?"

Again, Bell is wrong.

Now, on to the chapter "There are Rocks Everywhere."

In this chapter, Bell seeks to convince us that Christ is saving all kinds of people who may not even know that they are being saved by Christ. He starts out with the account in Exodus 17 in which Moses strikes the rock to bring forth water for the complaining Israelites. After briefly explaining the account, Bell says:

But the rock – we don't hear any more about the rock. Until more than a thousand years later.

In the letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul refers to this story about this rock, saying that those who traveled out of Egypt "drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10)

That rock was...Christ? Jesus?

Jesus was the rock?

How is that? Christ is mentioned nowhere in the story. Moses strikes the rock, it provides water, and the people have something to drink.

Story over.

Paul, however, reads another story in the story, insisting that Christ was present in the moment, that Christ was providing the water they needed to survive – that Jesus was giving, quenching, sustaining.

Jesus was, he says, the rock.

According to Paul,

Jesus was there.

Without anybody using his name.

Without anybody saying that it was him.

Without anybody acknowledging just what – or, more precisely, who – it was. (pages 143, 144)

So here we have Bell recounting this story to help us see that Jesus is at work everywhere, saving people that don't even know He is the one that is saving them. But is that really the meaning of this story? Is that why Paul shared this account? Because the scripture shows that God killed off most of the Israelites who actually drank from the rock.

Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me: Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD. And the LORD'S anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed. (Num. 32:11-13)

So was Jesus saving the Israelites only to later kill them off? If Bell believes that Jesus is saving others in this same way, is Jesus also going to kill off these other people in the same way? Let's look at 1st Corinthians and see what Paul wanted us to learn from this account.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” (1Cor. 10:1-12)

Paul did not write these passages in 1 Corinthians 10 to show us the marvelous ways that Jesus is saving people all over the world without them even knowing it. Notice who Paul is addressing. He says, “Moreover, BRETHREN.” Paul is talking to believers in Jesus Christ and giving THEM a personal warning. Paul is telling them how God redeemed Israel from the Egyptians, baptized them, and provided for them; but then because they sinned, God overthrew (killed) them in the wilderness. They were destroyed by the God who had saved them. Paul even tells them why this happened: “Now all these things

happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” These things happened and were recorded so that we who believe would have a warning about how God works, how serious He is, and how serious we should be about following Him and about our salvation. The point of Paul sharing this account, contrary to what Rob Bell believes, is not because he wanted to point out how Jesus was mysteriously saving people without them knowing it.

Bell continues:

Paul’s interpretation that Christ was present in the Exodus raises the question:

Where else has Christ been present?

When else?

With who else?

How else?

Paul finds Jesus there,

In that rock,

Because Paul finds Jesus everywhere. (page 144)

So because Paul sees Jesus at work in the nation to which God chose to reveal Himself, Bell assumes that God is also doing the same thing in other nations. However, God had specifically chosen to reveal himself through the nation of Israel, and they were to be a light to the world. Bell says that Paul “finds Jesus everywhere,” which is hardly the case. Paul finds Jesus at work in the people group that God called forth to reveal Himself to the world. Paul sees Jesus in all the types and shadows that God sovereignly ordered to teach us about Jesus Christ. Paul never refers to any pagan example to show Christ “secretly at work in their midst.” Notice what Paul says in Acts 17 at Mars Hill. Paul finds an altar there to an unknown God and says:

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. (Acts 17:23)

The men of Athens worshipped many gods and even had this altar to “the unknown God;” because they worshipped so many gods, surely there might be one they did not know. Paul then said He would declare this unknown God to them, who indeed is the only true God. Notice Paul did not say “I found an altar, and that altar IS Christ. He has been saving you and you just don’t know it.” Why? Because that was not the case. Paul did not “see Jesus everywhere.” Paul did see an opportunity to preach about Jesus, but Paul did not say that Jesus was at work in their midst already saving them. Then, notice what Paul tells these men:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30, 31)

Paul did not say that God was saving everyone. Nor did Paul say that they were already reconciled to God. Paul told them that God “commands all men to repent.” He tells them that they will be judged by a man that God raised from the dead. He did not tell them, “Don’t worry, Love Wins.”

Now, Rob Bell builds on his false assumption from the story in Exodus to continue teaching that Jesus is saving people, and sometimes they just don’t know it or Him.

Bell says:

John remembers Jesus saying, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (chap. 14)

This is as wide and expansive a claim as a person can make.

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. (page 154)

The whole testimony of the New Testament bears witness that what Rob Bell has just said is false. Nobody comes to the Father without knowing Jesus, His name, and what He has done for them through the cross. Jesus Himself commissioned His disciples to preach that it was only through believing their message about Him that men could have their sins forgiven.

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:47)

There is not one example in all of the New Testament of anyone coming to the Father through Jesus and not knowing it. That’s like saying, “I got married to my wife. We now live together. I just don’t know her name, and I’ve never met her.” Obviously, that’s absurd.

Now, though God does send people to preach the gospel, He sometimes reveals Himself to people even when there is no preacher. (God is not worried if the missionary gets a flat tire.) In fact, God often reveals Jesus to Muslims through dreams and visions. You can view many of these types of testimonies here: <http://www.morethandreams.org/> (I encourage you to do so; they are very edifying.) One thing you will notice though is that everyone comes to know who Jesus is, what His name is, and what He has done for them through the cross. God exalts His Son and does not leave men whom He’s saving in the dark in regards to the name of His Son and the salvation He has provided.

It almost wants to make you ask Bell some of his own questions.

Is God weak?

Is He not all powerful?

Is He impotent to reveal His Son to people?

What kind of God is that?

No, Jesus meant that people only come to the Father through Him. They know His name, they know what He has done, and they believe it.

Bell continues:

What Jesus does is declare that he,
And he alone,
Is saving everybody. (page 155)

I'm sorry, what verse was that? Actually, what Jesus says is come to Him to have life, repent and believe, and you will be saved. If you don't, then you will be damned (Mark 16:16). So Jesus is actually saving some people and damning others.

