

# The Quarterly Journal



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## Bell's Hell

### The Universalist Gospel of Rob Bell

by J. Greg Sheryl

This past March, HarperOne released a controversial book by Michigan pastor Rob Bell, titled, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*.<sup>1</sup> The book caused quite a stir both among Christians and the media even before its release due to its apparent premise that God would save everyone in the end, a theological view known as universalism.

Bell appeared on television, including *Good Morning America*, to discuss the subject and many Christians reacted strongly to the book. The front cover of *Time* magazine's Easter week issue asked the question, "What if There's No Hell?" with the cover story targeting Bell and his new book.<sup>2</sup> The Internet media site YouTube also has a number of video clips featuring interviews with Rob Bell.

Rob Bell is the 40-year-old emergent church<sup>3</sup> pastor of Mars Hill Bible

Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which he founded when he was 28.<sup>4</sup> According to *Time* magazine, the

church "draws 7,000 people each Sunday; its sanctuary is called the Shed."<sup>5</sup>

Bell gives his testimony of coming to Christ in the final chapter of his book *Love Wins*. There he states:

"One night when I was in elementary school, I said a prayer kneeling beside my bed in my room in the farmhouse we lived in on Dobie Road in Okemos, Michigan. With my parents on either side of me, I invited Jesus into my heart. I told God that I believed that I was a sinner and that Jesus came to save me and I  
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# Editorials

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## HEAVEN IS FOR REAL, BUT THE STORIES ARE NOT

Some in the evangelical world are abuzz over the surge of books describing purported journeys to heaven and back. A few years ago Don Piper's book, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, seemed to raise the level of credibility of such memoirs, in part, when the late D. James Kennedy endorsed it.

Many of these testimonials quickly fade into oblivion but some do not. Most notable is the best-selling *Heaven is For Real*, which reportedly has sold more than 4 million copies — and with a total projection as high as 10 million copies before its sales wane. A movie adaptation is even said to be in the works.

This popular book recounts a 4-year-old boy who is said to have had an out-of-body experience and was taken to heaven to see its wonders. The child, Colton Burpo, is the son of a bivocational pastor in Nebraska. The story explains that when Colton was four, he was in surgery for a ruptured appendix when he was taken up into heaven. The book reveals for its readers much of what Colton learned there. He says everyone had wings, except Jesus, and claims to have met John the Baptist, his great-grandfather, and a sister he never knew — his mother had had a miscarriage. It wasn't until four months following the surgery that Colton reportedly began to tell his parents about his journey into heaven.

The book was released in November 2010. Colton is now 11, so it took seven years for all this to be published.

The discerning Christian must be skeptical of those who claim to have visited heaven.

These claims have been reported since the 1700s and are often promoted by false teachers and heretics. Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) is a prime example of this. Swedenborg was the founder of the Church of the New Jerusalem and taught a mish-mash of esoteric philosophies while claiming numerous trips to heaven and hell. More recently in the 1990s, Betty Eadie, a Mormon, promoted all sorts of unbiblical tripe in regard to her purported tour of heaven. Her claims even led to an appearance on Oprah Winfrey's television show. Likewise, the heretical End-Time Handmaidens, under the direction of Gwen Shaw, sell numerous books with authors claiming heavenly visits.

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. Claims must be documented and proven. If the claims contradict the Bible or are inconsistent with the truths of Scripture, they should be rejected.

Many of the reports of heavenly trips have been exposed as lies. Betty Malz is a clear example. Her book was titled, *My Glimpse of Eternity*. Malz's trip to the heavenly realm supposedly took place from a hospital bed in 1959, although her book was not written until the 1970s. She was a huge favorite of Pentecostal churches.

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# News Updates

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## MORMON SATIRE BIG WINNER AT TONYS

The Broadway musical show by the creators of the irreverent animated television series *South Park* dominated this year's Tony Awards. The show, called *The Book of Mormon*, picked up the top honor as the best musical, along with eight other awards. It had received 14 nominations, one shy of the high-water mark. The annual award event was held June 12.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "The production centers on two boys from Salt Lake City who embark on a Mormon mission to Uganda. There, they face the challenges of persuading a God-hating village to embrace the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

*South Park* creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker have long used religion as a reservoir for their profane and obscene humor. Christianity, Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam have been fodder for the pair's crude genre of comedy. And Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, Buddha, Krishna, and Satan have all been grist for Stone and Parker's satirical mill. Even atheism and self-help groups and programs have been targets for Stone and Parker and their *South Park* series.

The current award-winning Broadway musical is not the duo's first lampoon of Mormonism. A *South Park* episode, "All About the Mormons," first aired in November 2003 and was written and directed by Parker. The cartoon uses as its storyline the narrative of a Mormon family who moves to South Park. It then presents the historical accounts of Mormonism through a series of 19th-century flashbacks to Joseph Smith complete with a musical narration. The show was said to have drawn from personal experiences Stone and Parker have had with Mormons. According to Wikipedia, "Parker and Stone later carried over many themes from the episode for their musical, *The Book of Mormon*."

While accepting the award for best musical, Parker quipped that he would be irresponsible if he didn't also thank Mormon church founder Joseph Smith. "You did it, Joseph! You got the Tony!," Parker jested.

The musical, like its *South Park* episode predecessor, takes aim at some of Mormonism's most absurd theological ideas, including God living on a planet called Kolob, God renouncing His discrimination against Blacks in 1978 (by granting them the Mormon priesthood), and the Garden of Eden being in Jackson County, Missouri. The danger for Christians, however, is in the simultaneous mockery of biblical truths including God as Creator

and God sending His only Son to die for sin, which also fall prey to Parker and Stone's Latter-day Saint ridicule.

—MKG

## VAN IMPE - TBN PART COMPANY

Apocalyptic televangelist Jack Van Impe said he will no longer air his programs on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Van Impe's decision came after the network pulled a scheduled rebroadcast of his program in which he labeled by name Rick Warren and Robert Schuller as advocates of "Chrislam," which he said is "a uniting of Christianity with Islam."

According to *Christianity Today*, Ken Vancil, the executive director of Van Impe's ministry said, "We would not be able to minister effectively if we had to look over our shoulder wondering if a program was going to be censored because of naming a name." The magazine report also indicated that the ministry's board of directors voted unanimously on June 17 to "no longer work with TBN." The parting of ways ends a decades-long association that Van Impe had with TBN.

Van Impe is not the first of TBN's popular personalities to be disunited from the network. In December 2005, prophecy author Hal Lindsey, who also cited censorship issues and a disagreement over opinions on Islam, had his programs suspended. In February 1997, TBN cut Pat Boone's *GospelAmerica* broadcast after the 1950s teen idol donned a black leather vest and pants, along with a studded dog collar, bracelets, and fake tattoos, at an awards ceremony where he presented the prize for the heavy-metal album of the year. Lindsey and TBN have since mended bridges and his program returned to the network in January 2007.

—MKG

## CAMPING SUFFERS STROKE

Maybe God's judgment was just a little later, and less widespread, than that which Harold Camping had envisioned. Camping wrongly predicted that Judgment Day, including earthquakes and multitudes left dead, would occur May 21. On June 9 he suffered a stroke.

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# MOUNTAINTOPS AND OTHER TALL TALES

Examining the Fantasy World  
of Modern-day  
“Apostle and Prophet”  
C. Peter Wagner



Jesus warned, “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:37).

C. Peter Wagner writes: “My inclination ... was to color outside the lines at times. I usually gravitated toward new wine, and therefore sought new wineskins. Some even considered me a maverick. ... Some might accuse me of thinking of myself more highly than I ought to think.”<sup>1</sup>

Wagner, considered by some to be a modern-day apostle and prophet, claims to have climbed Mount Everest to take on a goddess named The Queen of Heaven, and in so doing bound demons and broke their strongholds on the earth. He called this scenario “Operation Ice Castle.” He also claims to be the leader in battling territorial spirits, to have taught a course on supernaturally lengthening legs, and of dealing with a “migraine headache demon.” He says he hears the voice of God inside of himself and that he and his anointed friends will rule the world one day and redistribute all of its wealth. Wagner swears it is all true and claims to document some of it in his book, *Dominion*.<sup>2</sup>

## THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

In a past article in this journal we noted Wagner’s claim to be a leg

by G. Richard Fisher

lengthener; how he held a conference to bind the demon of homelessness, the demon of sickness, and the demon of the Bermuda Triangle; and how he has promoted the theories of Costa Rican occult psychologist Rita Cabezas,<sup>3</sup> specifically that demons rule geographical areas and must be detected and prayed away.

Wagner received wider attention when he and Vineyard Church leader John Wimber teamed up to teach a “signs and wonders” course at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., in the 1980s. Wagner launched the term “Third Wave” — which he at times dubbed “new wine” and “new wineskins” — to describe those who insisted that miraculous signs and wonders had to accompany evangelism and its outcome.<sup>4</sup> Wimber saw healing not as divine mercy (Philippians 2:26-27), but as an entitlement. He called it “Power Evangelism.”

Wimber eventually was dismissed from the school and the course terminated. Wimber suffered a mild stroke, later had open-heart surgery and then injured his head in a fall. He went into a coma and died at age 63.<sup>5</sup>

## APOSTLES AND THE EPISTLES

Wagner is currently “Presiding Apostle Emeritus” of a self-appointed

group called the International Coalition of Apostles<sup>6</sup> and calls himself an “Apostolic Ambassador” for Global Harvest Ministries.<sup>7</sup> The ICA group has made up “vertical apostles,” “horizontal apostles,” “marketplace apostles,” and a few other subcategories of both the vertical and horizontal apostles.<sup>8</sup> While this all appears silly to the outsider, the apostolic business is serious and lucrative. Membership in the ICA costs a U.S.-based member \$450.00, or \$650.00 combined for married apostles. However, an American Indian can join under the “First Nation” class for \$350.00. All of this, according to ICA, includes “Ordination, Commissioning, Covering, and Accountability.”<sup>9</sup> Membership is by invitation only.<sup>10</sup>

According to Wagner, the old way — or New Testament way — in the Church is obsolete. The new wineskins that Jesus spoke of are old wineskins, according to Wagner. God is establishing a new end-time Church government unlike the New Testament Church government, and all must come under the authority of the new super apostles. These new apostles — sometimes called Joel’s Army, The New Breed, or The Man Child — have been commissioned to take over the world and usher in the kingdom of God, thus inserting an unheard-of dispensation and superseding the Dispensation of Grace.

The Bible tells of a genuine apostle, Paul, who faced the same kinds of deceivers in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:37-38). Paul called these intruders and usurpers *pseudapostoloi*: false apostles. These boasters and their arrogance were condemned in 2 Corinthians 11:12-13 and 12:11-12.

