

## CREDO 12: The Kingdom of God

In our 3<sup>rd</sup> CREDO study we saw how God made the heavens and the earth in perfection, and in week 4 we studied how God made us male and female in his image and likeness. Our 5<sup>th</sup> CREDO study with the subject of Sin and the Fall of man. As we look around us it is painfully obvious to everyone that something has gone terribly wrong. Sin has left all of God's creation broken — Sin has stained and marred every person and everything. In weeks 7-9 we then studied how God came in flesh (Incarnation) into history — fully God and fully man. He lived a sinless life and then by way of His death on the cross for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead, He conquered our enemies of sin and death — and by way of that victory usher in His Kingdom. This week — as the final study in the CREDO series, we come to the doctrine of the Kingdom of God!

There's a bunch of stuff in tonight's study that won't sit well with a lot of people. But my responsibility is to **love you** by telling you the truth.

**For starters** — Man actually **wants**, and actually **believes**, that he can have heaven on earth **without God**. Man is convinced that given enough time, money and education, he can transforming this broken world into a perfect utopian existence. The world that every one longs for in the deepest part of their being is never going to be established by mankind. History has proven that at every turn man is incapable of governing himself. Our only hope for such a world must be anchored in the fact that God is willing and able to change the world we live in and usher in that world. The world that mankind so deeply longs for; a world marked by peace and love; justice and mercy; kindness and compassion — is a world ruled by God. **THE HOPE** of the Christian is the Kingdom of God.

We're going to dive into this final CREDO study by examining a number of false about what happens when we die; and then we're going to sprint through the Book of Revelation to see what God has to say about how the story of planet earth is going to end.

### I. FALSE VIEWS OF THE AFTER LIFE

**Universalism:** One false view is universalism; that is, regardless of what you believe about Jesus or how you live in this life; everyone is going to be saved.

To see how that actually looks — in your mind try to create a graph that plots everyone who has ever lived in regards to morality. On one end of the graph: The utterly amoral and godless. On the extreme opposite end of the graph: The most Christ-like, loving and godly.

Universalism says that no matter where you fall in the graph — everybody gets to go to Heaven.

On one end of the graph there are murderous tyrants like Antiochus Epiphanes, Caesar Nero, Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, and sociopaths like Charles Manson and Jeffrey Dahmer. On the other end of the graph are guys Joseph and Daniel in the Old Testament; Peter, James, John; Stephen (the guy who was so much like Jesus that when he was being murdered for his faith in Jesus said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them”) and the apostle Paul.

Universalism says that EVERYONE is going to go to heaven. Nobody’s going to Hell. Nobody’s going to pay the penalty for the wages of their sin. Nobody’s going to suffer eternal torment in hell. Instead, God is going to give eternal life and Heaven to everyone in the end. This is not a new view, but it has been perpetuated by guys like Rob Bell and others like him who essentially say that the church has allowed the story of the love of Jesus be perverted by other stories. Bell et al say that the “story” of an eternal hell is not a good story. Bell suggests that a “better story” would involve the possibility of a sinner coming to faith in Christ after death.... or hell being eventually emptied of all its inhabitants.

The problem with universalism is that the Bible **never even hints** at the **possibility** of a sinner’s salvation after death. In absolute contradiction to universalism the Bible teaches that **“it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).**

**Annihilationism:** This position teaches that no one will spend forever in

hell. It teaches that in the end those who did not receive salvation through faith in Jesus will simply cease to exist at some point following death. But [Daniel 12:2](#) (which, by the way, is quoted by Jesus in the New Testament) refutes both universalism and annihilationism saying, *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”* In other words — Christians will be in heaven just as long as non-Christians will be in hell — and that would be forever. The Bible teaches that **everyone** lives forever. The Question is **where** will they live forever. Will they live forever with God as redeemed friend and adopted children; or forever in hell as God’s foe. We need to bear in mind the fact that Jesus speaks about hell more than anyone else in the Bible. He constantly set Himself forth as the truth-teller in a world of lies. Jesus made it absolutely clear that not everyone will be saved. He spoke of the eternal life offered through faith in Him as a narrow path on which few travel and narrow gate through which few pass.

To not believe in Hell is the utter negation of the teaching of Jesus and the Cross of Jesus. To not believe in Hell mocks the death of the Son of God.