Bell continues this theme of Jesus secretly saving people through the rest of the chapter. However, he makes one other statement I want to address. Near the end, Bell says:

The world is being redeemed. (page 160)

The world is not being redeemed. The world is under a curse and will continue to get worse until Christ comes back. 2 Peter 3 and the whole of Revelation make this clear. Ultimately, this world will pass away, and then God will make a new heaven and a new earth. People are being redeemed; the world is not.

So, there are rocks everywhere, but they are only rocks.

Jesus is not secretly saving anyone.

He is the only way to the Father.

You must come to Him and know it.

This cursed world is passing away and God will make a new one.

And people, not the world, are being redeemed....those who believe. (John 20:31)

Chapter 6

THE GOOD NEWS IS BETTER THAN THAT

In this chapter, the next to the last in Rob Bell's book, he continues to demean the gospel, mock God, and call into question His character. The entire chapter is built around his explanation of the story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15. I'm not going to go through every detail of that story and Bell's comments, but I'm going to point out a few things and then address Bell's following comments about God. Rob Bell, in interpreting this story, says:

In this story, heaven and hell are within each other, intertwined, interwoven, bumping up against each other. (page 170)

The only way heaven and hell are in this story is if you give heaven and hell new definitions, ones that are not found in the Bible.

Bell defines hell by saying:

First, an observation about hell. Hell is our refusal to trust God's retelling of our story. (page 170)

Actually, the Bible teaches that hell is a place that God casts people into where He can destroy both their body and soul (Matt. 10:28). Heaven and hell are never spiritualized into some present-day reality that people experience in this life through their choices.

Then Bell again calls into question the character of God, basically saying that the God which most people believe in, because of what the scriptures teach, is cruel and vicious.

Bell says:

Millions have been taught that if they don't believe, if they don't accept in the right way, that is, the way the person telling them the gospel does, and they were hit by a car and died later that same day, God would have no choice but to punish them forever in conscious torment in hell. God would, in essence, become a fundamentally different being to them forever. A loving heavenly father who will go to extraordinary lengths to have a relationship with them would, in the blink of an eye, become a cruel, mean, vicious tormenter who would ensure that they had no escape from an endless future of agony. (pages 173, 174)

Again, that is not what the Bible teaches. The scriptures teach that men are already condemned (John 3:18, 19) and that unconverted men are enemies of God through wicked

works (Col. 1:21); in essence, they are already under God's wrath because of their willful sin and disobedience. All men, before coming to Christ, are already in a state of ruin and guilt. God, who is loving and rich in mercy, has provided salvation and pardon for all those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 3:16). They will not have to perish. God will give them eternal life, even though they do not deserve it. If someone dies in their sin, God does not "in the blink of an eye" become a different God to them altogether. One who is vicious and cruel. God stays the same because He is God and does not change. God stays holy and true and gives men the justice due their sins, not only for their sins against other men but also for their sins against God.

Bell continues:

If there was an earthly father who was like that, we would call the authorities. If there was an actual human dad who was that volatile, we would contact child protective services immediately.

If God can switch gears like that, switch entire modes of being that quickly, that raises a thousand questions about whether a being like this could ever be trusted, let alone be good.

Loving one moment, vicious the next. Kind and compassionate, only to become cruel and relentless in the blink of an eye.

That kind of God is simply devastating.
Psychologically crushing.
We can't bear it.
No one can. (page 174)

Those really are blasphemous statements. Notice Bell never mentions man's sin. Bell never mentions what God says about the condition of unconverted men. Bell just acts like God owes men everything. If God doesn't give us everything and then some, then He really is not God and can't be trusted. The scriptures do not teach that God is volatile or that He switches gears after one dies. God is always consistent. Men are condemned; Christ came to save those who believe. The only people who could possibly agree with what Bell wrote above about God are those who don't read their Bibles, those who let their emotions tell them what is right instead of the word of God. That has been the central theme throughout Bell's book: evaluating God by what fallen men think He should do. In essence, making God in their own image. A God that satisfies their definition of what is right and wrong.

Bell continues:

And that is the secret deep in the heart of many people, especially Christians: they don't love God. They can't, because the God they've been presented with and taught about can't be loved. That God is terrifying and traumatizing and unbearable. (page 175)

So back a chapter or two, Bell says that we can't resolve the tensions of whether God sends people to hell forever or whether he reconciles everyone; and here he says that a God who sends people to hell for their sin can't be loved. See how he talks out of both sides of his mouth? He wants to deny that he's saying or teaching something but then comes against what he doesn't believe. And no, Bell doesn't love the God of the scriptures. This chapter of his book is the most telling chapter about what Bell believes about the God of the Bible. Bell has his own god he worships; and, as he said, he cannot love the God of the Bible, because the God of the Bible is not made in his own image.

Bell continues:

Sometimes the reason people have a problem accepting "the gospel" is that they sense that the God lurking behind Jesus isn't safe, loving, or good. It doesn't make sense, it can't be reconciled, and so they say no. They don't want anything to do with Jesus, because they don't want anything to do with that God. (pages 175, 176)

Actually, the Bible tells us why men don't accept the gospel.

For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. (John 3:20)

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (2 Cor. 4:3-4)

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; (1 Cor. 1:23)

So people don't believe because...

They do evil and don't want to be exposed.

They are blinded by Satan.

The crucifixion is a stumbling block to Jews

And foolishness to others.

Bell continues:

A discussion about how to "just get into heaven" has no place in the life of a disciple of Jesus, because it's missing the point of it all. (page 179)

No, the gospel isn't just about how to "get into heaven," but it's certainly part of it, and a very important part.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mat. 5:20)

If Jesus talks about it, then I'm ok with it.

Bell continues:

An entrance understanding of the gospel rarely creates good art. Or innovation. Or a number of other things. It's a cheap view of the world, because it's a cheap view of God. It's a shriveled imagination.

