

### **My Response to “Love” Wins? : Rob Bell**

The release of ‘Love Wins’ in 2011 caused an explosion. It broke open the secret doors that hide away the discussion or mention of Hell. Much heat was released but not much light.

The book is highly rhetorical. It is the way it is presented, not the ideas presented which constitute the essence of its force. Rob Bell presents a series of questions, some of which are insightful, others that are simply confusing. The juxtaposition of these numerous and sometimes illogical questions serves to create the impression that something new has been imparted to the reader when, in fact, nothing has been clearly declared.

On page 50, Bell speaks of the transition from earth into Heaven “as one escaping through flames”<sup>i</sup> the soul taking into Heaven only those things that belong to God’s eternity and abandoning the rest. The implication is that everyone will make this escape and that God will take away from us our evil desires, transforming us back into what we were intended to be.

Free will? How could such a process of shriving be said to honour our free will? Is everyone to be burned at the stake to remove impurities because God couldn’t think of another way? What about those whose true desire is to “rule in Hell rather than serve in Heaven” as Milton suggested? Is it justice to steal evil away from those who desire sin and self more than life with their Creator? Would it not be true justice and real love to honour the choice of a soul to be separated from God rather than sin?

Even in the full light (firelight?) of truth it is conceivable that some could desire this separation. In order to love them, God would be forced (suffer) to allow their choice to stand eternally. God, who does not change, could not compromise to accommodate their ‘alternate lifestyle choice’. He would be forced to create for them another ‘heaven’ or eternal realm in which sin and evil were its essence not love. The Lake of Fire, the place of continual change, is that existence.

In another argument Bell chooses to interpret the passages dealing with the reconciliation of Israel to God as applicable to all humanity. The promise to ‘favour Israel once more and to return them to their land of promise is declared to be a ‘type’ of God’s dealings with all humanity. Everyone will be restored to God’s good graces like Israel instead of through Israel.

This easy interpretation of these passages<sup>ii</sup> ignores the justice required by the legal contract God had entered into with the elders of Israel. These profoundly voluntary covenants constitute a connection between God and Israel, which cannot be applied unilaterally to other peoples. The legal force of these agreements transcends generations and end with the promise “all Israel shall be saved”. Israel has suffered and prospered directly as a result of her relationship to God through these covenants in ways that no other nation has.

This covenant relationship, this legal binding does not automatically extend to all peoples any more than shares of Microsoft do. Legally binding relationships must be offered and then voluntarily agreed to in order to come into legal force. God’s covenants with Abraham, Moses and David will redeem Israel automatically but not all the children of Adam.

Jesus, as the heir and executor of the new covenant in His own blood has offered to extend the benefits promised to Israel to anyone who is willing to accept His offer.

Here again, it is not automatic like the law of gravity. Jesus' offer must be accepted by a willing choice before it comes into effect.

In 1522 Hans von Rechenburg wrote to Martin Luther and asked him<sup>iii</sup> to comment on the possibility that people could turn to God after death. "Who would doubt God's ability to do that?"

Building upon this question Bell posits that "given enough chances" the love of God could eventually win over all hearts.<sup>iv</sup> Nice as this sounds, (Origen liked it) it neglects time. Time ends. God has declared that He has appointed an end (moed). Last-call will not be extended indefinitely until everyone has satisfied their thirst for sin and decided to take God's offer of love instead. The end is coming, the time of decision. God has discerned that the time it is legally sufficient for the decisions to be made.

The suggestion that sufficient time will allow for all souls to be saved is the same argument used by evolutionary theorists who can't figure out how it was done. They add billions of years and hope that convinces someone. Creation didn't just happen over time, neither does salvation.

The mechanism of our healing and restoration to God is His Word. The instrument that applies that Word to our lives is faith, the Church and obedience to the Word. Harvests do not just happen. They are gathered by a conscious decision to act at a specified time, in a specific way. Harvests don't just 'eventually' end up in your barn if you wait long enough. You decide.

In chapter 6 Bell suggests that whatever saves us is Jesus. He implies that however we experience or name that event or process is irrelevant. But Jesus is a person. I don't respond to any name but my own so why should Jesus? We must honour Him as who He is not through the constructs we create for Him. "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow".<sup>v</sup> There is no provision for alternate name choices in salvation or in any legally entered agreement.

In the final chapter of his book, Bell recounts the story of his own confession of Jesus as a child with his parents on either side of him, kneeling beside his bed. Regardless of all that has come before in his book it is clear that Rob Bell has maintained his own deference to the Word. The Word of God still defines his own interpretation of reality even though he does not insist that it do so for others. The Word is the power to change. It is the lifeline that allows us to be rescued and to be pulled back to God.

Ultimately, the 'good news' offered in this book will not effect the same rescue from death and sin for its readers that Bell himself has known through God's book. Readers of 'Love Wins' will not know the Jesus Bell is describing in its pages because they are not required to know Him as Rob Bell himself has known Him, as the Word.

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:13-15

<sup>ii</sup> Lamentations 3, Hosea 6&14, Zephaniah 2&3, Zechariah 9&10, Micah 7, Joel 3, Amos 9, Nahum 2, Isaiah 57 etc.

<sup>iii</sup> Love Wins p 106

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid* p 109

<sup>v</sup> Philippians 2:10, Romans 14:11