**Reincarnation / Purgatory:** Both teach that after death there’s a second chance. Both teach that after you die you will exist in some other place (Purgatory) or in some other form (reincarnation) where you pay off your moral debt via by suffering until you can go to heaven. Again, [Hebrews 9:27](#) negates — *“It is appointed once for us to die and then judgment”* You die once and then you’re judged. No opportunity to get right with God after you die.

**Soul Sleep:** Seventh Day Adventists hold this position. This position teaches that following death our body **and** soul both lie dormant in the grave until the resurrection of the dead. Both [2 Corinthians](#) and [Philippians](#) refute this.

*[2 Corinthians 5:6-8](#) So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup>for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup>Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>8</sup>Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

*Philippians 1:21-23 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup>I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.*

**Non-Physical Eternal Existence:** Probably the most popular false view of the afterlife is essentially the cartoon version of Heaven. For some reason, in this version of heaven everyone looks like a baby and they're wearing a diaper. They have little wings and they're perched on a cloud that looks like a giant cotton ball and they are forever play a harp. Forever chubby in diapers makes heaven a bit Hellish to me! That seems ridiculous, but that wrong view of heaven is why some people opt for the version of hell that is like a giant party where their favorite rock band is playing, there's an endless supply of beer and all the girls are bikini models —and the only bummer is that there's no air conditioner.

**QUOTE: Atheist, Isaac Asimov** — *“Whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be worse.”*

(For the Biblical description of the suffering in Hell see FOR FURTHER STUDY at the end of the notes)

The Scriptures teach us man is made up of a material body and an immaterial soul. Upon the death of the Christian the body and soul are separated. Our body rests in the grave — our soul goes to be with Jesus.

*2 Corinthians 5:8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

<sup>1</sup> **Corinthians 15** teaches us that there is coming a day for the Christian when they will experience bodily resurrection like that of Jesus in which their body and soul will be rejoined. Upon the death of non-Christians their body rests in the grave while their soul goes to a place called Hades (not to be confused with Hell/Gehenna/Lake of Fire). Hades is something like a holding tank in jail where prisoners await trial and sentencing. There they will experience conscious torment ([Luke 16:23](#)) until their body and soul are

rejoined for final sentencing into the eternal torment in the Lake of Fire ([Revelation 20:13-14](#)).

Again, Jesus speaks of the fact that all people will rise for a physical eternal life.

*[John 5:25-29](#) “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup>For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup>And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup>Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup>and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*

Even as the Christian will have a body that will never grow old, never get sick, never die and is perfectly suited for life in a new heaven and new earth; the non-Christian will have a body that will never grow old and never die so that they can endure an eternity of judgment.

## **II. The King of the Kingdom**

The dictionary defines a kingdom as: a realm associated with or regarded as being under the control of a particular person. SO if we are going to study the Kingdom of God we have to establish the identity and the nature of its king. The King of the Kingdom is Jesus.

We’re going to actually walk through (in very short form) the entire Book of Revelation to understand the identity and nature of Jesus. The Book of Revelation moves between two scenes. It moves back and forth from the scene in heaven to the scene on earth. We don’t want to make the mistake of having our sights solely on the scene upon the earth to the exclusion of the scene in heaven. The Book of Revelation is not merely about the Great Tribulation, it is about Jesus; hence the title, “The Unveiling of Jesus Christ.” Neither do we want to make the mistake of looking at the scene in heaven to the exclusion of the events taking place on the earth. Jesus spent a tremendous amount of time (in the Olivet Discourse [Matthew 24-25](#) and

Luke 21) predicting the state of affairs and events on the earth that would precede His Second Coming. He said that we should be watching so that we would understand the nearness of His return.

*Luke 21:28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

Whether we are looking at the scene in heaven or the events transpiring on the earth we need to understand that the entire book is *theocentric*. The throne is the centerpiece of the book. It appears 45 times in the Book of Revelation. It appears in 17 of the 22 chapters. Who is on the throne? Jesus! What proceeds **from** the throne? — Truth and judgment. What proceeds **to** the throne? — All worship, praise, glory and adoration. Jesus is revealed in the book as *The King of Kings*. This is so huge — the One on the throne throughout the Book of Revelation allowed sinful man to mockingly call Him “king” and put a crown of thorns on His head before He was crucified with a placard above His head that read “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. The Book of Revelation closes the Bible with Jesus as King ruling over all creation and receiving all glory. So Jesus is the KING of the KINGDOM.