It's the gospel of goats. (pages 179, 180)

And that's what it's really all about...creating good art. Remember all those verses about creating good art? Remember how the apostles preach about art in the book of Acts? No, because it's not there and "good art" is irrelevant. The gospel of goats is one that redefines biblical terms, teaches "truths" with out-of-context verses, and calls God's holy actions into question.

Bell then gives his ultimate advice about the God of the Bible.

Have nothing to do with that God. (page 182)

Bell continues:

Many have heard the gospel framed in terms of rescue. God has to punish sinners, because God is holy, but Jesus has paid the price for our sins, and so we can have eternal life. However true or untrue that is technically or theologically, what it can do is subtly teach people that Jesus rescues us from God.

Let's be very clear, then: we do not need to be rescued from God. God is the one who rescues us from death, sin, and destruction. God is the rescuer. (page 182)

Notice how Bell says "however true or untrue." He's not willing to say whether it's true or not. Always trying to give ambiguous, grey, middle-of-the-road explanations. What Bell says in that paragraph is really only partially true. Yes, Jesus does rescue us from death, sin, and destruction; but it is God who ultimately passes judgment on men and condemns them for their sins. The devil doesn't cast people into hell; God sends them there (Mat. 10:28). God doesn't rescue men from a lake of fire created by some other being. He rescues men from the lake of fire that He has created.

Bell again says:

For some, the highest form of allegiance to their God is to attack, defame, and slander others who don't articulate matters of faith as they do. (page 183)

This is Bell's second and last effort to silence those who he knows will be coming against what he teaches. Let's not forget that Bell has said some believers are like demons, some might be guilty of sinning against children and will be drowned by Jesus, those who believe in traditional salvation have a weak and powerless God, and those who believe in

the God of the Bible believe in a God who can't be loved. Now that he's got all that out of the way, it's time for him to tell us that if we criticize him, it's because we think it's the highest calling, and we are simply doing it because we don't "articulate" matters of the faith the same as he does. Am I, and are others, simply not "articulating" matters of the faith as Bell does?

Is that really the problem? The problem is that Bell is teaching something altogether not found in the scriptures. Was Paul attacking and defaming Hymenaeus and Philetus simply because they were saying the resurrection was past? Was Paul all bent out of shape and just wanting to show his allegiance to his God? No, Paul cared about the Body of Christ and didn't want them to be led astray and have their faith upset.

But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:16-18)

Of course, the devil does not want you to question what Bell is teaching, thus the warning against criticizing and attacking him. Bell is perverting the word of God and still wants to remain under the umbrella of Christianity.

Bell concludes the chapter by again taking a few verses out of context to show that God has already saved everyone, but he again fails to mention the verses that say people must believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to be saved. (John 20:31)

So to summarize, Bell says the gospel isn't about "getting to heaven," even though Jesus mentions that as part of it. More importantly though, he says you don't have to believe in that mean, cruel, vicious, unlovable God that you've been holding on to. Bell has a new God you can believe in, one not found in the scriptures, one that can be found by using snippets of verses taken out of context, one that can be found by avoiding a great portion of the Bible.

And thus...his good news is better than God's.

Chapter 7

SOME STORIES ARE DANGEROUS

Going back to Genesis chapters two and three, we have two different stories being told. One story is told by God, and the other is told by the Satan. Those being told the stories are the first two people of the human race. In the story that God has told, you have man being perfectly cared for by His creator. God creates the heavens and the earth; God creates man out of dust and gives him life; He places him in a garden paradise called Eden, causes all kinds of trees to come forth to produce food for him, and then produces a helpmate for him. God then gives him one commandment:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen. 2:17)

That was God’s story.

Believe what He has said.
Obey what He has said,
And live.

Don’t believe what He has said.
Disobey what God has said.
And die.

But Satan came and told Adam and Eve another story. It was a story that contradicted God’s story. It was a story that called into question what God had said. It was a story that introduced a lie, the exact opposite of what God had said. It was a story that promised them something “better.” Here’s the story:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”

But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:5)

What was the result of Adam and Eve believing this story? Spiritual death came to not only Adam and Eve but also the whole human race, and they were driven out of the

paradise of God. The story that sounded so good was actually the means by which the whole world was cursed. The story that promised life instead brought about death.

What do we learn?

We learn that some stories, no matter how good they sound, are in fact dangerous.

While promising life, they bring about death.

The only thing that matters is whether we are hearing and following God's story because today, all kinds of people are telling different stories.

From Genesis through the book of Revelation, we find that God has expanded on His story. God has told a story that, at the center, includes the redemption of man. It's a story of God sending His only begotten Son to be crucified for the sins of the world. It's a story of Jesus being resurrected for the justification of all who believe. It's a story that gives life to the dead. It's a story that says:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:18)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. (John 3:36)

Those who believe in the Son have life, eternal life.

Those who do not believe in the son perish.

They are condemned.

God's wrath abides on them.

Jesus says it another way here:

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Mat. 25:46)

Those who are saved go into a life that never ends. Those who are not saved go into a punishment that never ends.

When asked by someone how many would be saved, Jesus replied:

Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (Luke 13:24)

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Mat. 7:13-14)

But in this critique, we have just looked at another story being told. It, like the original story told by Satan in Genesis, is a story that, to some, sounds better. It's a story that questions what God has really said. It's a story that introduces a lie. But in this story, instead of becoming like God, God actually becomes like us. Like Satan's story in Genesis, it does contain some truth. Satan told Eve that if she would eat the fruit, "her eyes would be opened." There was truth in Satan's story. This truth, however, was sandwiched in between lies, thus making story as a whole a lie. In Rob Bell's story, like Satan, he asks the question, "Did God actually say...?" He questions the character of God. He calls God a liar. He introduces a lie that says you will not die. He tells a story that, if believed, will bring spiritual death and ruin to many people.

In Bell's story, you can just read part of a verse or give a verse or a word a new meaning. In his story, the above verses say:

"For God so loves the world." (John 3:16)
"All are not condemned" (John 3:18)
"All will have eternal life,
and God's wrath abides on no one" (John 3:36)

Those who believe will have life.
Those who don't believe will have life.
Those who believe but don't know it will have life.
No one is condemned.
God's wrath abides on no one.

