



Love Wins

A Book Review

Robert H. Bell Jr., *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 202 pages.

Author

“Rob Bell is the founding pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is the author of the bestselling *Velvet Elvis*, *Sex God*, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, and *Drops Like Stars*. . . . [He is a] graduate of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, and Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.”¹

Synopsis

In the “Preface” to his book, Bell states that “A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better.”²

In contrast to this traditional belief, Bell explicitly states, “Jesus is bigger than any one religion. . . . Jesus himself, again and again, demonstrates how seriously he takes his role in saving and rescuing and redeeming not just everything, but everybody.”³ Furthermore, Bell states, “What Jesus does is declare that he, and he alone, is saving everybody.”⁴

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Traditional Religion versus *Love Wins*

While Bell never employs the term “universalism,” numerous critics apply this word and concept to his beliefs and writings.⁵ In considering the vast gap between traditional religionists and Rob Bell’s *Love Wins*, we freely confess with the apostle Paul that “now we see through a glass, darkly” and only “know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Yet in an effort to reconcile the disparity between Bell’s beliefs and traditional religion — and in view of the reciprocal human relationality inaugurated at Jesus’ First Coming (John 15:15) — is it not probable that the One who is always present (Matthew 28:20) will soon appear again (Greek *parousia*, or Second Coming) as promised (Acts 1:11; cf. Romans 9:28; Galatians 4:4), raise the dead (Matthew 25:31, 32; John 12:32; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17), convene the judgment (John 5:22, 27; 12:31; Hebrews 12:23), and reveal that he has already accomplished salvation for everyone in and by his Creation, incarnation, life, death and resurrection?⁶ Will not the Risen One then offer the freedom of transformation and eternal existence for all who ever lived and who then stand before him?

Though the freedom for which Jesus suffered and died surely provides the option to refuse human relationality (life) and thus choose nonexistence (death), hopefully most, if not all, would accept God’s gracious offer, while few, if any, would choose to return to “dust” (Genesis 3:19; cf. John 12:32; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 3:20; 22:17). Even

then, the idea that the choice of nonexistence would mean eternal torment at the hands of an angry God is wholly contrary to the spirit of Jesus.⁷

Oh, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10, 11)!

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Endnotes

1. Robert H. Bell Jr., *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), p. 202.
2. *Ibid.*, p. viii.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 150, 151.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
5. See Rob Bell, at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rob_Bell.
6. Cf. “For judgment I AM . . .” (John 9:39, emphasis supplied).
7. See “Truth Triumphant III: Parousia and Transformation,” *Outlook* (November/December 2011); “God as Triune Judgment,” *Outlook* (July/August 2015).