

HELL,  
ROB BELL,  
AND WHAT  
HAPPENS  
WHEN  
PEOPLE DIE

BOBBY CONWAY

**Praise for**  
***Hell, Rob Bell, and What Happens When People Die***

“Bell on hell doesn’t ring the bell. Rather, Bobby Conway shows the right way. Jesus is the only way, and He believed heaven was the narrow way. God is the loving way, but He can’t force a rebel to go another way. It is more loving to allow them to go their own way. So, God’s love necessitates the truth about hell and tolerates the error of Bell.”

—DR. NORMAN L. GEISLER, Distinguished Professor of Apologetics at Veritas Evangelical Seminary ([www.VeritasSeminary.com](http://www.VeritasSeminary.com)), Murrieta, CA, and author of over 70 books, including the best-selling work *If God, Why Evil?* (Bethany, 2011)

“In *Love Wins*, Rob Bell challenges the traditional Christian view of hell and who goes there. Unfortunately, Bell’s handling of the biblical texts is neither careful nor equitable. Readers who wish to be more informed will appreciate this critique by Bobby Conway, a trusted Christian apologist.”

—MICHAEL LICONA, author, speaker, and Apologetics Coordinator at the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention

“At a time when the truths of Scripture are ignored, revised, and openly denied by various leaders, the ministry of Bobby Conway is a breath of fresh air. With meticulous scholarship and excellence in presentation, he tackles tough subjects in ways that are understandable, relevant, and applicable to everyday life. Conway is doing the important work of standing up against the recent challenges to Christian orthodoxy (such as in his critique of Rob Bell’s denial of hell). With plain truth and ‘no spin,’ Conway is introducing a new generation to true Christianity.”

—ALEX MCFARLAND, author of *The 10 Most Common Objections to Christianity* and host of TV’s *Sound Rezn* and *Explore the Word* radio

“Hell has been a hot topic lately, and whether you believe in the reality of hell or not, this book deserves a fair hearing. There’s much pressure to abandon the reality of hell and embrace the idea that eventually everyone will be saved. But as Bobby Conway points out, this was not the view held by Jesus. We may not like hell, but can we dismiss something Jesus warned people about? Conway says ‘no,’ and I agree.”

—SEAN MCDOWELL, educator, speaker, and author of *Apologetics for a New Generation*

# **Hell, Rob Bell, and What Happens When People Die**

**Bobby Conway**

**Multnomah Books**

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Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.

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*To my wife, Heather,*

*and*

*our two children, Dawson and Haley,*

*who have sacrificed so much by offering their endless support and prayers  
so I can defend the Christian faith*

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## Chapter 1

# The Fuss About *Love Wins*

Arguably, Bell's tome is the first controversial Evangelical book of the Internet age....

Bell may enjoy the distinction of being the first person ever excommunicated via Twitter: one well-known writer tweeted "Farewell, Rob Bell."

—CHUCK COLSON

**I** wish I didn't have to write this book.

It's not that I hate writing or that there's nothing to share. It's the topic.

This is a book about hell!

I know, so much for the warm introduction. No pun intended. Hell is a jarring subject.

People joke about hell all the time. Perhaps laughing about something makes it seem less threatening?

Less real?

Less maddening?

Or even less despairing?

And when people get worked up, sometimes they vehemently tell others to go to hell.

That's sad.

I'm here to tell you that hell is no laughing matter. Hell is a real place.

A sobering place.

A horrific place.

A hellish place.

Hell is no joke.

✧ *Hell is no laughing matter.*

*Hell is a real place.*

It's a place I wish no one went. However, the Bible is clear: hell is an eternal lodging place, and it's no Hotel California. So why write this book? I'm compelled to, because hell is the fate of much of humanity. The most unloving thing I could do is hold out false hope or go mute about this awful, endless reality.

### MISSION TO EARTH

To help you get a sense of my urgency, imagine something for a minute. This may sound silly, but track with me anyway.

Imagine you live on a planet called ELPIS (in Greek this means "hope" or "expectation"). You have been tasked with evacuating your entire civilization to another planet because of a life-threatening emergency. Due to an increasing level of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, ELPIS has limited time before there's not enough oxygen to sustain life. So you are developing a plan to transfer your fellow residents, via spaceships, to a safer environment. You've chosen a planet called Earth as your destination and have already been in touch with the humans there. The earthlings are happy to accommodate the immigrants from ELPIS.