In Bell's story, Jesus says:

"And these will go away into 'a pruning for a period of time,' but the righteous into 'life for a period of time.'" (Mat. 25:46)

In Bell's story, when Jesus is asked how many will be saved, Jesus replies:

"I am the door that everyone enters whether they know it or not. My love will cause all to want to enter, and they will all be able to. All will be saved."

His is a story that ultimately says the same things that Satan told Eve.... "Surely you will not die."

What we see is that Satan's methods of deception have stayed the same. The same way he deceived Adam and Eve is the same way he's deceiving people today. He's still questioning God's word, questioning God's character, calling God's word a lie, and promising that there will be no death. He is trying to make God and His story seem wrong

by telling a story that introduces a new god that is not found in the scriptures. It is a god that is made in our own image. It is a god that bows down to human reasoning, that determines right and wrong based on the emotions of fallen man. It is a god that, while promising life, if he is followed, will bring about death.

Here's the conclusion.

All we have seen is Satan retelling his story through a different vessel. This time, he did not use a serpent; he used a man, who wrote a book, called Love Wins.

The question for you is the same question that was presented to Adam and Eve.

Whose story are you going to believe?

It does matter.

WHY “HELL’S BELL”?

I know that some people will question why I titled the site “Hell’s Bell.” Let’s just pretend that hell is not only a place but also a being that wants to consume as many people as it can. The only problem is that this being is unable to come to earth to deceive people. Therefore, it needs an earthly spokesman to represent itself and to deceive as many people as possible so they end up in hell. If that were true today, one of those spokesmen would be Rob Bell. Thus, Hell’s spokesman today is Rob Bell. Rob Bell is deceiving people by giving new definitions to biblical words like heaven and hell. He is also distorting the gospel, the “good news” of salvation, in a way that will lead many people to hell. His is a gospel that gives false assurance and false hope to those who are still outside of Christ. It is a gospel that leads people to believe that they can reject the grace of God in this life, live as they please, and yet still have an opportunity to repent after they die and inherit God’s kingdom. It is a gospel that presents a false view of God’s love that will surely cause some to be careless about the state of their soul. It is a deception that will lead many people to hell.

Some people might view what Bell believes as just another “different” interpretation of the Bible. There are sincere believers in Christ who often do have different interpretations of difficult passages of the Bible. But what Bell has done in his book is to go way beyond simply having different interpretations of some difficult texts. What Bell has done is to give biblical words entirely different meanings. He quotes passages out of context to make them say something they don’t, and he’ll quote part of a text, stripping it from its context, in order to make a point, without quoting the rest of it. Nobody who has a real love for God and His word would treat the explaining of the word of God in such a careless manner. I am convinced he does not love God or His word. You cannot love God without loving His word.

In writing my response to Rob Bell’s book, I have tried to keep it as simple as possible. I have tried to show, in a basic way, that anyone can pick up their Bible, without being a theologian, and see that what Bell teaches is completely false. I have intentionally stayed away from deep theological explanations for each of Bell’s errors. While I’m probably not the best one to do it, I could definitely provide more in-depth answers to each of his errors if I wanted to go that route. But that was not my goal in this response. My goal was to show even the newest believer that they can pick up God’s word and believe what it says, they can see that what Bell is teaching is wrong, and they can do so even without necessarily aligning themselves with any particular theological camp. They do not need a “theologian” to twist the word of God for them and tell them what it “really says,” like we see in [Love Wins](#). It is my hope that this basic response to Bell’s book will cause some people to examine what Bell says in light of God’s word, thus keeping them from falling into deception.

Some people might take offense because I have pictured Rob Bell as a snake on the webpage. Since Rob Bell is into art – expressive, interpretive art – I’m sure he will

understand. I have portrayed Rob Bell that way because just how the devil spoke through the serpent in Genesis three, the serpent (Satan) is speaking through Rob Bell today. There really is no difference. For those who still are offended, remember that Satan spoke through Peter (Mat. 16:23) and entered Judas (Luke 22:3). So is Rob Bell a misguided Peter, is he an apostate Judas, or is he just a plain false teacher? I'll leave that for you to decide. Everyone must come to their own conclusion. I hope though that after you've read my response and looked at the word of God, it will become clear to you.

My hope and prayer is that God will use this simple response to help someone hunger and thirst for the word of God, that it will keep someone from being deceived by all of Bell's leading questions that can cause people to doubt God's goodness, and that it will keep people from falling for a false view of God's love. My prayer is it will cause people to read God's word and see ALL of God's attributes working together in perfect harmony. My prayer is that God will deliver some who are caught up in the teachings of Rob Bell and others like him and that ultimately God and His word will be magnified in people's lives.

TO THOSE AT MARS HILL

If you're reading this, and you attend Mars Hill, you're probably wondering, "Why does this guy hate my pastor so much?" My response to Rob Bell's book has nothing to do with liking or hating Rob Bell personally. I've never met Rob Bell in person, nor have I had any communication with him. My response is given out of a love for God and His word and a desire to see people understand and know the truth. It is my desire to see those who have been influenced by Bell's teachings to come out from under them and to make the word of God their foundation. You cannot have the word of God as your foundation and adhere to what Rob Bell is teaching in his book, Love Wins. In fact, if this is how Rob Bell teaches on a regular basis, then I suggest you put on your running shoes and run as far and as fast as you can away from Mars Hill. It would probably do you good to just take a few months off of going to church and simply sit at home and read and read and re-read the New Testament over and over and over again. Get out from being under Rob Bell's teaching and soak yourself in nothing but God's word. If you can do that, I guarantee you that you will be a different person in three months. You will be better for it.

