

Thoughts on the book *Love Wins* | What heaven is *not* | Predicting the end

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Q: Harold Camping predicted that the world would come to an end May 21, 2011. Obviously, it didn't happen. He now predicts the end will be October 21st. The Mayan calendar suggests the world will come to an end in 2012. Is there really any way to determine when the end will actually happen?

A: Not according to the Bible. *Only God knows the actual day of the coming of the Lord. But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* Matthew 24:36 (NIV)

It is obvious the world is coming to an end. In fact, the frequency of "birth pains" is quite evident. *For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Messiah," and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.* Matthew 24:5-8

Q: The end of the world is not the only prediction being made. Others have come to the forefront predicting where people will go once they die. Others suggest that we cannot guarantee where one will go because no one really knows what happens when someone dies. What is the truth about life after death? Can one know what happens to them when they die?

A: People are fascinated about life after death. After all, God has planted that curiosity with all of us. *He has also set eternity in the human heart.* Ecc 3:11

BIBLICAL FACTS:

1. Everybody dies physically. *Like the fool, the wise too must die.* Ecclesiastes 2:16

2. Everybody dies eternally. *And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.* Hebrews 9:27 (NLT)

3. Nowhere in Scripture will you find the concept of purgatory—it is a man-made concept. But you can live with the confidence of knowing where you will spend eternity here in this life. *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants.* Psalm 116:15

My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going. John 14:2-4

Q: How about life before death? Does it really matter how we live now? Does it bear any weight on our eternity?

A: A person determines their eternal destiny before they die. So, how you respond to Christ while you live really matters. But keep in mind: Life is short.

We don't know when we will die. Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come. Ecclesiastes 9:12

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TRAVEL



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BOOK REVIEW



Erasing Hell: what God said about eternity, and the things we've made up.

By Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle

How could a loving God send people to hell? Will people have a chance after they die to believe in Jesus and go to heaven?

With a respect for God's Word, Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle share questions many may have about eternal destiny. Sometimes we just do not want to believe in hell, but as they write, "We cannot afford to be wrong on this issue."

Available through Amazon.com

Rob Bell, JESUS, HELL, and Us

By George P. Wood

Rob Bell's book, *Love Wins*, has sparked a controversy among Christians about the doctrine of hell. Bell's position, if I read his book correctly, makes two points: (1) Hell exists. (2) It might be empty. According to Bell, the reason for his second point is God may offer grace to unbelievers even after their deaths. If unbelievers put their faith in Him, and it is a pretty big *if*, then God will rescue them from hell and welcome them into His presence.

Traditionally, theologians have called positions like Bell's universalism because they teach that all will be saved and none will be lost. However, Bell's position does not claim that all will be saved, only that all might be saved. Nor does he claim that God will offer grace to unbelievers after their deaths, only that he may. The confusion about whether or not Bell teaches universalism arises in part from failing to notice this nuance in his book. Perhaps we should say that Bell hopes universalism is true but can't say for sure that it is.

How should we Christians respond to the message of *Love Wins*?

First, we should agree that hell exists. Jesus portrayed hell as a place of punishment for sins (Matthew 25:31-46), destruction of body and soul (Matthew 10:28), and banishment from God's presence (Luke 16:19-31). Jesus spoke more about hell than the other New Testament authors. Noting this, Dorothy Sayers wrote, "We cannot repudiate hell without altogether

repudiating Christ." Hell is an unpopular doctrine, but it is a Christian one because it is Christ's own teaching. We must affirm its reality or deny Christ.

We should agree that God desires to save all people from hell.

Second, we should agree that God desires to save all people from hell. Peter taught, *God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9, emphasis added). More than that, the benefits of Christ's death are available to all people. Paul taught that Christ *died for all* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, emphasis added). God's desire to save is universal and so is His power to save.

Third, we should take action right now so that all people hear about God's desire and power to save them. Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus Christ gave us this commission: *Make disciples of all nations* (Matthew 28:19). After stating that God was *reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them*, Paul begged his audience: *Be reconciled to God* (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). Elsewhere, he asked, *How can they [unbelievers] hear [the good news] without someone preaching to them?* (Romans 10:14).