The serious Bible student knows that there are no apostles today in the biblical sense, and that there does not have to be. Ron Rhodes writes:

“The New Testament apostles were specially handpicked by the Lord or the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:1-4; Acts 1:26). They were the special recipients of God’s self-revelation and were aware that God was providing revelation through them (1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 1:1-3). They were aware of their special divine authority (1 Corinthians 7:10; 11:23). Scripture reveals that Christ promised to guide them into ‘all the truth’ (John 16:13; see also 14:26; 15:27). Two key factors show the utter uniqueness of the apostles. First, they were all authenticated by miraculous signs. In Acts 2:43 (NASB) we read that ‘everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles’ (see also Acts 3:3-11; 5:12; 9:32-42; 20:6-12). Second, 12 of the apostles were granted an eternal place of honor. In the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21, the description reads, ‘And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb’ (verse 14 NASB). There can be no apostles today, for an apostle had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:7-8). Further, the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:19-20), and once a foundation is built, it does not need to be built again.”<sup>11</sup>

### WAGNER TELLS HIS STORY

When Wagner turned 80, he published an autobiography, *Wrestling*

*With Alligators, Prophets and Theologians*. Much of the book is devoted to promotion of his other books. It is endorsed by such Charismatic standouts as Mike Bickle, David Yonggi Cho, Jack Hayford, Cindy Jacobs, and Steven Strang. Surprisingly, even John Maxwell and Elmer Towns of Liberty University sanction the book.

The dust jacket of the book says Wagner is “widely recognized as a leading authority in the fields of church growth and spiritual warfare. President of Global Harvest Ministries and chancellor of Wagner Leadership Institute in Colorado Springs, Wagner is the author or editor of more than 70 books.”<sup>12</sup>

Wagner claims to have had a bias against biographies:

“My close friends and my publisher have known for a long time that I will not allow a biography to be written on my life. I personally cannot get interested in reading Christian biographies because of their propensity toward living in the achievements of the past.”<sup>13</sup>

However, Rick Joyner changed Wagner’s mind by quoting 1 Thessalonians 5:12: “recognize those who labor among you.” Joyner’s use of this passage in this instance is a real stretch because the verse refers to the followers doing the recognizing and not the leaders recognizing themselves. Likewise, the verse refers to the pastors of the church.

### COMMITTEE CONSTERNATION

Wagner writes in his book that following his graduation from Fuller Seminary, he was on the verge of ordination when he ran into a minor conflict with his ordination council.<sup>14</sup> The discord had to do with the issue of the two natures of Jesus. Wagner explains his position:

“The standard view, held unanimously by those on my committee, was that Jesus switched back and forth, sometimes operating through His divine nature (e.g., stilling the storm or raising Lazarus) and sometimes through His

human nature (e.g., getting hungry or weeping). My view, which I had learned from my theology professor, Edward John Carnell, was that during His incarnation, Jesus operated solely through His human nature and that His miracles were not done by His power but by the power of the Holy Spirit working through Him.”<sup>15</sup>

Later in his book, he says that “while He was on earth, before the cross, Jesus used only His human nature.”<sup>16</sup> The view Wagner espoused (and one that he still holds) creeps perilously close to the old Nestorian errors in the early Church.

Nestorianism appeared in Syria and Asia Minor in the fifth century A.D. The Nestorians insisted that the two natures of Jesus did not commingle. The human nature seemed to trump and overpower the divine nature, in their view. The Council of Chalcedon (in Bithynia) forever settled the issue. A summary of that Council is that Jesus had two natures uniquely joined in one person without division.

The question comes down to this: Was Jesus, while on earth, only occasionally dependent on the Holy Spirit for miracles, or was He exclusively and totally dependent on the Holy Spirit, as Carnell and Wagner say? Wagner’s ordination committee was true to the orthodox view that Jesus most often operated through His own divine nature and only on occasion operated through His human nature in dependence on — or in concert with — the Holy Spirit.

John Walvoord states a balanced biblical view on this issue:

“...on two specific occasions Christ is revealed to have performed His miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:14-18). In these instances Christ chose voluntarily to be dependent upon the power of the Father and the Holy Spirit to perform His miracles. In view of the fact that this is mentioned only twice and hundreds of miracles were performed it would seem clear that Christ

exercised His own power when He chose to do so as, for instance, when He commanded the waves to be still and caused Lazarus to come forth from the tomb at His command."<sup>17</sup>

So it is one thing to say Jesus worked in concert *with* the Holy Spirit and yet another to say without the Holy Spirit Jesus could do nothing. No Scripture would even remotely support that view. That would strip Jesus of His omnipotence and give us "another Christ."

### WHY PUSH THINGS THAT ARE SO QUESTIONABLE?

The problem that emanates from it has to do with extreme views of sanctification. The proposal, which expresses the critical issue, goes like this: Jesus operated only out of His humanity and depended totally on the Holy Spirit. So it must follow that because I am human I can do in my humanity, through the power of the Holy Spirit, whatever Jesus did, as I, too, am dependent on the Spirit.

This view crops up in Latter Rain and extremist charismatic circles. The idea is linked to passages in the Epistles that speak of imitating Jesus. To the extremists, imitating Jesus is doing absolutely everything that Jesus did. Most expositors, however, would argue that *following* Jesus is prominent in the Gospels and *imitating* Jesus is prominent in the Epistles. They are the same thing, just expressed differently. There is a huge difference in following Jesus and being like Jesus and actually *being* Jesus. We cannot forgive sins, we cannot yearn for a return to preexistent glory as Jesus did in John 17:5, and we certainly can never be sinless like Jesus was. Further, we cannot raise the dead, walk on water, or multiply food — and there is nothing in the Bible to remotely suggest we could. Our following Jesus and imitating Him has limits. We can imitate the moral qualities of Jesus, but could never do what He did in His deity.

### SWITCHING PARTIES

In the 1970s, Wagner was associated with missionary guru Donald Mc-

Gavrin. Both men taught at Fuller Theological Seminary at the time and during that period Wagner would have been considered an Evangelical, or at worst a Neo-evangelical. However, a shift was to take place in Wagner's thinking. Up until then, he had been a cessationist.<sup>18</sup> Cessationism is the belief that apostolic signs and wonders belong exclusively to the apostolic age. The position is biblically upheld by the fact that there is no clear scriptural mandate or proof that signs and wonders would continue after the apostles. In a trial run while in private, Wagner tried what he calls speaking in tongues and becoming what he refers to as a "closet tongues-speaker."<sup>19</sup> After abandoning his cessationism view, he then declared it as "the spirit of religion" and links it to a "demonic principality."<sup>20</sup> Demonizing the opposition is a brutal and radical tactic. Godly men have long held the cessationist position. And one can be a non-cessationist and avoid the extremes that Wagner professes.

Other seeds of extremism also were taking root in Wagner. As Wagner recalls his early days as a missionary with the South American Indian Mission, he laments that "we unwittingly allowed ourselves to be dominated by an evil spirit of poverty."<sup>21</sup> Wagner had so thoroughly imbibed the Word-Faith mindset that he saw being poor as something evil. Moses in Deuteronomy would not agree and warns against thinking badly of the poor:

"Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you. ... For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land'" (Deuteronomy 15:9, 11).

Scripture tells us the poor should be pitied and helped, not accused of having an evil spirit.

Wagner's negative view of the poor is a twisted form of spiritual class warfare. The wealthy Word-Faith preachers should not be urging poor widows to give to them, but rather, according to James 1:27, just the reverse. Wagner endorses and promotes the Word-Faith teachers full-bore. He says that missionaries would be greatly benefited "if they had been listening more closely to the message of biblical prosperity that Hagin, Roberts and others were preaching."<sup>22</sup> This is surely guilt by quotation.

Wagner also moved a few more steps forward in his ideas when a running sore on his neck was healed through the prayers of E. Stanley Jones.<sup>23</sup> (However, the healing was discovered the following day and did not occur at the time of the prayer, unlike the healings of Jesus.) After attending a Pentecostal church, Wagner threw his past to the wind and asserted, "My anti-Pentecostal days were over!"<sup>24</sup> Wagner was now ready for someone as extreme and aberrant as John Wimber. He and Wimber would go far beyond the bounds of historic Pentecostalism by linking themselves to Latter Rain and Vineyard's extremes.<sup>25</sup>

Wagner embraced Wimber as much as he did McGavrin. When Wagner heard of Wimber's death, he wrote that he sobbed and wailed for some time. By comparison, he says he had not shed a tear when his parents passed away. Then he concludes, "I knew that John Wimber had influenced my life as few others had, but this grieving must have meant that he had influenced it even far beyond what I had realized."<sup>26</sup> Wagner calls 1982-1989 "The Wimber Era."<sup>27</sup>

For those unfamiliar with John Wimber and his ideas of "Power Evangelism," Michael Moriarity explains:

"... signs-and-wonders ministries have become a celebrated component in the total ministry of most charismatic churches. Signs-and-wonders teaching is often identified with John Wimber and his associated Vineyard ministries, sometimes referred to as the 'signs and wonders' movement.

Wimber has been influenced by the view that Jesus' ministry is to be an inbreaking of the kingdom by combining the proclamation of the kingdom with its demonstrations (the casting out of demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, and so on). Christ's followers have received Christ's authority and must proclaim the kingdom and exercise that authority in his name. The key for effective evangelism is combining the proclamation (preaching the Gospel) with the demonstration (signs and wonders). The key for overcoming sickness and suffering (with the exception of the aging process) is to claim Christ's authority and resist and rebuke the sickness and suffering as evil."<sup>28</sup>

Wimber appears to have confused the kingdom in its fullness as well as the resurrected state with our present state on earth, which is a common Latter Rain error.

Wagner describes the antics of the raucous Vineyard meetings as "doin' the stuff!"<sup>29</sup> It was in 1983 when he dubbed it "The Third Wave," saying:

"The desire of those in the Third Wave is to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in healing the sick, casting out demons, receiving prophecies, and participating in other charismatic-type manifestations without disturbing the current philosophy of ministry governing their congregations."<sup>30</sup>

"The First Wave" was the Azusa Street Pentecostals in the early 1900s. "The Second Wave" was the Charismatic Movement born in 1960, which ran across denominational lines. "The Third Wave" widened the net further, drawing from Pentecostals and Charismatics, as well as Evangelicals. It is unrealistic of Wagner to think his radicalism would not disturb the philosophy and government of a church.

## LUNGS AND OTHER BODY PARTS

Wagner wrote that he was once sent by Wimber into the foreign mission field to do healing. It was in Argen-

tina under the tutelage of Omar Cabrera that Wagner claims he witnessed a lady with one lung being prayed for by Cabrera. While he prayed the anonymous female supposedly grew another lung.<sup>31</sup>

Wagner employs the standard fare of all faith healers, saying that the miracle was medically recorded. However, there is no documentation of this miracle. It is only an assertion by Wagner. Wagner goes on to claim dental miracles; teeth supernaturally filled, and even missing teeth restored. Based on Wagner's reporting, the dental miracles were as common as people here getting a checkup.<sup>32</sup> Occurrences as common as those Wagner claims cease to be considered miracles.