One of the things Rob Bell does continually in his book is to talk about subjects without looking at all the different verses on the topic. You cannot teach people on the "new meaning" of heaven and hell and salvation if you're not willing to consider all the verses on a topic. It would do you good to meditate on this verse:

"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever."
(Psa. 119:160)

It is the entirety of God's word that is truth. When you look at all the scriptures on a given topic, then you will be able to discern what the Bible teaches on a topic. If you just cherry pick verses that agree with your predetermined position, then you will almost always be led into error. You have to approach God's word with no predetermined positions or assumptions, and then let the ENTIRETY of God's word teach you truth on any given matter. If you want to see just how important God's word is, read Psalm 119. The longest Psalm in the Bible is a Psalm about the importance of God's word. But the fact is, Rob Bell goes a step further. Rob Bell obviously doesn't take the sum of God's word as truth because he cherry picks verses in his book, while leaving out multitudes of verses that also speak on the subject he's presenting. Rob Bell goes beyond that and gives new meanings to biblical words that are already defined by Jesus Himself. If you love God and His word, then this should be of great concern to you. In fact, if you do love God and His word and you attend Mars Hill, then you are probably already troubled by what you see and hear, and what I'm writing isn't really all that surprising to you.

Remember, when you stand before God to be judged and to give an account of your life, Rob Bell will not be standing beside you in your defense (2 Cor. 5:10). You will be accountable for what is written in your Bible. Putting your faith in what Rob Bell or any other man says will not be a defense before God, if you end up believing and walking in a

lie. So again, I encourage you to take a few months off of going to church and just stay home and read and re-read your Bible. Over and over and over again. God will be faithful to teach you the truth.

From experience, I already know how many people from Mars Hill will react regarding what I've written about Rob Bell. For most people, they will not be able to get past the person, the personality. You will be angry that someone has spoken "against" your pastor. Your defense will not be the word of God, but it will be the person of Rob Bell. Rob Bell is probably a nice guy. He's probably a caring guy. In a way, he seems to be concerned about people. He's concerned about social justice. He may have even impacted your life in a positive way, to some degree. Because of this, you will naturally have a tendency to want to defend him. I can understand those feelings. But the great question is, whom do you love more? Do you love God more or Rob Bell? Whose word do you value more? Whose word has more authority in your life? Some of you will say God's, but then you will not properly evaluate what Rob Bell says in light of God's word. That shows that you've put a man above God, and it shows where your true allegiance is. I used to go to a church that had much in common with Mars Hill. The pastor there used to tell me, "Some people value relationships over truth, and some people value truth over relationships." He said this as if they were both equal. But in God's kingdom, you must always value truth over relationships. That's why Jesus said he did not come to bring peace but a sword.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Mat. 10:34-37)

Can you believe that Jesus, the social justice peacemaker, came to divide families? Does Jesus value relationship over truth or truth over relationships? Jesus says that following the truth about Him will cause divisions, even divisions in one's own family, and Jesus says that He came to bring this about. Then Jesus says that if you love father or mother more than Him that you are not worthy of Him. You can say you love Jesus, but if you put another person, even your own parents or children, above Christ, then you are not worthy of Christ. If you put the person of Rob Bell above the truth of what Jesus Christ has taught, then you are not worthy of Jesus. Those are not my words; that is clearly what Jesus Himself taught in Mat. 10:34-37. Your willingness, or unwillingness, to search the scriptures and see if what Rob Bell has said is true, seeing that he is your pastor, will tell whether you put Jesus first or your pastor.

So before you get upset with me and send me an angry email, please take the time to go through what both Rob Bell and I have written. Check it against the word of God. Read the scriptures in context and let God show you what His word teaches. If you have a hard time believing that your pastor could write something that is wrong, then pretend Love Wins was written by some guy named Jon Doe. Take your pastor out of the mix, if you

can, and try to just evaluate what he has said by the word of God alone. And please realize, I don't encourage you to do this because I hate Rob Bell or just want to be antagonistic. I do this because I want you to understand the truth that the Bible teaches, because I care, because God cares. I want you to understand the truth about God and all His attributes. I'm not trying to get you to go to my church or join some denomination. My desire is that you would simply have a love for God's word that supersedes a love for any man. Having that type of love will save you from being swallowed up in the delusion and apostasy that so many find themselves in today...especially when the apostasy is cloaked in "good works."

So how will you respond?

Will you test all things? (1 Thes. 5:21)

Or

Will you allow yourself to be led into a ditch? (Luke 6:39)

May the Lord give you the grace needed to walk in truth.

IN Christ,

Sean Scott
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SOCIAL JUSTICE JESUS AND HIS DISOBEDIENT FOLLOWERS

In reading through Rob Bell's book Love Wins, you notice that social justice is a major theme woven throughout the book. To him and others, being involved in social justice is one of the primary ways of bringing "heaven to earth." In fact, Rob Bell says:

Taking heaven seriously, then, means taking suffering seriously now. Not because we've bought into the myth that we can create a utopia given enough time, technology, and good voting, choices, but because we have great confidence that God has not abandoned human history and is actively at work within it, taking it somewhere. Around a billion people in the world today do not have access to clean drinking water. People will have access to clean water in the age to come, and so working for clean-water access for all is participating now in the life of the age to come. (page 45)

Being involved in bringing about "social justice" means, as Rob Bell says, "taking suffering seriously now" and seeking to rid the world of injustices. Now that sounds like a very noble cause, but is that the primary calling for the followers of Jesus? How can we really know if this is what we are to labor for and spend our time and efforts on? The clearest way to understand what Jesus wants his followers to do is to look at the very last commission, or words, that He spoke to them before He ascended back to heaven. Then the next logical thing to do would be to look in the book of Acts and see HOW these followers of Jesus understood His last instructions for them. The book of Acts is almost like a commentary on helping us understand what exactly Jesus wants us to be doing. If anyone understood what exactly Jesus meant when He gave His commandments, surely it was those whom He personally commissioned, who walked with Him in the flesh, who saw Him resurrected from the dead, who received the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and in Paul's instance, who was converted by a vision from the Lord and then taught directly by Him. Don't you think that would be a good place to start? Is it best to start with our own ideas of how we should follow Jesus's commands, or would it be best to see how the first disciples and apostles understood Jesus's commands and then follow their example as they followed the Lord Jesus Christ?