The people of Earth, like the residents of ELPIS, cannot exist without air. And experts on both planets have stressed to you that there is no air anywhere in space. So you have naturally acquired a large supply of pressurized air tanks for use in the passage to Earth. Your preparations seem to be proceeding smoothly, and you think you're just about able to breathe a sigh of relief.

But then a new emergency arises. Just days before your planetwide launch to remove your fellow citizens from ELPIS, a new book comes out entitled *Relax, There's Room to Breathe: Deconstructing the Myth of an Airless Outer Space*. The book skyrockets to the top of the planet's bestsellers lists. By the thousands, ELPIS residents toss away their air tanks as they prepare to leave for their new environment.

Lives are on the line.

The deception is costly.

You must respond.

What will you do?

Would it not be unthinkable to say nothing?

\*\*\*

Let's wake up from our dream. This is not ELPIS. This is worse.

We face a life-threatening situation.

We're not running out of oxygen on Earth. In fact, the crisis is even more serious.

That's why I'm writing this book.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF *LOVE WINS***

Ever since Jesus walked among us, orthodox Christians have understood eternity in terms of heaven and hell. For two thousand years, the church has tried to prepare people for the afterlife by stressing that faith in Jesus Christ is a necessary prerequisite to spending eternity in heaven with Him. At the same time, believers have warned people that to die having rejected Jesus Christ will result in a hell-bound eternity.

In short, from the beginning of the church, Christians have declared, "Right now counts forever!"<sup>1</sup>

Then, in early 2011, the Internet blogs began buzzing about a forthcoming book by Rob Bell with the title *Love Wins*. Bell is the forty-year-old pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church, a megachurch located near Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is also a popular author with a reputation for approaching topics in creative ways. Prior to the publication of *Love Wins*, the story online was that Bell was approaching the topic of hell in a fresh, alternative fashion. The evangelical world braced itself.

*Love Wins* reached bookstores on March 15, claiming to be about "heaven, hell, and the fate of every person who ever lived." The Internet buzz became a blast of heated debate and publicity, pushing the new release to the top of bestseller lists. In fact, Bell's book challenged the traditional, orthodox Christian view of what happens when people die. Soon Bell was ubiquitous in the media, appearing on *Fox & Friends*, the *Today* show, and other news outlets. *Time* magazine released its Easter week issue with a cover story on Bell's controversial book, asking the question "What If There's No Hell?"

✧ *Bell's book challenged the traditional, orthodox Christian view of what happens when people die.*



Why so much buzz? Why all the controversy?

Because *Love Wins* holds out a big promise—postmortem salvation, the idea that everyone has another opportunity after death to get right with God. Bell presents a salvation so wide and so deep that *eventually* all residents of hell would potentially taste the hope of heaven. In other words, love really can win for all, even after death.

Many people who probably had not thought much about hell for a long time all of a sudden could not avoid the topic. Could Bell's assertions be true? Could Christians now consider throwing away the tried-and-true rescue plan and trust Bell's fresh insights?

### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

To his credit, Bell has taken on a big, metaphysical question that makes many Christian leaders squirm: What happens when you die? In particular, where do people end up when they die without faith in Christ as the one way to God?

There are quite a few ideas floating around on this topic. Are you reincarnated as a maggot, wasp, feline, or Homo sapien, as many Buddhists and Hindus think? Will you, like a good Muslim, keep your fingers crossed, hoping your good deeds outweigh your bad when you stand before Allah? Is your life, as an atheist contends, like a candle that is snuffed out once you die? Or, if you were smart about this, would you take the middle path of agnosticism, as Vincent Bugliosi recommends in his recent book *Divinity of Doubt*? Can anyone even know?

Given these other alternatives, what are we to make of the Christian doctrines of heaven and hell? I think a lot of people are thinking along these lines:

*Heaven sounds good to me. That is, as long as it's not a boring existence filled with harps, clouds, and halos, as portrayed in cartoons.*

*But hell? Will I go there simply for not believing the right information about Jesus? Will God fry me forever for sins that I commit with a sinful nature I inherited? Is there hope of salvation after I die? Or, as Bell suggests, does the Bible offer the possibility of being saved even after death?*

Important questions demanding truthful answers.