Wagner wrote that he suffered from migraine headaches; various healers prayed for him with no results. Then Wimber came to the rescue and with a "word of knowledge" that revealed that Wagner had a "headache demon." Wimber explained that it must be treated "like a cat on the back porch."<sup>33</sup> He instructed Wagner to yell at it and tell it to go away. He wrote that while taking a shower one morning, he yelled at the supposed demon and has not had a migraine since. When Wagner decided that his house was haunted and his wife saw a demon with green eyes, they were able to exorcise the demon with the help of a whole contingent from church. They were even able to smell the demons before dispatching them. When Wagner's wife Doris had a piercing cramp "spirit" in her foot, the Wimber ritual was employed and he "treated it like a cat on the back porch" commanding it to leave, "in the name of Jesus."<sup>34</sup>

It was during this time, Wagner wrote, that he discovered he had the ability to lengthen legs if one happened to be shorter than the other. He claims to have had a mass healing and lengthened 50 legs in one meeting.<sup>35</sup> Wagner even boasted that his specialty is orthopedics:

"If someone needs prayer for diabetes or hepatitis or cancer or Down syndrome or kidney prob-

lems, they need to see someone else. But backs and legs and other skeletal problems, I can usually handle."<sup>36</sup>

## WHO COMES NEXT?

Wagner appears to be always searching for new and more radical ideas. With McGavrin and Wimber both gone, it was inevitable that he would align with someone else. That someone was Cindy Jacobs. This began Wagner's spiritual mapping and strategic-level spiritual warfare phase. Later in Manila, Doris Wagner was hit by a depression demon and Jacobs "helped set her free."<sup>37</sup> Wagner says at this new stage in life he began hearing directly from God. He writes, "It was not an audible voice, but I distinctly heard God say [it] in my spirit."<sup>38</sup>

Both Scripture and our own wisdom tell us that inner voices speaking to us can have more than one source. There are choices. It could be imagination, plain and simple. It could be our own musings. Prescription medications can cause this, as can alcohol or illicit drugs. People in stages of severe sleep deprivation claim to hear voices. Or it could all just be a lie to gain attention or control over others. But, worst of all, it could be a demonic entity.

Wagner's strategic-level spiritual warfare teaches that demons control certain pieces of geography or certain ethnic groups or nations. We are also pitched the notion that we have to go head-to-head with the demons to set these groups or nations free. Spiritual mapping has to do with the purported ability to know which demonic forces hold onto which pieces of geography. It's an unprovable power for the practitioner. The Bible student is hard-pressed to find anywhere in the Bible where believers are instructed to probe the demonic realm. As well, we never see Jesus or Paul doing spiritual mapping or anything even close. Demons are interested in influencing and controlling individuals, not dirt. Paul did not map Asia Minor; he evangelized it. Peter did not map Jerusalem, he told his audience that they should come out of a

nation that rejected Jesus by coming to the Savior (Acts 2:40).

## MARKETING SPIRITUAL WARFARE

In 1990, the Spiritual Warfare Network (SWN) was formed by these new apostles and prophets. It is important to remember that they have had 20 years to reclaim ethnic groups, nations, and parcels of geography. So far, after two decades, they have made no progress at all. In those 20 years there has been the rise of radical Islam, wars continue unabated worldwide, and drug trafficking is on the increase. Prostitution, abortion, pedophilia, pornography, child abductions, murders, spousal abuse (domestic violence is a 365 day a year plague), and divorces all abound in record numbers. Even Cindy Jacobs, on her Generals International Website, decries the awful state of affairs:

“It doesn’t take a prophet to recognize that we are in dire straits on many levels here in the United States. Our foundations are crumbling and only intervention from God Himself can reverse the damage to the nation.”<sup>39</sup>

Jacobs is correct about one thing, only God Himself can turn things around. But Wagner and Jacobs are just as wrong when it comes to their concept of spiritual warfare. After 20 years of selling their ideas, there is no proof of being able to take or reclaim territory from demons. They are selling a chimera and “They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:16). In the end, Fuller Seminary let it all slide and by benign neglect ended up in collusion with Wagner.

It is helpful to know the buzzwords of the Spiritual Warfare Network. These include: 1. *Ground-level spiritual warfare*, which is getting demons out of individuals. 2. *Occult-level spiritual warfare* or dealing with groups, although no one has ever witnessed an entire witches’ coven delivered or a large assembly of New Agers set free. 3. *Strategic-level spiritual warfare*, which is said to confront principalities and

powers over territories and nations. Most would argue that 2 and 3 do not exist, not that demons do not exist but that the two latter categories are contrived and invented.

It was inevitable that Wagner would ruffle feathers and lose supporters. Some of Fuller’s professors became critical. Critical books and articles were written and, prior to his death, even John Wimber broke with him over the matter of strategic level warfare. Wagner tried to answer his critics in a book, but it did not convince many.

As one would expect, Wagner longed to move on to something — and someone — else. That someone and something was Luis Bush and his AD 2000 Movement.<sup>40</sup> Whenever Wagner traded in a former ministry, it was described as “old wineskins” and the new one as “new wineskins.” Bush’s AD 2000 structure included a spiritual mapping track, which delighted Wagner. It is interesting that Wagner does not refer to it as a ministry, but rather as “one of the most important career decisions” he had ever made.<sup>41</sup> Then it was time for still another switch as Wagner formed the aforementioned Global Harvest Ministries.

Wagner visited a snake-handling church several times and inserted the experience into his writings for *Ministries Today* magazine, boasting, “These magazine articles helped greatly toward orienting the Body of Christ in general toward supernatural interventions of many different and unusual kinds, including snake handling!”<sup>42</sup>

Wagner next gravitated to the inner ranks of the hyper-charismatic and Vineyard hierarchy of apostles and prophets, linking with Chuck Pierce. Wagner and Pierce tried to rewrite the doctrine and government for the universal Church, replete with varieties of apostles and prophets, and filled with code words, buzzwords, and inside lingo. Wagner called his new movement “The Postdenominational Church.” When his friends (especially Jack Hayford, who is in the Four-square denomination) criticized him over the new title, Wagner dropped

the name and eventually came up with “The New Apostolic Reformation” or NAR. It was yet another new wineskin. In Wagner’s view we now have entered “the Second Apostolic Age,” which he says began in 2001.<sup>43</sup>

Wagner has made some horrible blunders — financially and otherwise — especially in his long and troubled business relationship with disgraced minister Ted Haggard. Wagner had set up a new wineskin called The Global Harvest Ministries Center on Haggard’s church property. Their business deals left Wagner on the losing end. His reputation was further soiled when Haggard was brought down in a scandal involving drugs and a male prostitute. Haggard’s immorality was rumored and discussed by the prophets’ club years before it was exposed.<sup>44</sup> One would have thought that God would have given an apostle and prophet such as Wagner a word of knowledge about his business partner. At the very least one would think Wagner would have listened to what others in his club were saying.

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN LIE

Wagner has an entire collection of demon stories, including one that has demons burning down the drug den house near his home because intercessors moved the demons away from his house. Demons, Wagner claims, pulled a ladder out from under him causing him to fall 12 feet onto a concrete floor. And one territorial spirit in Guatemala tried to kill Wagner and his wife in an airplane by causing it to crash while landing as they were coming to the country to “do some spiritual espionage.”<sup>45</sup>

A wilder claim, among many, is that of his team climbing Mount Everest because of a vision promoted by a woman named Ana Mendez. Wagner writes:

“Ana had a vision of the Himalayas as a huge castle of ice, so we named the expedition ‘Operation Ice Castle.’ This was our first direct assault on the Queen of Heaven. The original name of Mt. Everest in Nepali is *Sagar-*

*matha*, meaning 'Mother of the Universe'! So, in September 1997, a team of 24 strategic intercessors was deployed in Nepal. A group led by Doris, hobbling on a cane because of a deteriorating hip, prayed for three weeks in a rustic hotel, with no hot water and very marginal food, at 13,000 feet. Others prayed in the Everest Base Camp at 18,000 feet. Ana, along with a team that had taken Alpine training with her in Mexico and Peru, crossed bottomless crevasses and scaled the mountain to 20,000 feet. There they performed a series of dramatic prophetic acts at a site that they perceived to be the territorial power point of the Queen of Heaven. This involved such strenuous physical, emotional and spiritual security risks that we kept the strategic expedition a secret until all were safely home."<sup>46</sup>

This Queen of Heaven might be drawn from a passage in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, 2,700 years ago, referred to a Queen of Heaven (Jeremiah 7:18). God's people apparently were enticed into worship rituals to this pagan goddess. Even the word "Queen" in the verse is not certain in English. The Hebrew text can bear other translations such as the word "army" or even "stars." The Septuagint version translates it "host of heaven." Trying to stay within the context of Jeremiah's world, commentators have tentatively suggested Ishtar, an Assyrian goddess as a candidate or even the Canaanite Astarte.<sup>47</sup> And we also know that the Jews of Jeremiah's time were not told to make a "direct assault on the Queen of Heaven," but simply to stop their idolatry, devote themselves to the one God, and remember where they came from and how they were delivered. They were then told to repent and turn back to God or they could expect judgment (Jeremiah 7:21-34, see Jeremiah 44 for the judgments that occurred).

A recent investigation of the details of Wagner's Mount Everest incident has been released from the Christian

Research Service. Specifics have been ferreted out and presented some remarkable information including findings by author Elizabeth Hawley. The work is exhaustive and meticulous. Some of Hawley's conclusions are:

"A planned climb that did not actually happen was an attempt on Everest from the Nepalese side by three Mexicans and a Costa Rican under the leadership of Mrs. Ana Mendez from Mexico City. Their expedition was called *Summit for Peace - Everest 1997*, and their intention was to pray at the highest point on earth for peace in the world and against poverty. As Mrs. Mendez explained, 'The top of the world is a symbol of the world. By standing on the top of the world, I intercede with God for the world.' She said that 50 million people around the world from a large number of Christian organizations would pray with her team as they held a brief ceremony on the summit. ... However Mrs. Mendez never received a permit from the Nepalese authorities to set foot on Everest, and her party never moved above base camp. She claimed her Kathmandu trekking agent robbed her; the agent said she never produced the funds for the permit and instead made a concerted effort to convince officials that disasters would strike Nepal if they could not pray at the summit, and they should not be charged any fee for their vital services to the country; the tourism ministry said no permit was issued because only part of the \$50,000 royalty fee was offered by a representative of the team (not the agent)."<sup>48</sup>

#### YET MORE WINESKINS

In 2007, Wagner launched his utopian theory of Dominion and the seven mountains. His "Dominion Mandate" states, "seeing the kingdom of God actually being manifested here on earth as it is in heaven,"<sup>49</sup> and is a rehash of old ideas and questionable beliefs stitched together in a patch-

work and labeled with one of Wagner's fabricated names. His grand scheme consists of ideas drawn from and contained in at least four aberrant teachings. They are:

1. **Postmillennialism.** The teaching that we can bring heaven to earth and establish God's Kingdom worldwide before Christ's return.

2. **The Prosperity Gospel.** The belief that by faith and positive affirmations we can declare health, wealth, and prosperity into existence. There is very little difference between this and the "Law of Attraction" found in the best-selling books, *The Power* and *The Secret*.<sup>50</sup>

3. **Liberation Theology.** The philosophy that says we can, through various means, work to liberate ethnic populations or downtrodden nations and pull them up in worldly status to a better life. This belief developed in the 1960s in Latin American Catholicism and from the desire for more equal distribution of wealth.<sup>51</sup> In years gone by it was called the "social gospel."

4. **Reconstructionism.** This doctrine is also called Dominion Theology. It is a view that fosters the belief that the Law of Moses and the Old Testament have to be imposed on American culture, including all of its capital punishments.<sup>52</sup>

Wagner draws strands from each of these, wittingly or unwittingly, to establish the platform for his theory of Dominion and the Seven Mountains. Of course, the controllers and rulers over this kingdom on earth will be the new apostolic prophets.