If this concept of bringing heaven to earth by ending injustices is one of the central themes of Jesus's teachings, then we will clearly find it being taught by the first disciples and apostles. So let's go through each account of where the gospel was preached in the book of Acts and see exactly what kind of message these believers told the rest of the world. We'll even look at some of the results in the people's lives as a result of believing what these disciples of Jesus preached. Also, since Rob Bell seems to believe that the "reconciliation of all people" is so clearly taught in the Bible, we'll see if we can find it mentioned in any of apostles' preaching.

We'll start out by looking first at the commands that Christ gave to his disciples before he

ascended to heaven. After preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God for three and a half years, fulfilling what was written about him in the prophets, He was crucified and rose from the dead. These are His last instructions for those who were there following Him, those who called Him “Lord.”

In Matthew, Jesus says:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
(Mat. 28:18-20)

So, Jesus says:

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus.
Therefore, make disciples of all nations
Baptize them.
Teach them to observe everything Jesus commanded.

In Mark, Jesus says:

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:15-18)

Here Jesus says:

Go into all the world.
Proclaim the gospel to the whole creation
Those who believe and are baptized will be saved.
Those who believe not will be condemned.
Cast out demons.
Speak with new tongues.
They will pick up serpents with their hands.
If they drink deadly poison, they won't be hurt.
They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.

In Luke, Jesus says:

and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed

in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:46-48)

We are told that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be PROCLAIMED in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

In the gospel of John, the commission given to the disciples is not recorded.

There we have the last commands of Christ. This is what Christ wants his followers to be about doing until “the end of the age.” If we can understand what Jesus means for us to do in these commissions, then we can be faithful to our Lord and do His will. So instead of working our way through each commandment in the commission, let’s just go through the book of Acts in a basic way and see what the Apostles spent their time preaching and doing.

Here’s the first sermon we find preached in the book of Acts after the promised Holy Spirit has been poured out. Starting at verse 32, it says:

“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:32-47)

It would probably be helpful for you to go back and read the whole chapter. But in this second chapter of Acts, we have the Holy Spirit being poured out on the believers who were waiting in the upper room in prayer. After the Spirit is poured out, they go outside

and start declaring the “wonderful works of God.” Peter then gets up and preaches the above message. What does he preach?

He preaches Christ, a man approved by God with miracles signs and wonders.

He preaches the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, as prophesied by the prophets.

He preaches that Christ is at the right hand of God until God makes His enemies His footstool.

He preaches that the one whom they crucified is the one whom God has made both Lord and Christ.

Then the men who heard him were “pricked in their hearts,” and they cried out to Peter “Men and brethren, what shall we do.”

What does Peter tell them? Does he tell them about the new meaning for heaven and earth? Does he tell them that everyone will be saved? No, he tells them to:

Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin.

He tells them that in doing this, they will receive the promised Holy Spirit.

He tells them this promise is for everyone that God calls.

He then exhorts them with many more words, telling them to “save themselves from this crooked/perverse generation”.

Peter did exactly what Jesus told them to do in his last commands before He went back to heaven.

What were the results of Peter’s obedience?

Three thousand people became believers and were added to the disciples.

The new believers continued in the apostles teaching, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The believers willingly had all things in common.

They sold their possessions and parted them to the believers who were in need.

Notice they didn’t all gather together to form a bunch of non-profits to address the injustices in the world. But they did do something else. These new believers “naturally,” out of the fruit of being saved, parted with their goods and met the needs of the brethren. They were the “sheep” of Jesus, and they were naturally fulfilling the parable of the sheep and the goats (Mat. 25:31-46). They were giving to Jesus by giving to the brethren in Christ.

Let’s continue on to chapter three. As we continue on, I want you to carefully look to see if the disciples made social justice, bringing clean water to the world, environmentalism, or redemptive art a focus of the gospel they preached and lived. Surely, if Jesus commanded it, it will be evident in the book of Acts, as we follow their lives and see what they said and did.

Chapter three begins with Peter and John going up the temple at the hour of prayer. They see a man being laid at the gate of the temple who was born lame. This man would daily ask for money from the people going in and out. Then we read:

And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” (Acts 3:4)

And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. (Acts 3:4-8)

Peter does exactly what Jesus told them to do and he heals this man. Peter then uses this opportunity to preach the gospel to the Jews who were there.

Peter says:

“The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name – by faith in his name – has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ – And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” (Acts 3:26)

Again, let’s highlight what Peter says to these Jews who, living at that time, would have been aware of what happened to this man named Jesus.

He accuses them of delivering over and denying Jesus in Pilate’s presence. They denied the Holy and Righteous One, asking for a murderer to be let go instead.

He tells them that God has fulfilled what He spoke through the prophets by the suffering of Christ.

Then he tells them to repent so that their sins might be “blotted out” or forgiven.

He tells them that Moses said if they don’t listen to Jesus, they will be destroyed.

He then concludes by saying God wants to bless them by turning them from their wickedness.

Have you ever heard a gospel message like that? If you are reading this and go to Mars Hill, have you ever heard Rob Bell preach like this?

Peter confronts these men with their sins. He does so by speaking directly to the sins they have committed.

He tells them of the suffering of Christ prophesied by the prophets.

He tells them to repent so their sins can be forgiven.

He tells them that they will be destroyed if they don’t listen to Jesus and that God wants to turn them from their wickedness.

Does it sound as if these men will be reconciled to God if they don’t repent and do what Jesus says? Or, does it sound like they will be destroyed? Can you imagine Peter saying such a thing to a crowd of people? What if the single mother that Rob Bell talks about in his book – the one who works so hard to bring up her children – what if she is in the crowd? Here you would have Peter condemning someone whom Bell thinks God might just ask to run the world. And where is the social justice aspect of Peter’s message? All he does is preach the gospel to these people and tell them to repent and turn to God, which implies faith, so that their sins can be forgiven.

Again, what you have is Peter being faithful to do what Jesus told them to do...the same thing He tells us to do.

