A prominent US pastor claims that hell is not a place of everlasting torment in a controversial new book published just last week. In his book Love Wins , Rob Bell sets out the view that because the God of the Bible is a God of love, He could never send sinners to a lost eternity. Instead, Rob Bell believes that in the end, even in hell the love of God will win the hearts of the lost to Christ, and that He will in turn accept them into heaven. The book has already drawn much criticism from evangelical quarters, but a few liberal scholars have been rushing to defend the new book and Bell's questionable theology.

Martin Bashir, former UK television news presenter and MSNBC host, recently interviewed Rob Bell and asked him some very tough questions. One question which Martin asked the author on several occasions was whether a person's acceptance or rejection of Christ during their lifetime would determine their eternal destiny. Bell either could not or would not answer the question, which for most believers in Christ would be an automatic and unequivocal 'yes'. Instead he said that it was terribly important that people accept Christ as their Saviour, but went on to say that what happened to a person after death was
'entirely in the realm of speculation'
. He said that Christians have built whole doctrines and dogmas around what happens to people after they die, and that we need to be very careful not to build doctrines and dogmas around what is speculation. Of course this begs the question, if what we think happens to a person after they die is just speculation, how are Rob Bell's speculations any more valid than anyone else's speculations? Bell went on to defend his book by saying that it raised important questions, for example, regarding people that have never heard about Jesus, or the girl who has been abused by her pastor. He said he assumed that God's grace would resolve these difficulties, and presumably his theory that God's love will ultimately win over the lost forms part of that answer. Bell said that his reason for writing the book was because as a pastor, he must deal with a lot of people who have questions and hunches, and that he was giving these people the gift of knowing that
'within the Christian tradition'
, there are scholars and theologians that harbour the same questions and hunches. Bashir then accuses Bell of creating a message that is warm, kind and popular for contemporary culture, and that he was
'amending the Gospel, the Christian message, so that it's palatable to contemporary people who find the idea of hell and heaven very difficult to stomach'
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I have not read Rob Bell's book from cover to cover, but did have a quick flick through it

yesterday. It is not a very lengthy book. The print is quite large and it is written in a very casual, contemporary way, with concepts and opinions being formulated more through human reasoning rather than being backed up by any Scripture, at least from what I can tell. I think it would take me to read the whole book from cover to cover to find out exactly what Rob Bell is trying to say. As you can probably tell from the interview on YouTube, Rob is very hard to pin down on specifics. His own admission that the afterlife to him is more speculation than anything else means that I probably won't be any the wiser as to what he believes after reading his book. Likewise those defending Rob's theology also seem to resort to human reasoning and the opinions of prominent Christian leaders, rather than to the Word of God itself.

Of course it is true that there are certain things that the Scriptures do not elaborate on. But Scripture's silences do not give us licence to create doctrines around speculations. Rob Bell's theory is based on a faulty argument, that fallen creatures have the right to question the wisdom or justice of the Creator. Rob Bell assumes that because the idea of an eternal hell where the wicked are punished forever is unpalatable to sinners, that God's sense of justice must be skewed. Since God is a God of love, Bell will argue, He could never send a sinner to a lost eternity. In reality, we have no right, especially as sinful creatures, to question God's justice. If God were to send the entire human race to hell, He would still be just, and on several counts. Firstly, because He is the Creator and we are the creature. He created us, He owns us, He can do with us as He pleases (Ezekiel 18:4). Secondly, because God's holiness demands it, for the human race is in rebellion against its Creator. If God is to be righteous He must punish sin. As for the level of punishment, surely God who is the embodiment of holiness and is completely without sin (1st John 1:5), should alone decide that. If God's love of holiness demands complete perfection, surely His hatred for sin must demand complete condemnation of it (Psalm 45:7)? How can we, whose minds have been tainted by sin, say what is and what is not a just punishment for sin? We cannot.

It is said that the Lord Jesus Christ preached more times on hell in the New Testament that He did on heaven. If that is true, there should be no speculation about what happens after a person dies, or the purpose for hell. Prison used to be a place where you 'served your time' and 'paid your debt to society'. Today prison is marketed as a 'correctional facility' where people go to be 'reformed' and 'reintegrated' into society. The idea of criminals being 'punished' for their crimes is now frowned upon. Hell is not like that. Hell is not a place where you go to be reformed. The Bible is quite clear. It is described as a place of torment (Luke 16:24), a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12), a place of everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels (the lake of fire - Matthew 25:41), a place from which there is no return (Luke 16:26, Revelation 20:10). And there can be no return. The Bible makes it clear, salvation is not available to the unbelieving dead, even when they change their mind (Luke 16). "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement
", Hebrews 9:27. Again, "
the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins
", Matthew 9:6. Perhaps some may think that because the Bible states that Christ went and

preached unto the spirits in prison, that this could mean there is a second chance (1st Peter 3:18-19). This verse is often used by Mormons as justification of baptism for the dead. But they misinterpret the verse. The passage actually refers to how Christ preached through the Spirit of God unto the living in Noah's day, who were disobedient to the message of salvation and as a result are now disembodied 'spirits in prison'. Christ did not preach to the unbelieving dead in hell.

Rob Bell is right about one thing though, God is love (1st John 4:16) and God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). It is because of God's great love for us that He has not punished as much as our sins deserve (Ezra 9:13). And it is because of His love that He sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die for us upon the cross of Calvary (John 3:16). But it is God's justice that provided a way whereby we could be saved (Isaiah 53:11). It was that which laid the punishment for our sin upon the head of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in questioning the holiness and justice of God and the necessity of punishing the exceeding sinfulness of sin, Rob Bell ultimately minimizes the work of the cross and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. If God's willingness to judge sin is put in doubt, then the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice for sin upon the cross must also be questioned. Did Christ indeed bear the sins of the whole world (John 1:29), or were there certain sins that He was prepared to overlook? Did the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross put away sin completely (Hebrews 9:26), or does something still remain?

As you can see, this book rather than providing hope for the sinner, actually drives him further away from salvation by presenting a skewed view of the character of God and offering false assurance to those who have not yet believed. The need for preaching the gospel is reduced because 'Love Wins' in the end, and everyone will be saved regardless of whether they trusted Christ for salvation in this life or not. And the necessity of repentance is removed because people will think they will get a second chance to trust God after they die. Thus I believe this book is a damnable heresy (2nd Peter 2:1) which the Bible foretells will increase in number during the last days. This is why I run the website, so that people will hear the Gospel, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation before it is too late. "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ", Acts 17:31. Have your sins been forgiven? Have you trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved (Acts 16:31)

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