Wagner calls the seven mountains "battlefields." He adopted the concept from another "apostle," Lance Wallnau. They are spheres in society that must be conquered and, according to Wagner, "Whoever controls these mountains controls the direction of the world and the harvest therein."<sup>53</sup> However, Jesus said very clearly that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

The seven spheres that Wagner and the apostles want so desperately to

control are: "(1) Religion, (2) Family, (3) Education, (4) Media, (5) Government, (6) Arts and Entertainment, and (7) Business."<sup>54</sup>

In Wagner's prophetic scenario, Jesus must wait for this new kingdom to be established before He can return. Matthew 6:13 is crystal clear, as the Lord's Prayer affirms, that the kingdom is God's kingdom. Conquering the earth is based on the false premise that Adam forfeited the earth to Satan,<sup>55</sup> but this is far from true. The earth has always been and is still God's earth:

"In His hand are the deep places of the earth; the heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; and His hands formed the dry land" (Psalms 95:4-5).

The Psalmist further affirms, "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1).

Wagner appears obsessed with money and predicts the eventual transfer of enormous wealth to the new apostles and their followers. This pipe dream is a favorite theme of all the prosperity teachers and, in the past, was called "spoiling the Egyptians" — a reference to Exodus 11:1-3 and the Egyptians giving the Israelites articles of silver and gold. The socialist form of this is redistribution of wealth. So Wagner's paradigm is really nothing more than a "baptized" version of socialism.

Wagner is so bold as to say that he will be one of the key factors in the huge transfer deal. He boasts that, "God would use me down the road as one of His agents for the coming great transfer of wealth."<sup>56</sup>

Wagner also says that for years a poverty mentality and poverty itself had a hold on him. His question to his readers is, "How was I delivered from that repugnant spirit?"<sup>57</sup>

Wagner alleges his friend Bill Bishop Hamon was used by God to set him free. He says, "God spoke directly to him about my poverty

bondage."<sup>58</sup> Hamon and some friends gathered and "loudly decreed that the spirit of poverty would no longer have an influence on [Wagner's] life."<sup>59</sup> The group then acted in the prophetic, giving Wagner \$170 and telling him to take his wife out for a lavish dinner. Doing so, it is claimed, released Wagner from a poverty spirit from that moment on. It was quite an easy and inexpensive deliverance from "that repugnant spirit."

Wagner also confesses that he has moved to a position of open theism which is the belief that God is not all-knowing. This has also been called a form of Process Theology.<sup>60</sup> "I began to believe strongly that our prayers can actually influence what God will do next. *They can change God's mind.*"<sup>61</sup>

Wagner says that we can manipulate God. Here Wagner has moved from the heresy of another Jesus to the heresy of another God. To say that our prayers influence God (in some way) is one thing, but to say that we can change God's mind is quite another. God always knows what He will do and when He will do it. He also always knows what we will do and when we will do it.<sup>62</sup>

### THE "APOSTLE" CHARLES

In 2 Timothy 3:2, the Apostle Paul warned us that the end times would bring "boasters." The Greek word he used was *alazon*, which means "imposter." So we have been biblically warned. Charles Peter Wagner is a law unto himself. He seems to be a magnet for strange fire and new extrabiblical and esoteric doctrines.

He claims to see and hear what no one else does. His "ordination" as an apostle goes back not to Jesus, but to Cindy Jacobs and his other associates, who supposedly are speaking for God. Wagner explains:

"The first word was from Cindy Jacobs, ... 'My son, Peter, today I put the anointing of apostle of prayer upon you. I put the mantle upon you of an Abraham, a patriarch, and I'm calling you forth into the land of promise.'"<sup>63</sup>

Wagner asserts that this was later reinforced by Margaret Moberly.<sup>64</sup> And a few years later, he seems to have needed it again reaffirmed:

"I found myself kneeling on the platform with Jim Stevens of Christian International getting ready to prophesy over me in public. How I got there I still don't know! I glanced up and there was Charles Doolittle, one of our recognized intercessors, standing over me. Charles was a six-foot-four muscular African-American police officer on the Glendale, California, police force, with an aggressive look on his face and holding a huge three-foot sword over my head! I quickly decided that I'd better behave myself and listen carefully!"<sup>65</sup>

The shortened version of Doolittle's statement:

"Whether you want to say 'apostle' or not is of no effect, says God. The title shall rest, the anointing shall rest, and men will give it to you. It is not something you have sought for your own; men will place it upon your back and upon your spirit and they will draw the apostolic from you!"<sup>66</sup>

In short, Wagner's friends installed him into the high office with high drama, replete with prophecies and a sword.

Wagner would object to being called self-appointed because his friends appointed and commissioned him. However, they were appointed the same way by their "apostolic" buddies. True apostles were called by the Incarnate Christ Himself with a quiet, "Follow Me" (Matthew 4:19).

Wagner distorts Scripture by claiming that his many imaginations or borrowed ideas can be called "new wineskins." Jesus used the illustration of both old and new cloth and old and new wineskins to demonstrate for the Pharisees the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant that He would inaugurate (Mat-

thew 9:14-17). Here again, Wagner is clearly distorting the Bible and sound biblical interpretation. The Gospel and the New Testament are the only wineskins needed.

Wagner is like the pagan Athenians who lived to hear and debate some new thing (Acts 17:21). However, no one can improve on the Gospel and the New Testament.

Wagner's followers would be wise not to become too comfortable with his ideas as to the transfer of wealth and dominion because they could change at any time. His progressive revelation is not reliable. He himself warns:

"My intent, therefore, is to avoid coming to too many conclusions, because new information might eventually point in other directions."<sup>67</sup>

That statement negates anything that Wagner will ever teach. Thank God, in contrast, that God's Word "is forever settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89).

Perhaps Wagner believes himself to be an important factor in the world, if not in the universe. He thinks he is in the forefront of the plan of the ages and is one of its movers and shakers. In the end it is easy to write about one's cosmic utopian dreams, but much harder to deliver. Wagner and friends live with one foot in reality and the other in fantasy.

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66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., pg. 260.

wanted to be a Christian. I still remember that prayer. It did something to me. Something *in* me."<sup>6</sup>

He also states:

"What happened that night was real. It meant something significant then and it continues to have profound significance for me. That prayer was a defining moment in my life."<sup>7</sup>

*Time* magazine states that Bell:

"... was emotionally precocious. 'When he was around 10 years old, I detected that he had a great interest and concern for people,' his father says. 'There he'd be, riding along with me, with his little blond hair, going to see sick folks or friends who were having problems, and he would get back in the truck after a visit and begin to analyze them and their situations very acutely. He had a feel for people and how they felt from very early on.'"<sup>8</sup>

Bell attended church at either a Baptist or a nondenominational church (depending on which church his family attended at the time) on Sundays and Wednesday nights.<sup>9</sup>

He loved music and along with some friends started a band which became very important in his life.<sup>10</sup> However, he contracted viral meningitis, which "changed his life."<sup>11</sup> He graduated from Wheaton College in Illinois and decided to attend Fuller Seminary in California, where he later graduated. He preached his first sermon when he was 21.<sup>12</sup>

*Time* magazine also informs:

"After seminary, Bell's work moved in two directions. He was recovering the context of the New Testament while creating a series of popular videos on Christianity called Nooma, Greek for wind or spirit. He began to attract a following, and Mars Hill — named for the site in Athens where Paul preached the Chris-

tian gospel of resurrection to the pagan world<sup>13</sup> — was founded in Grand Rapids, Mich., in 1999."<sup>14</sup>

The *Time* magazine article also states, "By the time Bell was 30, he was an Evangelical celebrity."<sup>15</sup>

Bell has authored or co-authored several books prior to *Love Wins*, such as *Velvet Elvis*, *Sex God*, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, and *Drops Like Stars*.

### LOVE WINS: WHY IT'S SO CONTROVERSIAL

*Love Wins* was released slightly earlier than its announced release date because of the controversy surrounding it. The reason for the controversy is that in the book Bell clearly implies that God would not send people to hell to suffer torment for eternity. As noted, the teaching that God will eventually save everyone is called universalism; yet, in interviews, Bell has denied that he is a universalist. What he has not seemed to address is why his position is not rightly called universalism. After all, if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck. Either Bell doesn't understand what universalism is (even though he is a seminary graduate and a pastor) or else he is somehow playing semantic games to avoid acknowledging that he *is* a universalist. Alternately, Bell may simply be lying through his teeth. None of these scenarios — ignorance, parsing words, or lying — speaks well for Bell.

### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT LOVE WINS

First of all, it should be noted that not everything Bell says in *Love Wins* is wrong or bad (albeit his main thesis in the book is certainly unbiblical). Although only God knows Bell's heart, his Christian testimony, cited above from his book, is touching and seemingly genuine. Even if Bell is a universalist, this doesn't mean that he was not truly born again the night he invited Jesus into his heart.

In the book, Bell comes across as articulate and intelligent. He has a sense of humor and a way with words: One of his chapters is cleverly

titled, "Here Is the New There." He also makes some interesting and valid observations about how at least some Christians seem to view God as a slave driver and/or a harsh taskmaster.

However, Bell's handling of Scripture leaves a lot to be desired, especially — but not only — when he argues for the main thesis of his book. (More about this below.)

Additionally, while the book is 202 pages, much of it is simply "white space," due to the fact that often a line of text will only contain a word or two, or perhaps a few words. In fact, if one were to remove most of the blank space from Bell's book, as in most other books, Bell's 202-page book might shrink down to a mere 75-100 pages or so. Whereas Bell may justly feel that his style of writing required him to only put a word or so on many of the lines in the book, it made for a much larger-sized book out of a relatively short text.

One other point is that, while (as noted above) Bell is very articulate, he seems to be deliberately vague on some points. For instance, he never *explicitly* says in the book that everybody will be saved (universalism), but only strongly implies this. Perhaps he did this so that he wouldn't be accused of universalism, even though it would be difficult to understand his position in any other way; especially because he seems to identify his favored position with that of the early Greek father Origen, who definitely *was* a universalist.<sup>16</sup>

### BELL'S DILEMMA: THE CENTRAL THEME OF LOVE WINS

The primary thesis of Bell's book is his argument against God sending people to an eternal hell after death, even if they have never placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Bell bristles at the idea that God would do such a thing. Furthermore, he entices his readers by saying if such an idea makes them sick, "You are not alone. There are millions of us."<sup>17</sup> But Bell cannot know this for certain. He has not personally

surveyed millions of people in the world about their opinion on this matter. Bell continues:

“This love [of God] compels us to question some of the dominant stories that are being told as the Jesus story. 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. It’s been clearly communicated to many that this belief is a central truth of the Christian faith and to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus. This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus’s message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear. And so this book.”<sup>18</sup>

What is interesting about Bell’s approach to the concept of the hell presented above is that he doesn’t seek to determine the validity of such a position by comparing it to what God teaches us in the Bible. Thus, Bell’s approach to the biblical doctrine of hell is not determined by what the Bible teaches about hell, but by whether or not Bell can accept the Bible’s teaching on it. Bell cannot believe that the God whose nature the Bible reveals to be love (see 1 John 4:8, 16) — a truth which Bell wholeheartedly acknowledges<sup>19</sup> — would ever send people to hell for an eternity of torment.

Admittedly, these two truths which the Bible reveals seem opposed to one another; however, the same Bible that reveals that God is love also reveals that God will send many to everlasting punishment (for example, see Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23; 25:46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 13:22-28; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Jude 7; Revelation 20:15). Although it is difficult to reconcile these two truths, if we accept that the Bible is God’s Word, then we must accept both, whether we like them or not and whether we are able to understand how both of them can be true.