### III. Defining the Kingdom of God

The theologically liberal view of the Kingdom of God reduces the **nature** of the kingdom of God **solely** to that of good works done to help the poor and needy. Some evangelicals wrongly diminish the **scope** of the Kingdom of God by confusing it with the Church. In our study on the Doctrine of the Church we learned that there is a difference between the Church and the Kingdom of God.

**QUOTE: Lloyd-Jones, D. M.** (1998); *The Church and the Last Things* (4). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books — Surely it is this: the Church is an *expression of the kingdom but is not to be equated with it. The kingdom of God is wider and bigger than the Church*

**QUOTE: George Eldon Ladd** — “The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself.” (George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology*

*of the New Testament*, Eerdmans; Revised Edition, 1993, p. 109.)

**Here's the Point** — The kingdom is manifested now in and through the Church (the Kingdom is where Jesus reigns). Yet it is bigger than that. The Kingdom is yet to be seen in its fullness.

The amillennialists essentially make the church and the Kingdom one and the same and claim that the Kingdom is here in its fullness at this moment.

[Amillennialist - The "a" millennial (literally meaning "no" millennium) position is the eschatological view of historic Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Christianity. Reformed eschatology argues for a real, present, though "invisible" non-spatial millennium. Amillennialists insist that the promises made to national Israel, David and Abraham, in the OT are fulfilled by Christ and the Church during this age, which is the millennium, that is the entire period of time between the two advents of our Lord. The "thousand years" are therefore symbolic of the entire inter-advental age. Satan is bound by Christ's victory over him and the establishment of the kingdom of God via the preaching of the gospel, and Satan is no longer free to deceive the nations, through the presence of Christ is reigning in heaven during this period with the martyrs who come out of the great tribulation. At the end of the millennial age, Christ returns in judgment of all men. The general resurrection occurs, final judgement takes place for all men and women, and a new Heaven and Earth are established.]

Theologians call this an **over realized eschatology**

Others see the Kingdom as **exclusively future** — Jesus will establish when he returns. Theologians call this is an **under realized eschatology** which disconnects kingdom and church completely.

There are problems that flow from failing to understand the tension of the kingdom being already present in the church but not yet fully unveiled — and taking either extreme position.

This world still has sin, sinners, the devil and demons. Jesus is not yet ruling on the earth with a rod of iron ([Psalm 2:9](#); [Revelation 2:26](#); [12:5](#); [19:15](#)). The error of **over realized eschatology** is that it thinks the Church can fix all of the world's problems and usher in a perfect world. The opposite error of **under realized eschatology** is that we can't make a difference in the world as the Church sent on mission by Jesus, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live and proclaim the Gospel; to be ambassadors of His Kingdom; to be instruments for righteousness in His hands (Romans 6:13).

We need to see that the Church is the right now expression of the Kingdom of God; our lives showing what it looks like to be governed by God in a world that is not governed by God; our lives shaped by the values of His Kingdom as opposed to the values of fallen culture. But that Kingdom will not be fully unveiled until the return of Jesus. By the commissioning of Jesus we can labor in the extending of His Kingdom in the lives of men and women and in the world as we live for His glory, proclaim the message of the Gospel for His glory to the saving of souls, and extending the love and mercy of Jesus by caring for those who are broken and needy — caring for righteousness and justice.

**QUOTE:** Tyndale Bible Dictionary — The Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven as it is sometimes referred to in Scripture) is

*The sovereign rule of God, initiated by Christ's earthly ministry and consummated when [the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ \(Revelation 11:15\)](#).*

#### **IV. The King Receiving Worship**

So let's turn to the Book of Revelation and there we are going to see that the evidence of the Kingdom of God is the worship of Jesus. And from that we need to see that where **God's kingdom** truly breaks into the cultures of the earth, it is **visibly expressed** in the worship of Jesus.

In the Heavenly scenes of Revelation we see Jesus worshiped.

**Revelation 4:10-11** <sup>0</sup>the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”



He's is worshipped as the eternal, sovereign, creator. That sends us all the way back to the first of our CREDO studies on Trinity and Creation.

