



# John on Jesus

## *What About Those Who Don't Believe in Jesus?*

Small Group Work Sheet

July 8, 2012

### Part 1 - Ice Breaker

Where were you for the July 4th fireworks?

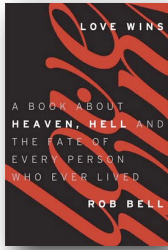
### Part 2 - Sermon Review

1. The Bible insists the entire human race is sinful and deserves eternal punishment. Why is it *exceedingly important* that we view the world, and ourselves, from this biblical perspective?
2. According to Romans 7, what is the self-evident proof that we are under the power of sin? What is the only way to find victory over our sin?
3. What is pluralism? How does it distort our view of reality?
4. All sin has consequences, even for Christians. What is the difference between immediate and eternal consequences for sin? How are they different for a Christian?
5. Nobody can adequately describe hell. It is beyond the capacity of language to convey. Why is hell beyond the capacity of language? What were the two descriptions of hell used in the sermon? How do they help you understand the place of final torment?
6. What are the two ways people try to take the hellishness out of hell? What is wrong with them? When you take the hellishness out of hell, what do you also take away from heaven?
7. Hell doesn't feel fair. It appears to be overkill against the crime of sin. When we hell feels like overkill, what do we need to remember about God's character?
8. Why is God insistent that Jesus is the **ONLY WAY** to heaven (There are multiple reasons)?
9. Of the three applications, which one will you focus on applying this week? Which one is the most important?

Next week,... how do you feel about jealousy? Have you found yourself angry at the success of others? Are you jealous when you can not achieve what others seem to effortlessly attain? Next week, we talk about success, jealousy and facing broken dreams.



## Part 3 - Digging Deeper - Randy Alcorn on Rob Bell



Rob Bell's book, Love Wins, holds a 4 out of 5 star rating on Amazon. It is a cultural success. It isn't a biblical success. A great response to the book concerning the issue of everyone going to heaven (Universalism) was written by Randy Alcorn. Portions of that blog post are below.

**Randy Alcorn's Blog post** - <http://www.epm.org/blog/2011/Apr/11/follow-up-rob-bell-and-hell-controversy>

Someone placed my Friday blog on their site. A journalist who read it posted this response: "*Alcorn's piece has a pretty major error of fact in the post. It's in this statement: 'every human being will ultimately be saved, and that none will experience Hell.' That's not what Bell says in Love Wins.*"

Now, people frequently disagree with me online, and I rarely respond, but I'm glad this was said, because I've seen similar statements in response to others who criticize Bell. People say the critics are wrong, that Bell really believes in Hell and isn't a universalist.

I am sympathetic to the confusion. As I read Love Wins I felt portions were slippery, and very difficult to nail down. I think the truth is this—Bell believes in Hell as HE defines it. That includes bad experiences in this life and a period some may face in the afterlife before turning to faith in Christ and being transferred to Heaven where everyone will spend eternity. My point was that Bell doesn't believe people will experience the Hell that the BIBLE talks about—a place of eternal punishment.

In other words, Bell does not believe in the REAL Hell, as Jesus defines it, and has been accordingly affirmed by historic Christianity. Jesus said, "*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*" (Matt.25:46). Christ also says of Hell, "*where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched*" (Mark 9:47-48).

So why do I think Bell does not believe in this Hell, the one that Jesus affirmed? Why do I and many others think Bell believes every human being will ultimately be saved? Because I read his book, Love Wins. He says, on page 107, **"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."**

Bell then goes on to defend "this perspective" with passages of Scripture which, in my opinion, he mishandles. In context "this perspective" Bell speaks of, which he defends, even if unconvincingly, seems clearly to be his own. You can argue that he doesn't emphatically say that, he just presents and defends it. But I think it's fair to say that the position we vigorously defend is our position. In fact this position is what leads him to call his book Love Wins. For if any were damned, then in Bell's mind love (and therefore God) would have lost, not won.

As Bell states the position, there are no exceptions. "The love of God will melt EVERY hard heart" and the worst sinners will eventually give up resisting and turn to God. And be in Heaven, not Hell, for eternity. That includes Hitler, Mao, and sinners like you and me (part of the same stock as Hitler and Mao), and the utterly unrepentant who died in complete rebellion against Christ.

Bell couldn't make a clearer statement of universalism, that all will be saved and that there will be no such thing as the eternal Hell Jesus said some will experience. Whether it is the fire being quenched, the worm dying, or the people being removed from fire and worm, the bottom line is that Bell affirms there will be for human beings no such thing as "eternal punishment."



That is Christ's term in Matthew 25:46, using the same word "eternal" for punishment as he used in the same sentence for "eternal" life in Heaven—as is the duration of the one so will be the duration of the other. Rob Bell says no person's experience in Hell will be eternal. That's why I said in the previous blog that either Bell is wrong or Jesus was wrong.

I've read a lot of blogs and articles defending Rob Bell. Now, I can understand why some people don't believe the Bible, including its teaching on Hell. I grew up in a nonchristian home where we didn't believe it. But what I can't understand is how anyone can read Luke 16, Matthew 25 and Mark 9, and other passages in which Jesus and the inspired writers of Scripture affirm eternal punishment in Hell, and still claim 1) "there is no eternal Hell, all will eventually go to Heaven" and 2) "I trust Jesus and believe God's Word" and 3) "it is not heretical or inappropriate for Rob Bell, as an evangelical pastor, to teach what he does in Love Wins."

If Rob Bell is right, many biblical passages become meaningless. For instance why does Peter explain the Lord's delay of his return on this basis: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise...but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). What is the point of this statement if there will be endless opportunities for people to repent after Jesus returns, and if eventually all people will come to faith in Christ, none will ultimately perish, and all will inhabit Heaven, with no one in Hell?

Though I know a few influential Christian leaders who have become universalists, I haven't met Rob Bell and I have nothing personally against him. Part of what makes this worth addressing is that Rob Bell doesn't stand alone; there are thousands of other churches where believers are wrestling with these same issues, in which the gospel is at stake. And don't get me wrong, if I had a vote, given my natural preferences, I would vote for Bell's position, not Christ's. The only reason—and it's a compelling one—that I wouldn't vote against Hell is this—I know Christ is infinitely smarter and better than I am. And than Rob Bell is.

I don't think it's consistent for Bell to deny the biblical historical doctrine of Hell, as stated by Jesus, then wave off critics by saying, "But I believe in Hell." Any more than it is okay to affirm the central teaching of universalism, that all people will end up in Heaven and none in Hell, and then wave off critics again by saying, "I am not a universalist." And when he denies clear doctrines taught repeatedly in the Bible, it does not make everything okay to say, "I believe everything the Bible affirms."

Jesus said, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37). I often think about this and try to apply it to myself before anyone else. I don't want to have said anything untrue or dishonoring to Christ in this post or in anything I write or say. If I have, may God enlighten me and may I own up to it and correct it, for the glory of God and the good of His people.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Randy". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing 'R' and a trailing flourish.

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