There are certainly other facets of the truth that the Bible reveals that are not easy to reconcile. Theologians have sought to reconcile God’s predestination with human freedom, His existence in three Persons, and other mysteries. Nicodemus couldn’t understand what Jesus meant when He spoke about being born again. He asked Jesus, “How can these things be?” (See John 3:9.)

During the days of our Lord’s ministry on earth, many people stumbled over how Jesus could say that He came from heaven, when they “knew” that Joseph was His father (for example, see John 6:41-42). Others couldn’t understand how Jesus could give them His flesh to eat (John 6:51-52) and they became offended at this teaching:

“... many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’ ... From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (John 6:60, 66).

A person may not like the biblical doctrine of hell and may even find it sickening, as Bell does. While hell is certainly not a pleasant doctrine, the Scripture teaches it. And if we are to be true servants of God and His holy Word, we must proclaim what God says about it and not our own fancies or preferences.

Consider the cost to God to save us from going there. It cost Him the death of His own Son. One would think if there was any other way for God to save us from hell, He would surely have done so. Jesus prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane that, if it was possible, He might not have to go to the cross (for example, see Matthew 26:39). However, the fact that God allowed Jesus to go to the cross, rather than sparing Him, shows us that our salvation could be accomplished in no other way.<sup>20</sup> (See Galatians 2:21; 3:21-22.)

Bell clearly evidences his disbelief and aversion to the biblical doctrine of eternal hell throughout *Love Wins*. In the first chapter of the book, he writes:

“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? Does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite, eternal torment for things they did in their few finite years of life?”<sup>21</sup>

He also asks, “What kind of faith is that? Or, more important: What kind of God is that?”<sup>22</sup>

Later in his book, Bell cites 1 Timothy 2:4, which says that God, “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”<sup>23</sup>

Bell asks, “So does God get what God wants?”<sup>24</sup> Later in the same chapter, he asks:

“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?”<sup>25</sup>

Elsewhere, Bell writes:

“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 very good story.”<sup>26</sup>

Here, Bell protests against the biblical doctrine of hell because he doesn’t believe it’s “a very good story.” In saying this, Bell seems to fail to grasp that the story he is so dead set against is the story that God Himself authored.

Elsewhere, Bell states:

“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. The plot has been lost, and it’s time to reclaim it.”<sup>27</sup>

Amazingly, Bell here states that the biblical story of hell has *nothing to do* with what Jesus came to do. To the contrary, it has *everything* to do with what Jesus came to do, as John 3:16 reveals. Jesus gave His life for us on the cross so that we wouldn’t have to endure eternity in hell, but could instead spend eternity with God. But Bell disapproves of the stories that Jesus is telling and thinks that they should be changed, so that they are “good stories,” that is, stories that Bell approves of and that make people feel good.

Although Bell asserts that “Jesus’s story has been hijacked by ... stories that Jesus isn’t interested in telling,” he later acknowledges:

“The actual word ‘hell’ is used roughly twelve times in the New Testament, almost exclusively by Jesus himself.”<sup>28</sup>

So, while Bell claims that Jesus isn’t interested in the story of eternal hell, he later admits that the word “hell” is used in the New Testament almost exclusively by Jesus. It sounds like hell really *is* a story Jesus is interested in telling!

### **BELL’S ASSERTION THAT HIS UNIVERSALISM IS PART OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY**

Before responding to some of Bell’s protests against the biblical doctrine of hell, we should note at least one other feature of *Love Wins*, which is Bell’s insistence that the belief that everyone will be saved has been a normative view of Christians throughout Church history. Bell makes this point several times in his book. For instance, he states:

“I haven’t come up with a radical new teaching that’s any kind of

departure from what’s been said an untold number of times. That’s the beauty of the historic, orthodox Christian faith. It’s a deep, wide, diverse stream that’s been flowing for thousands of years, carrying a staggering variety of voices, perspectives, and experiences.”<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, later on, Bell cites (among other early Church notables) the Greek Christian Origen as one who held to the position that Bell obviously endorses, namely “God’s reconciliation with all people.”<sup>30</sup>

He also states:

“At the center of the 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.”<sup>31</sup>

Concerning the traditional Christian teaching that only those who have believed on Jesus in this life will go to heaven and all others will go to hell, Bell states:

“Not all Christians have believed this, and you don’t have to believe it to be a Christian. The Christian faith is big enough, wide enough, and generous enough to handle that vast a range of perspectives.”<sup>32</sup>

Concerning this latter quotation, Bell is certainly correct that we are not saved by believing that only Christians will go to heaven and all others will go to hell. Our salvation doesn’t depend on our having all our theological ducks in a row. However, that doesn’t mean that we, as Christians, should just believe whatever we please. God wants us to love Him with our minds, as well as our hearts and our souls (see Matthew 22:36-37). Part of loving God with our minds is to seek to believe the sound doctrine of scriptural teaching about things.

It is interesting that Bell would cite the early Christian theologian Origen (*ca.* 185 - *ca.* 254) in support of his contention that Christians throughout history have agreed with his views

about God eventually saving everyone. Origen was, indeed, a defender of the Christian faith; however, he also held to some peculiar and unbiblical views. One source states concerning Origen:

“Among his speculations were the beliefs that souls who had erred in a former life were placed upon earth in a human body as part of a purifying process and that all beings, even the devil and his angels, would ultimately be reclaimed and restored by God’s grace.”<sup>33</sup>

Another source notes:

“Nevertheless, Origen was condemned later in Christian history for his belief that the souls of human beings were **pre-existent** (rather than the idea that souls are created at a particular time by God), and believing in the doctrine of **apokatastasis** [i.e., universalism] — that every creature would eventually be saved by God.”<sup>34</sup>

And so, precisely *because* Origen held to some unorthodox speculations, including universalism, he was “declared a heretic in A.D. 553 by the Second Council of Constantinople.”<sup>35</sup>

So, rather than holding to an orthodox view regarding the eternal destiny of all people, as Bell claims, his views on this are actually heretical, not orthodox. And a contemporary theological dictionary notes that, “Generally, Christian theology has rejected the idea of a universal salvation.”<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, in a book review of *Love Wins in Christianity Today*, Mark Galli, senior managing editor for the magazine, notes that in the book, Bell “misleadingly claims that the theme has a ‘long tradition’ and ‘an untold number’ of adherents among devout Christians. Only a tiny minority of Christians have ever espoused universalism.”<sup>37</sup>

Galli also writes:

“Bell ignores crucial questions, one of which is this: If universal salvation is true and such good

news, why is it practically nonexistent in Jesus' teachings; why does Jesus' ministry relentlessly focus on the Last Judgment? Jesus elaborates on this theme more than all the other New Testament voices combined."<sup>38</sup>

### EUGENE PETERSON'S DEFENSE OF BELL

Eugene Peterson, who produced the so-called "Bible paraphrase" called *The Message*, endorsed *Love Wins*. On the inside flap of the dust jacket of *Love Wins*, Peterson praises Bell's book:

"In the current religious climate in America, it isn't easy to develop a thoroughly biblical imagination that takes in the comprehensive and eternal work of Christ in all people and all circumstances in love and for salvation. Rob Bell goes a long way in helping us acquire just such an imagination. *Love Wins* accomplishes this without a trace of soft sentimentality and without compromising an inch of evangelical conviction in its proclamation of the good news that is most truly for all."<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised at Peterson's endorsement of *Love Wins*. He also praised the recent popular Christian novel *The Shack*, which likewise teaches universalism.<sup>40</sup> On the front cover of that book, Peterson wrote:

"This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!"<sup>41</sup>

In fairness to Peterson, it is possible that he was not praising the universalism expressed in *The Shack*; however, it would have been helpful for Peterson to clarify exactly what he was praising about *The Shack*, given that book's message of universalism. Nonetheless, it would be very difficult to give Peterson the benefit of the doubt regarding his praise for *Love Wins*, because the central thesis of that book is universalism.

If anyone would criticize Rob Bell's views, Eugene Peterson has a rebuke for them. He recently stated, "There's very little Christ, very little Jesus, in these people who are fighting Rob Bell."<sup>42</sup> Comments like these raise questions about what Peterson's own views are regarding universalism.

### CLARIFYING SOME TERMS

Before giving a biblical critique of Bell's universalism, there are two key terms (and a couple of other terms) we need to be familiar with:

1. **Universalism** — Teaches that all people will eventually be saved; as noted above, the early Christian theologian Origen went so far as teaching that even the devil and his angels would eventually be reconciled to God.

2. **Inclusivism** (also contrasted with exclusivism and pluralism) — Inclusivism is:

"A theory of salvation that suggests that although God saves people only on the merits of Christ, not all who are saved have consciously known of Jesus or heard the gospel. God saves those who, although they have not heard of Jesus, nevertheless respond to the best of their knowledge to the revelation of God available to them. This view stands in contrast to both exclusivism, which suggests that God saves only those who consciously respond to the presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to pluralism, which sees saving value in non-Christian religions."<sup>43</sup>

Some might say that Bell is an "inclusivist" rather than a "universalist."<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Bell does state some things in chapter 6 of his book, entitled, "There Are Rocks Everywhere"<sup>45</sup> that sound either inclusivist or pluralist. For instance, in this chapter, Bell proclaims, "As obvious as it is, then, Jesus is bigger than any one religion."<sup>46</sup> This is a pluralistic statement.

Elsewhere in this same chapter, in his faulty exposition of John 14:6,

where Jesus states, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me," Bell refuses to believe that Jesus means that people must *consciously* know Him in order to come to God. He says that John 14:6 simply means that Jesus alone is the one who is saving everyone, whether people realize He is the one saving them or not.<sup>47</sup> He states that people from other religions may be saved by what is, in effect, an anonymous Jesus. "People come to Jesus in all sorts of ways," Bell asserts.<sup>48</sup> And a page later, he states, "Sometimes people [who come to Jesus] use his name; other times they don't."<sup>49</sup> This is an inclusivist statement.

Of course, this is in perfect contrast to the story of Cornelius in Acts 10; where, although Cornelius was a God-fearing Gentile, an angel had Cornelius send for Peter so that he could hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that he could be saved (see Peter's recounting of this event in Acts 11:13-14). If Cornelius, who was what we would call a good man, a religious man, and a godly man, could have been saved by an unknown Jesus, then what was the point in God's angel having Cornelius send for Peter so that he could hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be saved? Through this story, God seems to indicate that, if a person really seeks after God, God will somehow enable that person to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be saved.<sup>50</sup>

Even though some of Bell's statements sound either pluralistic and/or inclusivist, because Bell has already identified his theological view of the eternal destiny of people with the famous universalist Origen, among others, identifying Bell as a universalist is appropriate and accurate, despite his denials. The fact that his views *seem* to accord with universalism means that he has the responsibility and the burden to clarify his position if he is indeed not a universalist, but a pluralist or an inclusivist. But even if Bell is a pluralist or an inclusivist, rather than a universalist, his views are unbiblical.