We don't want to miss this — In our first glimpse of the worship of Jesus we see spiritual leaders leading by worshiping Jesus. That means that anyone involved in leadership in the church should see that their first order of business in heaven is going to be that of coming before Jesus and taking the crown that you received from Jesus from your head and gladly laying it at the feet of Jesus and saying, *“Jesus, this belongs to you because everything that I ever accomplished was done was by your grace and for your glory.”*

**HERE'S THE POINT** — Where Jesus rules there will be humility, gratitude, passion, joy — worship of Jesus. And it commences with the spiritual leaders, but it doesn't end there.

### **Revelation 4:11-14 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne**

There's the throne again. Seated on the throne is the King, Jesus Christ.

### **and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,**

The chorus around the throne of Jesus is growing. By the time the book has culminated, there will be billions of people and angels and creatures around the throne.

### **<sup>12</sup>saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,**

Jesus is worshipped as the One who died in our place for our sins. We don't want to miss how throughout this amazing book of the Bible the worship traces many of the major doctrines that we've studied throughout this series. He is worshipped as Creator. He is worshipped as savior, as risen redeemer. All of the themes that we've been studying culminate around the throne of Jesus.

**to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”<sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”**

This is so amazing! *Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea* comes forward like something out of the Chronicles of Narnia — all worshipping Jesus!

**<sup>14</sup>And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.**

The worship continues to escalate. The sign of the kingdom is the worship of the king.

**Revelation 7:11-12<sup>11</sup> And all the angels were standing around the throne**

Angels are immaterial beings created by God to worship and serve him and to help us.

*Hebrews 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*

I don't know how many angels there are, but there's a lot.

**and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,**

They were standing and then they fell on their faces before the Lord! That's worship!

**<sup>12</sup>saying, “Amen!”**

*Amen* means “Even so.” It means “Lord, I agree with You.” It means *God, I want what You want.*” It means “What you say, that’s what I believe.”

**Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”**

Worship of Jesus that is Passionate.

**Revelation 15:2-4 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire**

The elemental structure of heaven is so magnificent. Those who are into the arts should walk around in the Book of Revelation because it is so multi-sensory in it’s colors, and the sounds around Jesus. The Kingdom of God is beautiful, creative, musical and artistic.

**— and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.**

These are Christians who died for their faith in Jesus during the Great Tribulation. Jesus is apparently handing out instruments. This is so amazing — One day, because of the Cross of Jesus, we will stand in the presence of God, with glorified bodies, to sing and play.

**<sup>3</sup>And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,**

It is a song of redemption! Again — In Heaven, there will be creativity and music for the purpose of worshipping the King. One of things that I love about Metro is that Danny writes new songs. In the Old Testament and New Testaments, we read “*Sing a new song unto the Lord.*” We see that in Heaven that new songs are being written and old songs are being rewritten forever. If you’ve ever been to a great concert try to imagine that to the nth degree!

saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!

<sup>4</sup> Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

The procession of worship continues. He is being worshipped for His works. Note especially *just and true are your ways* as that is so crucial to what is out in front of us.

**Revelation 19:1-5** <sup>1</sup>After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

Like a crescendo Billions upon billions from the nations of the earth crying out,

**“Hallelujah!**

Which means, *Praise the God. Praise God* for who he is. Praise God for what he does.

**Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,**

*Salvation and glory and power belong to* the TRINITARIAN God of the Bible. Not to Allah. Not to the gods of Mormonism or the gods of Hinduism or to any other god.

<sup>2</sup> for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” <sup>3</sup>Once more they cried out, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and

ever.” <sup>4</sup>And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne,

There’s the throne. On it is the king. Around it is the worship

saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” <sup>5</sup>And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.”

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING this is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

It is amazing to see how the Book of Genesis finds its completion in the Book of Revelation.

In the beginning, God created. In the end, God will have a new creation.

In the beginning, God made a garden. In the end, God will have a new Garden in the New Jerusalem.

In the beginning, God had a tree of life and we were banished from it in sin. In the end, God will bring the tree of life back.

In the beginning, we ate a meal without God. We ate it with Satan. In the end we eat a meal with Jesus.

So the END is essentially a NEW BEGINNING. It is not so much a beginning, middle end as it is a beginning — middle — beginning!