For me, John 3:16 brings these three things together in a powerful way: *For*

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. God gives us the choice of eternal life or death. He wants us to choose eternal life and provides the means to do so, but He leaves the choice to us.

I fear that Christians who read *Love Wins* will become complacent about the urgent importance of personal evangelism because Bell claims God may offer grace to unbelievers even after death, with the result that hell might be empty. That is a comforting thought, of course, but thoughts are not true just because they are comforting. Bell's "may" and "might" are personal speculations. Scripture nowhere teaches that post-mortem evangelism will take place. In fact, it describes hell as eternal (Matthew 18:8; 25:41, 46), and it says, *People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.* (Hebrews 9:27).

At the end of the day, how we express God's love here and now—through personal evangelism and acts of compassion—matters more than anyone's theological speculations about what may or might happen in eternity.



George P. Wood is the director of *MinistryDirect.com*, executive editor of *Enrichment Journal*, and editor of *Called to Serve* ministers letter. You can follow George on Twitter @GeorgePWood.



Scan this code with your smartphone to read Wood's complete review of *Love Wins*.



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What Heaven Does Not Have

A couple of weeks ago I was in San Diego, CA, for a day. I caught myself describing the beautiful weather in terms of what it was not – not hot, not cold, not humid, not windy, not cloudy. In other words, perfect!

The most detailed description we have of heaven is found in Revelation 21 (NIV). That is where we learn about gates of pearl and streets of gold. It is quite a picture! But what especially interests me is the description of what is not in heaven. Sometimes it is easier to describe the indescribable in terms of what it is not rather than what it is. The list is much shorter.

What's Not In Heaven

So here is what's not in heaven, according to Revelation 21. First of all, there was no longer any sea (21:1). That may seem inconsequential to us, but not to the Apostle John. He was recording this remarkable vision of heaven while being confined to the prison island of Patmos off the Turkish coast. I have been there, and the water is as far as you can see in every direction. That water separated John from family and friends, from the people of God, and from his beloved church in Ephesus.

Heaven, on the other hand, will not have the loneliness, the relational distance, the sense of alienation and the disconnectedness that we have become so accustomed to in our human experience. Heaven will be the ultimate experience of interpersonal community because there will be no longer any sea. Our deepest

longings for intimacy and relationship will be fulfilled there.

Imagine You Without Pain

Next we are told that there will be no tears or *mourning or crying or pain*. (21:4) The reason? There will be no more *old order* of things (21:4). There is a television ad for a pain medication for joint and arthritic conditions that poses the question, "Can you imagine a you without pain?" For most of us that is hard to imagine, especially when it comes to emotional pain. The reason this is difficult to imagine is because the present order on earth is ruled by darkness and filled with human frailty and sin. That *old order* was defeated at the cross of Jesus bringing Christ's dominion and restoration to potentially every sphere of life. Heaven will be the complete, unhindered, experiential realization of a Jesus-centered new order. Imagine you without pain, for God's glory.

God's Glory Gives the Light

After a description in the middle of the chapter of what is in heaven, John returns to describing two more things that are not in heaven. First, *I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple* (21:22). Then, in the next verse, *The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God God gives it light, and the lamb is its lamp* (21:23).

Temple and light; presence and glory. There is no temple because the presence of God will be pervasive, tangible, and all-encompassing. There is no need for

temples, church buildings, or even our bodies functioning temporarily as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). This is reality on an indescribable scale. His presence will radiate the light of his glory calling forth the kind of worship that will charge the very atmosphere of heaven and infuse us with that very glory.

No temple. No sun. They will not be needed. This is a way of describing existence beyond imagining. Heavenly life will be life that is luminously vibrant, engagingly adventurous, utterly fulfilling, and totally God-saturated. It is what

God created us for and sent His Son to redeem us for.

Oh, and that means heaven does not have to be without you!



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It is obvious the world is coming to



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