## A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF BELL'S UNIVERSALISM<sup>51</sup>

Although Bell discusses the topic of hell throughout *Love Wins*, he calls chapter 3 of the book "Hell."<sup>52</sup> Within this chapter, he purports to cover every reference to hell in the Bible. This takes him roughly five pages. He first covers some Old Testament Scriptures about what in Hebrew is called "Sheol" (the netherworld), which is nearly always synonymous with the Greek word "Hades" in the New Testament. Referring to "Gehenna," a Greek word translated "hell" in the New Testament, he states that in the New Testament, "The actual word 'hell' is used roughly twelve times in the New Testament, almost exclusively by Jesus himself."<sup>53</sup>

Christian apologist Robert Morey has likewise noted, "Out of its twelve occurrences in the New Testament, Gehenna is found no less than eleven times on the lips of the Lord Jesus himself."<sup>54</sup> And the late Bible prophecy scholar John Walvoord listed the eleven occurrences of Gehenna from the lips of Jesus: "Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5"<sup>55</sup> and stated:

"The expression occurs also in James 3:6 but does not occur in the book of Revelation. However, it is clearly equivalent to the lake of fire, or the eternal punishment of the wicked."<sup>56</sup>

After Bell's all-too-brief survey of the word "hell" as used in the Bible, he proclaims:

"And that's it. Anything you have ever heard people say about the actual word 'hell' in the Bible they got from those verses you just read."<sup>57</sup>

Not so fast. First of all, Bell sometimes cites and sometimes quotes from the Scriptures that use the word "Gehenna" in the Bible. He also refers to two other words (*Tartarus* and *Hades*) in the New Testament "that occasionally mean something similar to hell."<sup>58</sup>

However, Bell has only lightly skimmed the surface of the Bible's teaching on hell. He does not give any discussion of what the passages in the Bible that he cites as using the word "hell" are actually saying. This doesn't do justice to the biblical teaching on hell.

Later on in the chapter, Bell shows an awareness of the fact that not all references to hell in the Bible actually use the word "hell."<sup>59</sup> For instance, there are some passages in the Bible that refer to "everlasting fire" (Matthew 25:41); "everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:46); "eternal fire" (Jude 7); "the lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Revelation 19:20). Regarding this lake of fire and brimstone, the Bible says that:

"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are [see Revelation 19:20]. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

The Bible also states:

"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14-15).

For the most part, Bell doesn't deal with these Bible passages that speak of everlasting punishment and everlasting torment without actually using the word "hell." He does briefly attempt a response to Jesus' story of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46, in which he *explicitly* denies that Jesus' use of the phrase "everlasting punishment" in the passage (v. 46) is actually speaking of punishment that lasts forever. "Jesus isn't talking about forever as we think of forever,"<sup>60</sup> Bell assures us.

Bell also grapples with the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31,<sup>61</sup> but his treatment of it is unclear at best. Even though this story (which some Bible teachers believe is a parable, and others believe describes an actual event) is about a place of torment for the unbelieving dead

(Greek: *Hades*) prior to the final destination of the unsaved (Greek: *Gehenna*) which is synonymous with "the lake of fire" spoken of in Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8), it still clearly teaches the torment of the unsaved dead. But Bell spends much of his time with this passage discussing the "hells" of social injustice and earthly problems.

At one point later in the book, Bell finds the notion of hell in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).<sup>62</sup> What makes this so amazing is that the notion of hell is not so much as hinted at in this passage.

At one point in his chapter "Hell," Bell asks, "So how should we think, or not think, about hell?"<sup>63</sup>

What Bell does at this point is to recount horrible life circumstances in the lives of various people.<sup>64</sup> He seems to directly answer his own question at the end of the chapter, when he writes:

"To summarize, then, we need a loaded, volatile, adequately violent, dramatic, serious word to describe the very real consequences we experience when we reject the good and true and beautiful life that God has for us. We need a word that refers to the big, wide, terrible evil that comes from the secrets hidden deep within our hearts all the way to the massive, society-wide collapse and chaos that comes when we fail to live in God's world God's way. And for that, the word 'hell' works quite well. Let's keep it."<sup>65</sup>

Notice that Bell has here redefined the word "hell," giving it a non-biblical definition. In this chapter, Bell seems to largely relegate the word hell to certain evils in this life. Along the way, Bell denies that when the Bible talks about "forever," that the words used in the Old and New Testaments for "forever" actually mean "forever." He also expresses the view that God's judgments are always and only for the purpose of redemption; and that God judges both His own people and those who are not

His own people with judgments that are ultimately redemptive, as opposed to being purely punitive.

### A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO BELL'S TEACHING ON EVERLASTING HELL

Bell's exposition of hell in *Love Wins* is sub-biblical, to say the least. First of all, despite Bell's assertions to the contrary, the Bible's use of the word "hell" is speaking of a place of punishment for sin *after* this earthly life. This punishment is for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41; see also Revelation 20:10) and also for anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:15). Even in the Old Testament, we read:

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2).

Compare this with what the Lord Jesus said:

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29).

Again, the Lord Jesus clearly states, regarding the judgment of "the goats":

"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;' ... 'And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life'" (Matthew 25:41, 46, NASB).

As we noted above, Bell argues that the Greek word for "eternal" punishment used in verse 46, *aionion* (which is also the word for "eternal" fire used in verse 41), doesn't actually mean "forever." The late cult expert

Walter Martin was familiar with this tactic of trying to divest the Greek word *aionion* from meaning "forever." He stated:

"This argument stems from the old chestnut perpetually turned over in the fires of theological debate, which all qualified Greek scholars recognize as merely a 'dodge' to escape the paralyzing reality that the Greek language teaches in no uncertain terms *eternal punishment* for sin."<sup>66</sup>

Martin also cites Matthew 25:46, referenced above, and states:

"If we would limit the duration of the punishment of the damned, then by all the laws of sound exegesis we must limit the eternal habitation of the saved! This far even no universal reconciliationist is willing to go!"<sup>67</sup>

Martin does concede:

"There are, of course, contexts in the New Testament where the words *aionion* or *aionas* are found where they could not possibly refer to eternal things. However, the context clearly determines their meanings, and for universal reconciliationists to claim on the basis of a Greek noun or adjectival form that the Bible does not teach everlasting retribution when the overwhelming majority of Greek scholars — classical and koine<sup>68</sup> — have taught historically the direct opposite is just one more evidence of their lack of scholastic resources."<sup>69</sup>

However, Martin also states:

"The comparison of the usage of the word *aionion* as it is used in the Greek New Testament would show the interested reader immediately that in numerous contexts the word means 'everlasting' or 'forever.'"<sup>70</sup>

In the Gospel of Mark, the Lord Jesus said:

"And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having

two eyes, to be cast into hell fire — where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:47-48; cf. Matthew 5:29-30).

Speaking to the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus said:

"Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:33).

The Apostle Paul tells the Christians in Thessalonica:

"... it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed" (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

And in the book of Jude, we read:

"... as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7).

A passage in Revelation, neglected by Bell in his book, states:

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the

things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15; cf. Revelation 21:8).

To quote one evangelist, speaking of what these passages teach us: "Sin is black; hell is hot; and eternity is a long time." What we have seen in just these passages is that hell is a place of eternal torment that will be inhabited by (among others) the devil and his angels and also those who are not found in the Book of Life.

Bell correctly quotes from 1 Timothy 2:4: "[God] who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Compare 2 Peter 3:9, which states, "The Lord ... is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Nevertheless, despite this expressed desire of God, the Bible reveals that there will be many who will not make it to heaven.

For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, Jesus clearly says:

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

The gate and the way is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and Him alone. As He elsewhere states:

"I am the door of the sheep. ... I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:7, 9).

As to Jesus being the only way to heaven, He states:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Again, the Bible states of Jesus:

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

As one pastor and author explains:

"To use an analogy, Jesus is like God's telephone number. The God of the universe can only be contacted through Jesus Christ. Philosophical pluralists insist on getting through to God no matter what number they dial. But that is not how the telephone system operates, and it is not how God operates either. Jesus is the only direct line to God."<sup>71</sup>

Regarding there being many who will not be in heaven, the Lord Jesus stated:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Notice that *many* will make these claims before the Lord Jesus. But He will turn them away on that day.

### HOW TO GET TO HEAVEN, ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

So, how can we be certain of making heaven? The Bible also declares:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is

not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16-18).

The last verse of that same chapter states:

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

Jesus Himself assures us:

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. ... Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:40, 47).

This is in line with what Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer, when he asked them, "'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved'" (Acts 16:30-31). And the same is true of each person. If we believe (that is, "trust") in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Sin-bearer, because of His death for us on the cross, then we, too, will be saved, according to the Savior's own promise to us, as noted above.

In the words of evangelical theologian Robert P. Lightner, "Scripture repeatedly declares that salvation is by faith alone, plus *nothing*."<sup>72</sup> He also states:

"Personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone as Savior is the one and only condition for human salvation. Over one hundred times in the New Testament, faith in Christ, for those who are capable of exercising it, is made the one human requirement for receiving eternal life."<sup>73</sup>

### BACK TO BELL

Part of Bell's problem is that he so emphasizes God's love that he neglects the fact that God is also a God of justice. For instance, in Luke

11:42, the Lord Jesus mentions both “justice and the love of God.” However, Bell — and other universalists — downplay or omit the fact that God is not only love, but that He is also righteous and holy and just. In so doing, Bell will need to *somehow* find a way to explain (or else, explain away) the passages in Scripture where God instituted capital punishment (Genesis 9:6; cf. Matthew 26:52; Romans 13:4); where He prescribed the death penalty for various violations of the Mosaic law (for example, Leviticus 20:9-18; 24:10-17, 21; Deuteronomy 13:1-15; 17:2-5); where God actually took people’s lives (for example, Genesis 38:7, 10; Exodus 14:27-30; Leviticus 10:1-3; Numbers 11:33-34; 14:35-37; 16:28-35, 41-49; 2 Kings 19:35; Acts 5:1-10; 12:20-23. See also 1 Corinthians 11:27-32); and where God ordered the extermination of the Canaanites (for example, Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

Evangelical theologian R.C. Sproul writes:

“When lecturing on the holiness of God, the sovereignty of God, the justice of God, or the wrath of God, many times I am interrupted by someone who comments, ‘But my God is a God of love.’ I hasten to assure the person that I also believe in a God of love. But I often note in the protest a thinly veiled suggestion that the love of God is somehow incompatible with His holiness, justice, sovereignty, or wrath. Here the attribute of love has been isolated from God’s other attributes so that it is the only attribute by which God is known or it subsumes or swallows up all of His other attributes. ... [But] if the Bible is our primary source for God’s revelation of His nature and character and it declares that God is holy, just, sovereign, and wrathful, as well as loving, then we need to understand the love of God in such a way that it does not negate or swallow up these other attributes.”<sup>74</sup>

Later, he elaborates on this:

“The love by which He acts is altogether pure and untainted by any weakness, blemish, or hint of evil. If we learn nothing else about the love of God, it is imperative that we learn this. His love may be like our love in some respects, but in other respects it is unlike ours. Most significantly, our love is a marred love, a flawed and blemished love. Our love is always and everywhere tarnished by sin. That is why it is fatal to think of the love of God as a mere extension of human love. We have seen that the attribute of love in God must be understood with all of His other attributes. In this regard we must stress that whatever else the love of God may be, first it is holy.”<sup>75</sup>

#### DO THOSE IN HELL EVER HAVE A CHANCE TO GET OUT?

In *Love Wins*, Bell suggests that it might not ever be too late for a person who has been sent to hell after death to be released from there.<sup>76</sup> At one point in these musings, Bell asks:

“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.’”<sup>77</sup>

However, isn’t that exactly what happened to the five foolish virgins in Jesus’ parable of the 10 virgins in Matthew 25:1-13? They were refused entrance because it was too late. Additionally, we also see Jesus describing this same sort of scenario where He turns people away from the door in Luke 13:23-28. It is exactly the sort of scenario about God turning people away that Bell doesn’t want to believe. But Scripture is clear when it says:

“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Contrary to Bell’s speculations, according to Scripture God has not made provision for a post mortem salvation for anyone.