In the MIDDLE — we have the plan of redemption. We sinned and that sin has **infected** and **affected** everyone and everything. But God, through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has conquered Satan, sin in death. Because of that — in the end everything will be restored to God’s original intentions and taken even further.

In the beginning, there was a serpent and in the end, he will be imprisoned forever.

And in the beginning, after sin entered the world, there was a curse. And in the end, that curse was lifted.

So in the Book of Revelation — by the grace of God — we go back to the beginning. We were made to worship God. But rather than worship and live for creator God, we chose to live for ourselves. But in the end, by the grace of God everything is all about Jesus. We just dealt with that in our study on the Doctrine of Worship. God being our highest priority, our greatest treasure, our deepest longing, our most profound and passionate joy. THAT is the Kingdom. We see that in Revelation 19:6.

**Revelation 19:6-9 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. <sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; <sup>8</sup> it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. <sup>9</sup>And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”**

At the apex of history Jesus is on the throne, the centerpiece and focal point of all creation — the object of adoration and worship! At that moment Jesus steps off his throne and we eat a meal with him. It's called the wedding supper of the Lamb. The church is collectively pictured as a bride and Jesus is presented as a loving groom who has passionately pursued his bride. So here we see the Kingdom pictured as a wedding day — and the church (including you and me), washed from their sins with His blood, she wears white. Because of Jesus you and I are going to sit at the table of Jesus.

**DON'T MISS THIS** — The kingdom is inaugurated with the King throwing a party to feed his friends. Here's a few things that are absolutely mindblowing for us to think about in connection with this.

*Luke 12:37 Blessed are those servants whom the **master** finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, **he** will dress himself for service and have **them** recline at table, and **he** will come and **serve them**.*

THAT is absolutely mind blowing!! And I had NEVER thought about this until this morning: Is THIS “the JOY” that the Holy Spirit was talking about in the book of Hebrews?

*Hebrews 12:2 (NIV) For **the joy** set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame....*

*Zephaniah 3:16-17 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak.<sup>17</sup> The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*

Many of the Old Testament prophecies had both near and far fulfillments in mind. I’m wondering if the **that day** of Zephaniah looks beyond to **this** moment of Revelation 19 when after we’ve worshiped and praised and celebrated Jesus with the multitudes that Jesus sets the table — and we are seated as his friends. And there are brothers and sisters from **all of history** and **all of the nations** of the earth. I wonder if it’s at **that moment** that Jesus will **rejoice over us** and stand and **sing over us!**

Back to the intro — If your picture of Heaven is forever chubby in diapers on a giant ball of cotton — you’ve missed it!

## **V. The King Crushing Other Kingdoms**

Many Christians have a very small view of the King of the Kingdom. Many view Jesus only as a man from Nazareth in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. We NEVER want to diminish His humility. We spent an entire evening looking in awe at the infinite condescension of God in the Doctrine of the Incarnation. He got off His throne, laid aside the expression of His glory, came into human history and to the end that He could die in our place, for our sins, rise from

the grave and return to heaven. But we must never forget that Jesus is at this moment seated on a throne. At this moment Jesus is not some humble, marginalized, 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew from Galilee. If we could see Jesus today we would see Him as Isaiah saw Him in Isaiah 6.

*Isaiah 6:1-3 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"*

In [John 12](#) we are told that that Isaiah saw Jesus and spoke of His glory. It is crucial to our faith, crucial to our worship, crucial to our evangelism that that we understand Jesus as God, as King, as Lord, as enthroned, as ruling and reigning, worthy of our adoration, our devotion and worship. If we don't think of Him in that way we've missed everything about Jesus.

### **Revelation 19:11-16 Then I saw heaven opened,**

WHAT is that moment going to be like? The curtain is pulled back and there's Jesus!

**and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.**

In His first coming Jesus took a beating. Not because He was the whimpy, nerdy kid who had his lunch money taken. He was willing *wounded for transgressions and crushed for our iniquities*.

**QUOTE:** *"Why do bad things happen to good people? That only happened once, and He volunteered"*

But know this — Jesus will never take a beating again.



**<sup>12</sup>His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. <sup>13</sup>He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood,**

This is for everyone who thinks — Jesus is no big deal. Even if there really is a Jesus I'm not afraid of Him. If you think like that I want you to know that THIS is the Jesus you are going to stand before. Better have a change of undies ready.

