

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

Rob Bell: “Evangelical and orthodox to the bone”? Hardly.

Scripture: Mark 10:17–27

Code: B110414

Rob Bell is reminiscent of the Rich Young Ruler in Mark 10:17-27. He has a warped view of goodness. He talks as if his own standard of good is the norm, and Bell even suggests that God is not good if He sends people to hell.

Jesus' reply to the young inquirer ("No one is good except God alone"—v. 18) says God himself alone is the standard of true good, not any creature—certainly not a fallen creature.

The Young Ruler was not saved, nor can any person be who thinks his or her own preferences determine what is truly good. That kind of arrogance reflects a damning egotism.



In his books, sermons, and videos, Rob Bell has consistently promoted views that are *antithetical* to biblical Christianity and *hostile* to historic evangelical principles.

For example, although he claims to “affirm the historic Christian faith, which includes the virgin birth and the Trinity and the inspiration of the Bible” (*Velvet Elvis*, 26), Bell is clearly more interested in casting doubt on the fundamental truths of biblical Christianity than he is in defending them.

Consider what else Bell says on that very same page of *Velvet Elvis*:

What if tomorrow someone digs up definitive proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry, and archeologists find Larry's tomb and do DNA samples and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to the followers of the Mithra and Dionysian religious cults that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus, whose gods had virgin births?

But what if, as you study the origin of the word ‘virgin’ you discover that the word ‘virgin’ in the gospel of Matthew actually comes from the book of Isaiah, and then you find out that in the Hebrew language at that time, the word ‘virgin’ could mean several things. And what if you discover that in the first century being ‘born of a virgin’ also referred to a child whose mother became pregnant the first time she had intercourse?

Bell compares the Christian faith to a large trampoline, with its cardinal doctrines (truths evangelicals have historically deemed essential) functioning like the springs that support the jumping platform. The individual springs *aren't* absolutely essential, Bell says—including the virgin birth:

What if that spring [the virgin birth] were seriously questioned? Could a person keep on jumping? Could a person still love God? Could you still be a Christian? Is the way of Jesus still the best possible way to live? Or does the whole thing fall apart? . . . If the whole faith falls apart when we reexamine and rethink one spring, then it wasn't that strong in the first place, was it?" (26-27)

So on the one hand, in a single sentence, he professes to affirm the virgin birth. On the other hand (and on the very same page), he spends multiple paragraphs calling the *truthfulness* and *importance* of that doctrine into question.

That is Bell's *modus operandi*. He labels himself an evangelical while simultaneously undermining the foundational tenets of evangelical conviction.

In light of this, *Love Wins* should not have been a surprise to anyone. The book is consistent with several things Bell has been teaching for some time. For example:

- He has frequently espoused a distorted understanding of hell—one in which hell is not a literal place where wicked souls are punished, but more of a self-induced state of mind pertaining mainly to *this* life.

Rob Bell, [Ooze Interview \(July 2007\)](#): "I don't know why as a Christian you would have to make such declarative statements. [Why would you] want there to be a literal hell? I am a bit skeptical of somebody who argues that passionately for a literal hell, why would you be on that side? Like if you are going to pick causes, if you're literally going to say these are the lines in the sand, I've got to know that people are going to burn forever, this is one of the things that you drive your stake in the ground on. I don't understand that."

Rob Bell, *Sex God*, 21–22: "To the Jewish mind, heaven is not a fixed, unchanging geographical location somewhere other than this world. Heaven is the realm where things are as God intends them to be. . . . Now if there's a realm where things are as God wants them to be, then there must be a realm where things are not as God wants them to be. Where things aren't according to God's will. Where people aren't treated as fully human. It's called hell."

- His understanding of heaven is even more bizarre.

Rob Bell, *Sex God*, 168: "If sex is about connection, what happens when everybody is connected with everybody else? . . . Is sex in its greatest, purest, most joyful and honest expression a glimpse of forever? Are these brief moments of abandon and oneness and ecstasy just a couple of seconds or minutes of how things will be forever? Is sex a picture of heaven? In First Corinthians 12, Paul claimed to have seen a vision of heaven, and the phrase he used to describe it in Greek is translated 'unwordable words.' He wrote that he saw things man is 'not permitted to tell.' Maybe that's why the Scriptures are so ambivalent about whether a person is married. About whether a person is having sex. Maybe Jesus knew what is coming and knew that whatever we experience here will pale compared with what awaits everyone. Do you long for that? Because that's the center of Jesus' message. An invitation."

- Bell has also consistently promoted a form of universalism. For example:

Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 137: "So this reality, this forgiveness, this reconciliation, is true for everybody. . . . Heaven is full of forgiven people. Hell is full of forgiven people. Heaven is full of people God loves, whom Jesus died for. Hell is full of forgiven people God loves, whom Jesus died for. The

difference is how we choose to live, which story we choose to live in, which version of reality we trust. Ours or God's."

Rob Bell and Don Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, 147: "Jesus is the representative of the entire human family. His blood covers the entire created door. Jesus is saving everyone and everything."

Rob Bell, *Ooze Interview* (July 2007): [In response to the question, "Do you believe in a literal hell that is defined simply as eternal separation from God?"] "Well, there are people now who are seriously separated from God. So I would assume that God will leave room for people to say 'no I don't want any part of this.' My question would be, does grace win or is the human heart stronger than God's love or grace. Who wins, does darkness and sin and hardness of heart win or does God's love and grace win?"

Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 18: "God is bigger than any religion. God is bigger than any worldview. God is bigger than the Christian faith."

So when he promotes *Love Wins* with the following words, why would we be surprised?

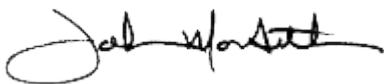
Rob Bell, *Love Wins* Promo Video: "And then there is the question *behind* the questions, the real question: What is God like? Because *millions* and *millions* of people were taught that the primary message—the center of the Gospel of Jesus—is that God is going to send you to hell, unless you believe in Jesus. And so, what gets, subtly, sort of caught and taught is that Jesus *rescues* you from God. But what kind of God is that; that we would need to be rescued from this God? How could that God ever be good; how could that God ever be trusted? And how could that *ever* be good news."

Or when he suggests the possibility of post-mortem salvation, should we be shocked?

Rob Bell, *Love Wins*, p. 107: [There will be] "endless opportunities in an endless amount of time for people to say yes to God. At the heart of this perspective is the belief that, given enough time, everybody will turn to God and find themselves in the joy and peace of God's presence. The love of God will melt every hard heart, and even the most 'depraved sinners' will eventually give up their resistance and turn to God."

In our next post in this series, we'll look at more examples of Bell's skepticism, heterodoxy, and twisted teaching, and I think you'll see even more clearly why it is spiritually dangerous to question the Bible's teaching on hell. When a person begins to question the justice of God in the punishment of the wicked, practically every point of gospel truth is suddenly put at risk.

And Rob Bell's teaching provides vivid proof of that.



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