#### HELL AND THE JUSTICE OF GOD

A question might be raised as to how it is righteous that a very wicked person and a respectable moral unbeliever would both share the same fate of eternal punishment in hell. The answer to this is that the Scripture teaches that there will be degrees of punishment in hell. The torments of hell will not be the same degree for all people.

In his excellent study of what happens to people after death, Christian apologist Robert Morey cites several passages of Scripture that support the idea of there being degrees of punishment in hell: Matthew 11:21-24; Luke 12:47-48; Matthew 10:15; Hebrews 10:29; John 15:22; and Romans 2:3-6.<sup>78</sup> Morey states:

“In this passage [Matthew 11:21-24], Christ reveals that there will be degrees of punishment in hell. While all sinners in hell will be *perfectly* miserable, they will not be *equally* miserable. In determining the degree of punishment in hell, our Lord takes into account the words (Matt. 12:36, 37)<sup>79</sup> and works (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 20:11-15; 22:12) of sinners.”<sup>80</sup>

He also states:

“According to Christ, some sinners will receive greater torment than others. Since there will be degrees of punishment, God’s justice will be revealed.”<sup>81</sup>

#### WHAT ABOUT INFANTS, YOUNG CHILDREN, AND THE MENTALLY IMPAIRED?

Concerning infants and young children, Bell refers to a teaching existing in some Christian circles about an “age of accountability” where people become responsible for sins they have committed. Prior to this age, although

they may sin, they are not held accountable for their sins.<sup>82</sup> While this view has merit, the age of accountability may actually vary from person to person.

Christian apologist Ron Rhodes writes:

“It would be a cruel mockery for God to call upon infants to do — and to hold them *responsible* for doing — what they *could not* do. At a young age children simply do not have the capacity to exercise saving faith in Christ.”<sup>83</sup>

Rhodes believes (and offers support) that this view is in accord with the Bible.<sup>84</sup>

He further writes:

“God does not exercise His love at the expense of His holiness. The infant’s sin problem *must* be dealt with. The solution is that at the moment the infant dies — and not before — the benefits of Jesus’ atoning death on the cross are applied to him or her. And at that moment, the infant becomes saved and is immediately brought into God’s presence. This view acknowledges both the love of God and His holiness.”<sup>85</sup>

Rhodes also believes that those who are never born, either through a miscarriage or an abortion go to heaven as well.<sup>86</sup>

### WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO NEVER HEAR THE GOSPEL?

Bell facetiously asks, “What if the missionary gets a flat tire?”<sup>87</sup> In so asking, he is raising the larger question of what happens to those who die who, for whatever reason, have never heard the Gospel?

Perhaps a good response to this would be the response of theologian Robert Lightner, when he writes:

“The Bible is silent on the question. The only reasonable answer which can be given must be the result of one’s theological view. We know God is sovereign and that He will always do what is right. He is a loving God and according to Scripture always

responds to the open and receptive heart. We know too that God has revealed Himself in man (Rom. 1:19) and in nature (Ps. 19; Rom. 1:20), and all responsible humans are therefore without excuse. Scripture makes it clear that salvation is only through Christ (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5) and that no one can come to God except through Him (John 14:6). Belief or trust in Him is essential to salvation (John 3:16). What shall we say about the multitudes who die without ever hearing the name of Christ as the Savior of sinners? The compassionate heart wants to say God will make an exception in their case and somehow apply the finished work of Christ to them whether they ever hear the Gospel and respond to it or not. But there simply is no biblical basis for such a conclusion. We must rest in God’s sovereign wisdom and goodness and leave the mystery of His will and ways with Him. It seems in harmony with Scripture and human reason to conclude the following: God grants to those who respond positively to the revelation of God in themselves and in nature the opportunity to hear the Gospel. Sovereignly He sees to it that the message of God’s gift of salvation through Christ comes to them so they can believe and become children of God. It is here that God’s people have the responsibility to take the message of salvation to the lost. The unevangelized are not always in some far-off distant land. Some of them live in our neighborhoods. Some of them are our friends.”<sup>88</sup>

Bell’s theology about salvation is sub-biblical and heretical. If the Bible’s teaching about hell is the truth, then Bell has done a great disservice to the truth.

The biblical teaching on hell is such an important and basic Christian doctrine that the author of Hebrews lists the doctrine of eternal judgment as being part of foundational Christian

teaching (see Hebrews 6:1-2). By promoting heresy about such an important and basic issue as the biblical doctrine of hell, Bell demonstrates that he has no business having a teaching ministry as a pastor or a Christian author. Bell’s teaching about there not being an eternal hell makes the cross of Christ unnecessary for the salvation of man, despite his unsupported assertion that such is not the case.<sup>89</sup> This unsupported assertion of his seems just as unbelievable as his assertion in interviews that he is not a universalist, when his views can hardly be understood as anything else.

Although Bell’s book contains some good, the bad far outweighs any good. If space permitted, more errors in Bell’s book could be cited. Bell is promoting liberal and erroneous theology in his book. It seems fitting to close this review with a couple of quotations from a gracious, but critical review by Baptist theologian and author Albert Mohler:

“Rob Bell is a master communicator. Had he set out to defend the biblical doctrine of hell, he could have done so marvelously. He would have done the church a great service. But that is not what he set out to do.”<sup>90</sup>

Near the end of his review of Bell’s book, Mohler writes:

“H. Richard Niebuhr famously once distilled liberal theology into this sentence: ‘A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.’”<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps not everything Niebuhr said above would be true about Bell. However, whether he is intentionally doing so or not, Bell is teaching false doctrine about a basic and important biblical doctrine. His teaching has the very real potential to cause Christians to have a cavalier and apathetic attitude about evangelism (if all are going to eventually be saved anyway); and to lull unbelievers into a false sense of security about their need for the Savior and their salvation from God’s wrath expressed in an everlasting hell.

## Endnotes:

1. Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.
2. Jon Meacham, "Is Hell Dead?," *Time*, April 25, 2011, pp. 38-43.
3. *The Quarterly Journal* has covered the emergent church movement in past issues. See for example, Gary E. Gilley, "The Challenge of the Emerging Church," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2006, pp. 1, 17-26; Gary E. Gilley, "The Kingdom of Emergent Theology," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2008, pp. 1, 14-20; Gary E. Gilley, "There's No Place Like Rome? Understanding the Ancient-Future Faith Movement," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2008, pp. 1, 11-20, as well as other *Journal* articles. The emergent church movement seems ill-defined, and is not monolithic. At least portions of it, such as the portions that emergent church authors Rob Bell and Brian McLaren represent, seem to thrive on ambiguity, vagueness, and posing questions to which they do not supply solid answers.
4. "Is Hell Dead?," op. cit., pg. 43.
5. *Ibid.*, quotation rendered in italics in original.
6. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pg. 193, italic in original.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 194.
8. "Is Hell Dead?," op. cit., pg. 42.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 43.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 43.
13. See Acts 17:16-34.
14. "Is Hell Dead?," op. cit., pg. 43.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pg. 107.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. viii.
18. *Ibid.*
19. For example, *ibid.*, pg. vii. Also see pp. 177-178, where Bell states (correctly) four times in these two pages that God is love.
20. I am indebted to Pastor Chuck Smith, Sr., of Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, Calif., for this insight which he shared in a sermon I heard.
21. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pg. 2.
22. *Ibid.*, pg. 3.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 97.
24. *Ibid.* Also see pg. 116.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 102.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 110.
27. *Ibid.* pp. vii-viii.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 67.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. x-xi.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 107.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 109.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 110.
33. Catherine Clark Kroeger in Walter A. Elwell, Editor, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989, pg. 803, s.v., "Origen."
34. Tony Gray and Steve English, *The Potted Guide to Theology*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Paternoster, 2007, pg. 24, bold in the original.
35. Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999, pg. 87, s.v., "Origen."
36. *Ibid.*, pg. 13, s.v., "apokatastasis."
37. Mark Galli, "What's Up with Hell?," *Christianity Today*, April 2011, pg. 63.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 64.
39. *Love Wins*, op. cit., inside flap of the dust jacket.
40. Wm. Paul Young, *The Shack*. Los Angeles: Windblown Media, 2007. For evidence of universalism in *The Shack*, see, for example, pp. 119-120, 161-163, 169, 224-225. For various theological problems with *The Shack*, see Gary E. Gilley, "Putting God in a Shack: The Unshackled Heresy of Wm. Paul Young," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2009, pp. 4, 12-13. For more information on Wm. Paul Young's universalism, that finds expression in his book *The Shack*, see the Introduction in James B. De Young, *Burning Down 'The Shack'*. Washington, D.C.: WND Books, 2010, pp. ix-xxvi. De Young gives firsthand testimony of Wm. Paul Young's universalistic views.
41. *The Shack*, op. cit., front cover.
42. Ted Olsen, compiler, "Quotation Marks," *Christianity Today*, May 2011, pg. 19.
43. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, op. cit., pg. 65, s.v., "inclusivism."
44. For example, theologian Bobby Conway suggests this possibility in his YouTube video "95. Is Rob Bell a Universalist?" Accessed at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDextJy5tvc&feature=feedu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDextJy5tvc&feature=feedu).
45. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pp. 139-161.
46. *Ibid.*, pg. 150.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.
48. *Ibid.*, pg. 158.
49. *Ibid.*, pg. 159.
50. I am indebted to Dr. Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas for making this point in one of his sermons.
51. A small part of this section originally appeared in J. Greg Sheryl, "The Grave and Beyond: A Biblical Look at What Happens After Death," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2006, pg. 17.
52. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pp. 63-93.
53. *Ibid.*, pg. 67.
54. Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pg. 89.
55. John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies: 37 Crucial Prophecies That Affect You Today*. New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1994, pg. 488.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pg. 69.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 79ff.
60. *Ibid.*, pg. 92.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-79.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 164-190. Bell does seem to make some good points in this section; however, the doctrine of hell isn't one of them.
63. *Ibid.*, pg. 70.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-79.
65. *Ibid.*, pg. 93.
66. Walter Martin, *Essential Christianity*. Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1980, pg. 122, italics in original.
67. *Ibid.*, pg. 123.
68. Koine Greek was the common everyday Greek language in which the New Testament was written.
69. *Essential Christianity*, op. cit., pg. 123, italics in original.
70. *Ibid.*, pg. 122, italic in original.
71. Philip Graham Ryken, *Is Jesus the Only Way?* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999, pg. 37.
72. Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1991, pg. 158, italic in original. The book's subtitle is "The Theology of Everlasting Life," and the book gives a comprehensive understanding about the salvation God offers us in Christ.
73. *Ibid.*, pg. 159.
74. R.C. Sproul, *Loved by God*. Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001, pg. 9.
75. *Ibid.*, pg. 14.
76. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pp. 106-109ff.
77. *Ibid.*, pg. 108.
78. *Death and the Afterlife*, op. cit., pp. 153-154.
79. The book here says "(Matt. 12:26, 37)," but I have corrected the first verse number. On pg. 250, where Morey makes the same statement, he has the correct verse numbers.
80. *Death and the Afterlife*, op. cit., pg. 153, emphasis added.
81. *Ibid.*, pg. 154.
82. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pg. 4.
83. Ron Rhodes, *Heaven: The Undiscovered Country*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996, pg. 102, italics in original.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-108.
85. *Ibid.*, pg. 104, footnote, italic in original.
86. *Ibid.*, pp. 108 and 205, note 12.
87. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pg. 9.
88. *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, op. cit., pp. 176-177.
89. *Love Wins*, op. cit., pg. 155.
90. Albert Mohler, "We Have Seen All This Before: Rob Bell and the (Re)Emergence of Liberal Theology," Wednesday, March 16, 2011. Accessed at: [www.albertmohler.com/2011/03/16/we-have-seen-all-this-before-rob-bell-and-the-reemergence-of-liberal-theology/](http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/03/16/we-have-seen-all-this-before-rob-bell-and-the-reemergence-of-liberal-theology/).
91. *Ibid.*

When her story finally was checked out, it was revealed that she had not been in the hospital on the dates claimed. She was never heard from again. Another Pentecostal icon is Roberts Liardon who claimed to have had a water fight with Jesus in the river of life while visiting heaven. Years later, it was divulged that Liardon was an active homosexual.

