

A Loving God Must Send The Lost To Hell

By: Keith Keyser

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly.” 2 Peter 2:1-6

Recycling Old Lies

The recent publication of Rob Bell’s *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* generated much commentary in the media, including interviews with the eminent journalists George Stephanopoulos and Martin Bashir.ⁱ While denying that he is a universalist, Bell makes contradictory statements that point in that heretical direction.ⁱⁱ Of course, “evangelical” critiques of the Bible’s teaching on eternal punishment in the lake of fire are nothing new. During the past thirty years various prominent scholars have vacillated on this controversial issue, while others have denied it outright.ⁱⁱⁱ Some prominent nineteenth-century evangelical scholars also had difficulties with this doctrine – F.W. Farrar and Andrew Jukes to name a few.^{iv} Human doubts and opinions notwithstanding, the clear teaching of the Bible affirms that the holy God of the Universe will consign unrepentant sinners to eternal punishment in the lake of fire (e.g. Mk. 9:38-50; Rom. 2:4-11; Rev. 20:10-15.) Peter warned that such false teachers would arise; thus one should not be surprised to read of heresies like this universalism and annihilationism reappearing in modern times.

As horrible as it may be to contemplate the future perdition of the lost, eternal punishment shows that God is righteous and loving. If the Almighty did not judge sin and evil, then He would be an accomplice to every wicked thought and act ever committed by men on planet earth. If there is no justice beyond this world, then the heinous deeds of men against their fellow creatures would be unresolved. It would mean that God does not care about the damage that sin does to people made in His image. Genocide, war, corruption, oppression, and perversions of every kind would go unpunished; therefore, the Lord would be saying that He is uncaring toward those who are hurt by these sins. Hitler, Stalin, Mao and many other tyrants would escape any reckoning for their lives of iniquity and dissipation. The cross of Christ pronounced judgment upon this wicked world, for only the redemptive work of Christ – which entailed His unparalleled suffering for sin in all of its foulness – could adequately provide a payment for such evil (John 3:18-21; Gal. 6:14; Eph. 1:7.)

Rather than being indifferent or unfeeling toward the plight of fallen humanity, God's wrath shows that He loves and cares for His creation. He is "...not willing that any should perish," and so has made a way through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ for everyone to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4-5.) In His longsuffering, He is waiting for human beings to repent – that is, to change their minds about God and themselves. They must see that God is holy and good; conversely, they must understand that they are sinners deserving of judgment and eternal wrath. Then, they must receive the Lord Jesus, confessing Him as their only Lord and Savior, Who died on the cross to bear their punishment and extend to them eternal life (John 1:12; John 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:24-25; Rom. 10:9.) He rose again to vindicate His claims as the Messiah and Son of God, and now lives to intercede in heaven for those who trust Him (Heb. 7:21-28.) But His longsuffering will not last forever. One day He will judge those who reject His light (2 Pet. 2:9; 2 Thes. 1:6-10.)

Righteous & Holy Love Wins

Because He loves mankind, God does not minimize sin or sweep it under the rug. He insists on judging all of it. That is why the Lord's sufferings on the cross were so awful: He was judged for sin in all of its loathsomeness. His work enables the great exchange: human sin for divine righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21.) If impenitent people spurn His loving offer of grace, life, and forgiveness through Christ, then the only destiny that remains for them is banishment to an eternal hell, where the enormity of rejecting an infinitely good and beautiful God will be adequately recompensed. If He did not do this, then all of His attributes – including His righteousness, holiness, goodness, and love – would be impugned. If He does not pour out everlasting wrath upon sin and evil then He would not be true to His own character, Word, and justice. By not punishing sin to the fullest extent possible, He would effectively say that evil does not matter, which is tantamount to saying that people do not matter. Humans matter to God – so much so, that His Son took on human flesh and died to save sinners. A God of love has already done all that He can do to save His creatures. If they go their own way, then they make a choice with eternal ramifications, resulting in their eternal separation from their Maker. In doing so, they separate themselves from the source of light, life, and goodness. All that remains outside of Him is darkness, the second death, torment, and defilement (Rev. 22:11.)

ⁱ For a good audio interview with Martin Bashir regarding his thoughts on his interview with Bell, see here: <http://www.faithtalk1500.com/LocalHosts/9/> ; Bashir's original interview may be viewed here: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2011/03/15/msnbc-martin-bashirs-interview-with-rob-bell/> Both of these links were accessed on 3/22/11.

ⁱⁱ For critical & informative reviews of Rob Bell's book, see the following links: <http://www.challies.com/book-reviews/love-wins-a-review-of-rob-bells-new-book> ; <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/03/14/rob-bell-love-wins-review/#more-3855> ; http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/03/16/we-have-seen-all-this-before-rob-bell-and-the-reemergence-of-liberal-theology/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+AlbertMohlersBlog+%28Albert+Mohler%27s+Blog%29 ; <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/event/love-wins-a-conversation-on-rob-bells-new-book/> All of these links were accessed on 3/22/11.

ⁱⁱⁱ John R.W. Stott would be in the vacillating camp (after writing an article advocating annihilationism, he later back-tracked & now apparently considers himself an agnostic on the subject of future punishment.) Meanwhile, the late theologian Clark Pinnock and writer Brian McLaren both deny a literal, eternal hell. For a survey of evangelical

views on Annihilationism, see J.I. Packer, “Evangelical Annihilationism In Review,” found here:

http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ji_packer/Packer.Annihilationismreview.html#11 Accessed on 3/22/11.

^{iv} The nineteenth century challenges to the biblical doctrine of hell were ably answered by F.W. Grant, (*Facts & Theories As To The Future State*, found here: http://biblecentre.org/topics/fwg_facts_and_theories.htm) & Sir Robert Anderson (*Human Destiny* , found here: <http://www.gospelhall.org/bible-teaching/sir-robert-anderson--human-destiny.html>); the links were accessed on 3/22/11.