### PONDERING FATE

A man was walking through a cemetery when he came across a tombstone with this inscription:

Pause, stranger.  
As you are now,  
So once was I,  
And as I am now  
You soon shall be.  
So prepare for death  
And come follow me.

Startled, the man stopped and thought for a moment. Finally he stated aloud to the stone, "I'm not content to follow you until I first know where you went!"

Wise choice. In a world where many people cross their fingers and hope for the best, we cannot be so aimless when it comes to our fate. There must be thought-out intentionality

that forces us to come to grips with our destiny. This is an urgent matter, not because we are running out of oxygen, but because we are running out of time.

We need answers. Now.

This book is an attempt to clarify what happens when each of us dies. Please understand, I am not attacking Rob Bell but rather defending orthodox Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

I certainly have nothing against Bell on a personal level. We've not met, but my hunch is that I would like him as a person. Obviously, he is creative, gifted, and compassionate.

I also think he makes some valid points in *Love Wins*. For instance, he maintains that Christianity isn't about "getting in" or just "getting *there*."<sup>3</sup> He is right. Too often we focus on our "entrance theology" (salvation) or our "exit theology" (heaven), but Christianity includes more than just having our sins forgiven so we can get to the "other side." Christians also ought to have a "now theology," because what we do in this life has an impact on the next.

✧ *Christianity includes more than just having our sins forgiven so we can get to the "other side."*

I do think, however, that *Love Wins* is fatally flawed, and I don't want people to be misguided by its seemingly hopeful, yet hopeless, message. This is serious business. It has ramifications far beyond a book telling citizens of ELPIS that there is air in space. Bell's book literally is an eternal life-and-death matter.

*Love Wins* presents a threat that must not be overlooked, not because Bell is a skilled theologian, but rather because of his massive influence as a pastor, author, and personality.

Andy Crouch, author of *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, was quoted in the *New York Times* as stating, "Rob Bell is a central figure for his generation and for the way that evangelicals are likely to do church in the next twenty years."<sup>4</sup>

Even now closet Universalists are finding courage to stand shoulder to shoulder with Bell. In fact, a Barna poll found that 25 percent of born-again Christians maintain that all people will eventually be accepted by God.<sup>5</sup>

Like the tombstone epitaph, *Love Wins* asks us to pause as we ponder Bell's definition for our destiny. Now, that's a very personal matter. Are we content to trust Bell's view of the afterlife for our future? Do we agree with his perspective that, given enough time, the heat of God's love will melt all cold hearts, because in the end "love wins"?<sup>6</sup> That sounds good, but what if Bell is wrong? What if he has given the world—including us—false hope? What if he has misunderstood or mishandled God's Word? Is it really possible that all those devoted followers of Christ over the centuries have gotten hell wrong?

I want to be as sure as possible that I have the right answers—and that you have them too.

✧ *What if Bell is wrong?*

*Love Wins* may be a bestseller, but it presents a false hope. *Love Wins* ultimately loses because it gives the wrong answers.

That is why I am compelled to write this book.

ADDITIONAL VIDEO INFORMATION ONLINE

Promotional video for *Love Wins*  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODUvw2McL8g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODUvw2McL8g)

Rob Bell on *Good Morning America*  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufENW7tGAz0&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufENW7tGAz0&feature=related)

Rob Bell on MSNBC's *Morning Joe*  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOW6rDPzTbc&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOW6rDPzTbc&feature=related)

Rob Bell discusses Christian Universalism on Premier Christian Radio  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2m49jau2gOM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2m49jau2gOM)

“Response to Rob Bell—Does Love Win?”  
[www.youtube.com/oneminuteapologist#p/u/17/jKTpt6JrSKg](http://www.youtube.com/oneminuteapologist#p/u/17/jKTpt6JrSKg)



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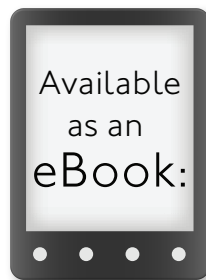
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