The clear words of the Apostle Paul should give us pause. As an apostle of Christ and one receiving first-century divine revelation for the purpose of composing Scripture, Paul was allowed a glimpse of heaven. He writes about the experience in 2 Corinthians 12, but gives no details. In fact, he says of what he saw that “it is not lawful for a man to utter” (v. 4). The NIV renders the verse, “things that man is not permitted to tell,” while the NASB renders it “words, which a man is not permitted to speak.” The Jerusalem Bible is even stronger, “heard things which must not and cannot be put into human language.” These current books by their very existence violate what Paul said. The apostle — who truly visited heaven — was not permitted to tell what he saw and heard. But are we to believe that it is rightful for these modern-day seers to captivate us with their tales?

We have in the Bible all we are to know and need to know about heaven. Trying to explain all there is to know about that sphere and dimension is like trying to explain trigonometry to a first grader. God has given us all we need for life and godliness in the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:3). We have what we need — not what we want. The sin of Adam and Eve consisted partially of wanting to know more than they needed to know.

The outright contradictions among these accounts of heaven render them all meaningless. One, for instance, is that Colton Burpo insists that Jesus has blue eyes. Others have claimed that Jesus has brown eyes. Then there is the 17-year-old painter, child prodigy, and visionary named Akiane Kramarik. She claims that she went to heaven when she was four years old and Jesus’ eyes were definitely green. She has painted the face of Jesus with bright green eyes, so now we actually have a portrait of the Lord — or so we are to believe. (Kramarik can easily be found on YouTube, along with reproductions of her paintings and stories on various Internet sites.)

There are so many other possibilities that can account for these heavenly tales. As stated above, some have been shown as fabrications and outright deceptions. Others are mere hallucinations. Some have definite medical explanation tied to brain activity or as a result of medication during surgery. The heaven conjured up is always in synch with the person’s prior beliefs. For instance, Catholics meet Mary and the saints in heaven, while faithful Muslims see Mohammed, and so forth. There can even be a demonic component — especially when false doctrine is espoused as being from the other side. There is also the possibility of an overcharged imagination.

We have to ask if this perhaps is the case of 4-year-old Colton Burpo who could have had seven years of coaching from an overzealous father. Memories can be constructed and built, and can seem very real. No one knows for sure what kind of information was fed, even inadvertently, to young Burpo over those seven years, which was the time between the surgery and the book making its way onto bookstore shelves. Sometimes, if pondered long enough, imagination can seem like reality to a child. Only to say that because we are forbidden by apostolic decree to divulge this kind of information, there has to be other explanations.

One of the finest volumes which cataloged and examined these heavenly revelations is an out-of-print book entitled *Heaven Can’t Wait* by the late Bill Alnor. While a bit lacking and dated in regard to the current wave of heavenly travelers, it is an invaluable publication which surveys alleged trips to the other side (including Swedenborg, Eadie, Malz, Liardon, Kenneth Hagin, Morris Cerullo, and many, many more). It presents a sane and balanced note in the symphony of contradictory and unbiblical claims.

Unfortunately, selling and sensationalism prevail today instead of good sense and good doctrine. A final warning is the statement of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:4, “and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables.”

—GRF

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## NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

Reports say that Camping was taken by ambulance from his home in Alameda, Calif.

The stroke appeared to be minor and according to Camping’s wife “he was doing good ... and the only thing that’s affected is his speech.” A spokesman for Camping’s ministry, Family Radio, told *USA Today* that, “He is presently recuperating in a local hospital and the doctors are pleased with his progress.” On June 21, the Family Radio’s Website posted a “Special Announcement” which stated, “Mr. Camping has been moved to a Skilled Nursing Facility, where he is undergoing rehabilitation to regain his strength. Mr. and Mrs. Camping greatly appreciate all the cards, letters and flowers they have received, as well as your continuing thoughts and prayers. God has been very merciful.”

In the days immediately following Camping’s failed prediction of doom, gloom, and the world’s end, the radio preacher told the news media he was “bewildered” and “flabbergasted.” On May 24, and in what appears to be a page taken from Ellen G. White and the Adventist movement, he said that May 21 ushered in a “spiritual” Judgment Day, whereby the world is presently under

Christ's judgment until the actual end which is to occur Oct. 21.

On Family Radio's Website a document was posted which answered the question, "What Happened on May 21?" In the statement Camping's ministry implied that "two words, 'earthquake' and 'rapture' have been extremely important in our teaching of Judgment Day — May 21. A critical understanding of these two words is the only change required to know why the unsaved are now living in a world that has not been horribly destroyed, and the elect have not been caught up to be with God." Many will recognize the redefining of terms as a maneuver used by the Watchtower Society to also circumvent its failed prophecies.

Meanwhile, news articles reported pleas by Christian leaders to have Camping ousted from Family Radio. *Christianity Today* explored the question if Camping could be sued for fraud and noted that "an atheist group [asked] the California attorney general for action" against Camping. *CNNMoney* described how Eileen Heuwerter lost her inheritance to Camping. The online article told of Heuwerter's aunt from Queens, New York, who left nearly her entire estate — around \$300,000 — to Family Radio.

*Christianity Today* placed the cost of Camping's May 21 Judgment Day campaign at \$100 million, and said the funds were acquired from the sale of a television and a radio station, as well as donations and life fortunes of Camping's followers.

—MKG

## SCHULLER REMOVED FROM CHURCH BOARD

In what could be seen as another reversal of fortune for the Rev. Robert H. Schuller, the board of the Crystal Cathedral announced in July that he was removed as a voting member. A statement by the board of directors said that they "voted to change Dr. Schuller's position from that of a voting board member to the honorary Chairman of the Board Emeritus, a non-voting position."

Schuller founded the Southern California megachurch, over a half century ago. During recent years, however, the positive-thinking pastor has experienced varied misfortune. As far back as 2001, the church began cutting its staff. In 2006, he stepped down as senior pastor and installed his son into the position. Two years later the younger Schuller was removed. Financial woes have repeatedly beset the church and it announced last year that it was over \$50 million in debt, was being sued by creditors, and had filed for bankruptcy protection. Several offers for the property have been made, including one for \$50 million by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange.

According to a CNN report, "the church's board once had as many as 30 members but recently had shrunk to only five members" and indicated that a desire by Schuller to add additional members led to his ouster by the board. But a church spokesman denied the "reports of the board ousting the elder Schuller," telling the *Los Angeles Times* that he was "not voted off the board."

—MKG

### PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



# Books in Review

## THE CERTAINTY OF THE FAITH

by Richard B. Ramsay

P&R Publishing, 280 pages, \$13.99

Richard Ramsay tells us, “Some people need a heavy dose of apologetic arguments to help bring them to Christ” and that we need to “realize that a good ‘defense’ of the gospel also includes a good ‘offense’” (pg. 8). His book, *The Certainty of the Faith*, is excellent instruction toward those assignments.

Ramsay recognizes that there is debate as to the “‘right’ approach to apologetics” — including evidential, logical reasoning, historical, and presuppositional. In offering his own method, he writes, “I would like to propose an ‘integrated apologetics,’ where we use every form of revelation and the best of various strategies, depending on the person and situation” (pg. xii). And Ramsay reminds us that, “We should never separate apologetics from the gospel. In fact, apologetics is an essential aspect of evangelism” (pg. 9).

After instructing us as to the need for apologetics, Ramsay spends about a quarter of the book surveying various fields of philosophy. He offers that his “review of philosophy is greatly simplified for the purpose of helping Christians get a grasp of the main issues” (pg. 20). While Ramsay makes a respectable effort toward this end, some may find this section tedious and challenging. But don’t give up — the information comprising these pages is a valuable survey of philosophical thought and, as slow reading as it may be, the succeeding sections are inspiring and easily understood.

The next section is his catalog of “Representative Apologists” — men who have contended, or are presently contending for the faith. Ramsay first highlights early apologists such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, then moves on to erstwhile apologists including G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, Cornelius Van Til, and Francis Schaeffer, and finally presents contemporary defenders which consist of Norman Geisler, Josh McDowell, R.C. Sproul, John Frame, Henry Morris, and others. This information puts faces to the apologetic arguments that Christians have heard and used for years. For example, the trilemma (that Jesus is either Lord, liar, or a lunatic)

which was given prominence by modern-day apologists such as McDowell, is an adaptation of an apologetic argument by Chesterton who lived from 1874 to 1936.

Ramsay warns not to make one’s apologetic method a “canned” presentation (pg. 150). The last half of the book moves into practical apologetics — comprising his “suggested approach,” along with how it is applied to six of the most critical questions asked of Christians by non-believers. His approach embodies an acrostic of the word “defend.” The questions he examines using the DEFEND approach include the existence of God, reliability of Scripture, other religions, evolution, eternal punishment, and the problem of evil.

In his discussion of hell and eternal punishment, he tackles the opposing theological views of free will and predestination. While arguing for the latter and utilizing Romans 9 as his biblical foundation, he cautions, “The teachings of this chapter of Scripture can be difficult to chew on, much less to swallow, even for Christians, and in many cases it is not prudent to discuss these issues with non-Christians” (pg. 219). He sounds a similar warning in regard to the young earth-old earth-gap theory debate, saying, “It is best to avoid adopting a dogmatic position on these issues at this point. For apologetic purposes, it is not necessary to make a final decision but only to show the non-believer that there are several ways to harmonize the teaching of the Bible with the apparent age of the earth” (pg. 211).

In the final chapter Ramsay takes on some of the more perplexing riddles hurled at Christians by non-believers concerning the problem of evil. One atheistic Website asked Christians how they know they will not sin once they get to heaven and be cast out like Satan. Ramsay tells us, “No one answered this question” (pg. 229). He answers that question — as to why there will be no sin in heaven — and goes further by explaining with compelling insight why God did not create man sanctified and unable to sin from the very beginning (pg. 231).

Each chapter ends with a series of review questions which encapsulate its critical points and teaching. If one takes the time to retrace through the chapter and respond to the questions, he will be better able to distill the crucial instruction just read. It is a worthwhile exercise.

This volume is loaded with apologetic wisdom, peppered with Scripture throughout, and provides a rational basis for the Christian faith. It is a terrific addition for the apologetic section of a Christian’s library.

—MKG

**Editor’s Note:** The publications featured in PFO’s *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.50 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.