Moving on to chapter four, we find Peter and John being tried/questioned before the High priest and others. They are angry at them for preaching “through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” (Acts 4:1)

When they ask Peter by what power or name he has done the miracle of healing the lame man, he says:

“let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
(Acts 4:10-12)

Peter tells them that they rejected Jesus and that “there is salvation in no one else. There is no other NAME under heaven given among men by which we MUST be SAVED.”

So there is a message to be preached.

A Person and a Name to be believed in so that we might (MUST) be saved.

Notice there is no explanation that Jesus might be secretly saving people and they just don't know, as Rob Bell would have us believe. The disciples are taking what Jesus said seriously and preaching about a person (Jesus) who people must know about and believe in to be saved, to have their sins forgiven.

At the end of chapter four, we read:

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

The apostles are continuing to preach about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What do we see with those who have believed their message? We see them sharing their goods with other believers, so that no one would lack anything needed. They were meeting each other's needs. These believers, in giving to other believers, were again giving to Jesus, because they were giving to the BRETHREN of Christ. They are fulfilling the "sheep" in Matthew 25. Notice they have still yet to start one non-profit to address the injustices in the world.

In Chapter five, we find the High Priest and the Sadducees taking the apostles and throwing them into prison. But God intervenes and sends an angel to set them free. The angel tells them:

But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." (Acts 5:19-20)

What are the "words of this life"? It's the same word that they have already been preaching. It is the death and resurrection of Christ for our salvation. It is a message that says, "If you want to enter this life, you must repent and believe what Jesus has said." If they do not believe this message, they will not have life and their sins will not be forgiven. There is no universalism in their message.

The apostles confirm their message again by saying before the council:

"The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:30-32)

Peter again confronts these men with their sins and tells them Christ was given to give men repentance and forgiveness of their sins. What was the council's reaction to the good news of the gospel?

When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. (Acts 5:33)

Some people just don't want to be confronted with the fact that they have sinned and that they must believe in Christ to be saved. If you don't like that response, you could always just tell them that God will eventually save everyone, so it's ok.

Chapter five concludes by saying:

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:42)

The apostles continued to do what Jesus told them to do. Everywhere they went, they preached the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In chapter six, we find something very interesting as it relates to social justice. It says:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:4)

There was a dispute between the Hellenist (Greek) believers and the Hebrew believers. The disciples had sold many of their possessions and laid them at the apostles' feet to be distributed to those believers who were in need. Yet there was a complaint that Hellenist widows were being neglected in the "daily distribution." Notice that the daily distribution was taken up for the widows among the believers. The apostles didn't start soup kitchens all over Jerusalem to feed all the poor widows everywhere. They were taking care of the family of God, the brethren of Christ. And what did the apostles say?

"But we will devote ourselves to social justice, ridding the world of evils, and try to save this world that God is going to destroy." No, they didn't say that, as some would have you think they did. They said they would devote themselves "to prayer and to the ministry (preaching) of the word." The apostles knew that it was through prayer and preaching the word of God, the word of salvation through Jesus, that men would be saved and reconciled to God. They knew that this foolish message, that so many today see as unimportant for the salvation of men, was the only way that men could be saved and have their sins

forgiven. As you read through the book of Acts, you will see the apostles continuing to labor and be faithful to the commands of Christ.

In chapter eight, we find a disciple named Philip preaching Christ to those in the city of Samaria.

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city. (Acts 8:5-8)

The people of that city used to follow a man name Simon, who was a sorcerer. He bewitched the people so that they were fooled and called him “the great power from God.”

The scripture says though:

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)

They believed the good news about being saved through Jesus Christ and they turned to God and were baptized. Then if you continue reading, you find that when the apostles hear of their conversion, they send Peter and John to come down and see these believers. The apostles lay their hands on these believers and they receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17). When Simon, the sorcerer, sees that the Holy Spirit is given through the laying on of hands, he offers the apostles money so that he might have the same power. Peter says to him:

But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” (Acts 8:23)

Wow, sounds pretty unloving, eh?

Can you imagine someone saying to Rob Bell, “You have distorted the word of God; your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.”

Most people today would say, “That’s so unloving. Jesus said to just love people.” After all, Simon (like Rob Bell) was also a “baptized believer.” How could the apostles say such a thing to a man? They were doing the right, and ultimately loving, thing to this man. They were rebuking him so that he might repent of his sin and wickedness and be forgiven by God. The love of God doesn’t always look like some think it should.

Continuing on in the chapter, we find the Spirit of God telling Philip to go to Gaza. There he finds the Ethiopian eunuch traveling in his chariot. The Spirit of God tells him to “join himself” to this chariot. As he does, he finds the man reading from the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. It is that great chapter that foretells the coming of the Messiah. It tells of Christ suffering for our sins so that we might be justified in God’s sight. It truly is an amazing chapter, one of the crown jewels of the Old Testament. Philip asks him if he understands what he’s reading, to which the eunuch says he does not. So, as the scripture says:

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. (Acts 8:35)

Philip preached to him that in Jesus, there is forgiveness of sins. The eunuch even understood that he needed to be baptized, as Jesus said in Mark 16:16.

And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. (Acts 8:38)

Again, be it disciples or apostles, we find they all continued to be faithful to do what Jesus commanded to be done in his last, “great commission.”

In chapter nine, we come to the conversion of Saul. Notice what the Lord Jesus tells Ananias His mission for Saul is:

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. (Acts 9:16)

Saul was a chosen vessel of God to “bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.” Saul was to “bear His name”? We later find Paul doing that very thing. He is telling people about the name and person of Jesus so that they can be saved. Neither Jesus nor Paul take the stance that Bell does, that somehow people can believe in Jesus and not know they are believing in Jesus. Furthermore, Paul did not try to alleviate the world of its suffering, but he was called to personally suffer for Jesus. That is another concept that is almost foreign to the church today. The fact that God is not so much calling you to, in the words of Bell, “enjoy His good world;” but He is calling you to suffer for His name’s sake in this fallen world that we live in.

What did Paul do when he was converted?

And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. (Acts 9:20)

He went to those who did not believe in the Son of God and preached from the scriptures that Christ is God's Son and that only through Him can you be saved. Paul didn't become an advocate for social justice or teach the reconciliation of all men. He too was faithful to the commands of Christ.

As we continue on to chapter ten, we find another one of the great sermons in the book of Acts. This one, however, is preached to a Gentile. Not just a Gentile, but a Gentile who already believed in the One true God. He worshipped the God of the Hebrews and lived a life of prayer and alms giving (giving to the poor). By Rob Bell's understanding, this man was already participating in the age to come. He was already bringing heaven to earth and participating in the kingdom of God. Yet in God's eyes, though this man was favored before God for his faith, God still sent Peter to preach to him, so that he could have his sins forgiven. Here is what Peter preached:

“The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:36-43)

What a great sermon! What a faithful God! God, who is rich in mercy, made sure that this faithful centurion was able to hear about Jesus Christ. God was not hindered, as Rob Bell implies, by the possibility of the missionary getting a flat tire. Sometimes, God does get what God wants.

Notice again what was preached. Peter starts off by saying that God preached “peace by Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ is the true peacemaker, as He has made peace between God and man, for those who believe. Peter then tells of the death and resurrection of Christ. He tells them that Jesus commanded them to preach and testify that it was HE who has been ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead and that “through His name whosoever believes in him shall receive forgiveness of sin.”

It's the same focus

It's the same message

Over and over and over again.

We're now ten chapters into the book of Acts, and we've still yet to see the emphasis on social justice, environmentalism, or “redemptive art.” However, since Bell tells us these

things are so important and one of the main focuses of Jesus, surely we're soon to come across them being taught. Let's continue on and see.

In chapter 13 of the book of Acts, we find Paul preaching in a Jewish synagogue. It's a rather long sermon, but we'll highlight a couple of things he says:

“Men *and* brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.” (Acts 13:26)

“And though they found no cause of death *in him*, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took *him* down from the tree, and laid *him* in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead:” (Acts 13:28-30)

“God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” (Acts 13:33)

“Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:38-39)

Paul preached:

God has sent a word of salvation
He preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
He preached that through Jesus is the forgiveness of sins.

Paul continues to obey the last instructions of Jesus to his disciples.

In Acts chapter 16, we find that Paul and Silas have been cast into jail. While in jail, they sing praises to God. Then suddenly, there is a great earthquake, and all the jail's cell doors come open. The jailer awakens out of his sleep to find all the cells open. He pulls out his sword to kill himself, when Paul stops him and tells him that they are all still there, that they haven't left. The man falls down trembling before Paul and Silas and says:

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. (Acts 16:30-33)

The man asked what He must do to be saved.
Paul tells him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
The man is then baptized.

In chapter seventeen, we find Paul reasoning in another synagogue.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. (Acts 17:1-3)

Continuing on in chapter seventeen, we come to the famous sermon that Paul preaches on Mars Hill. Here, preaching to the men of Athens, he says:

“For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31)

Paul tells them that they “ignorantly worship” the unknown God.

He tells them this God does not dwell in the temples they make.

Nor the idols they make with their hands.

This God has determined the times we should live in.

He is not made of gold, silver, or stones, the artwork of men’s hands.

AND

This God has “winked” at your times of ignorance.

But now this God commands that all men everywhere repent.

Because He has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness

By a man whom he raised from the dead.

Pretty straightforward! He calls out their sin of idolatry. He tells them God doesn’t dwell in the temples or their idols, which are the work of their hands. He tells them this one God has made everything, and He’s going to judge everyone by a man whom He raised from the dead. And he tells them that God commands them to repent.

Not exactly your “seeker-sensitive” message! But again, Paul is being faithful to do what Jesus told us to do.

In chapter twenty of Acts, we have recorded what Paul told the elders at Ephesus. He tells the elders what he has spent his time doing:

And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:18-21)

Paul continually preached that men are to repent to God and have faith in Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapter twenty-four, when Paul is before Felix, we find Paul preaching:

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” (Acts 24:25)

In chapter twenty-six of the book of Acts, we find Paul again recounting and telling us more details about his conversion experience and his commission by Jesus Christ:

“And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (Acts 26:15-18)

Paul was sent to the Jews and the Gentiles to open their blind eyes, that they might be turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sins and be among those who are sanctified by faith.

In other words, it’s the great commission all over again.

So there’s a bird’s-eye-view of what takes place in the book of Acts.

After reading Rob Bells book, Love Wins, we have to wonder why the apostles did not focus their time and energies on ridding the world of injustices, why they did not create non-profits to clean the environment or bring clean drinking water to everyone, why they didn’t promote sustainable development, and why they didn’t see the importance of

believers creating “redemptive art.” Since, as Bell says, Jesus so clearly teaches us to do these things so that we might bring heaven-on-earth, we have to ask, “Were the disciples of Jesus just disobedient to the commands of their Lord? Or, were they so dense that they just couldn’t understand what His commands actually were?”

I don’t believe that, and hopefully you don’t either. If anyone understood what Jesus primarily wanted us to be doing, it was the first disciples and apostles, the very ones who walked and talked with Jesus Himself. In reading through the book of Acts, we can clearly see how they understood the commands of Jesus and what they did in order to obey them. What they did was exactly what Jesus told us to do in His last instructions before He ascended to heaven. They spent their time doing exactly what Jesus said, so that men would have their sins forgiven through Jesus Christ. As I said in my critique, they were helping to rid the world of the greatest injustice of all, the injustice of the sins that men commit against God. They were peacemakers in the truest sense, as they were ambassadors for Christ, helping men to be reconciled to God. Instead of being focused on social justice, they focused on helping men to be justified in God’s sight. What they gave men was not some temporary benefit that only lasts this short lifetime. They gave men the living water of Jesus Christ that not only benefits them in this life but also in the life to come.

If we are to follow their example and obey the commands of Christ, then we are to spend our time and energies doing the exact same thing they did; bringing the good news of the salvation in Jesus Christ to the whole world.

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Cor. 1:21)

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1Co 1:25)

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. (1Co 3:17-20)

Amen.