**and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.**

Scripture is the written of Word of God. Jesus is the incarnate Word of God (John 1).

**<sup>14</sup>And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.**

I don't know if you've ever thought of this — but when guys know they're going to get dirty — they don't dress in white. If you ever show up for a fight and the guy your going to fight is wearing white, and all his mates are wearing white — it's because they're pretty certain about how things are going to turn out.

**<sup>15</sup>From his mouth comes a sharp sword**

One guy said that this is the “life verse” for a 4 or 5 year old boy. He said that if you read that verse a 5 year old boy is going to want to get saved on the spot.

**<sup>15</sup>From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations,**

Some people read this and say — I can't love this Jesus. This is violent and brutal. Jesus is dealing with rapists, sadists, murderers, liars, and idolaters — those who have abused the marginalized, the helpless and the poor.

There is coming a day when Jesus is going to say, ENOUGH! — and He is going to put an end to it. This is so important — God is measuring human history not by a calendar but by a moral time clock. There is coming a day when God will say — *Time is up!* I'm so glad that the King of the Kingdom is going to put an end to this mess and usher in a new kingdom.

**and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup>On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.**

I don't know what you're thinking — but I'm thinking you might want to figure out what team you're on.

**<sup>17</sup>Then I saw an angel standing in the sun,**

There's an amazing sight to see — not only standing in the sun — but big enough to be seen.

**and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, <sup>18</sup>to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great."**

THAT would be the definition of contrast — God's people feast **at** the wedding supper of the Lamb. God's enemies are feasted **on** by the birds of the air.

**<sup>19</sup>And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.**

Jesus is not a pacifist!

Some people are against Jesus. Some nations are against Jesus. Some kings are against Jesus. False religions are against Jesus. And in the end — when Jesus shows up — they all want to fight Jesus. They are going to lose and it's going to be their fault because they have declared war on him

**<sup>20</sup>And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. <sup>21</sup>And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.**

This is Jesus dealing with other kingdoms by crushing them. This is not the Church crushing other kingdoms or religions (like Muslims during the Caliphate or the Roman Catholic Church during the inquisition). As Christians we are to live like Jesus did in his first coming.

When Jesus comes to this planet a second time he will not come in humility. He will come as King of kings and he will put to an end all other kings and kingdoms who are opposed to him. Some say that Jesus Jesus shouldn't do that. They think He should bring peace." In His first coming He came to make peace between those in rebellion against Him. He did that by being CRUSHED (wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities — the chastisement for our peace was laid upon Him). He brings in His forever Kingdom of peace by crushing those who refused the peace He died to make.

## **VI. The Kingdom of Hell**

Many people wrongly believe that Satan rules over Hell and Jesus rules over Heaven. WRONG! Jesus is King over all — and that includes Hell. Hell is part of God's dominion. We will see this in **Revelation 20**.

FIRST — we need to spend a few moments on the subject of hell.

**QUOTE: Wayne Grudem** — *“Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked.”*

*“Because the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment is so foreign to the thought patterns of our culture, and, on a deeper level, to our instinctive and God-given sense of love and desire for redemption for every human being created in God’s image, this doctrine is emotionally one of the most difficult doctrines for Christians to affirm today. It also tends to be one of the first doctrines given up to people who are moving away from a commitment to the Bible as absolutely truthful in all that it affirms. (Wayne Grudem, [Systematic Theology](#) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1148.)*

We must come to grips with the fact that Jesus said more about hell than Daniel, Isaiah, Paul, John, Peter put together. Here are some of the things Jesus had to say about hell —

Jesus speaks of ["eternal fire and punishment"](#) as the final abode of the angels and human beings who have rejected God ([Matthew 25:41,46](#))

Jesus spoke of being in danger of the ["fire of hell"](#) ([Matthew 5:22; 18:8-9](#))

The word Jesus uses for ['hell'](#) is Gehenna, a valley on the south and the west of Jerusalem which was infamous for human sacrifice, in particular burning babies alive in the worship of pagan god Molech. Eventually Gehenna became the city dump. Along with the piles of garbage that were burned there every day would be human feces and the corpses of those who had no family to bury them.

In Mark 9:43 Jesus speaks of a person going to "hell [gehenna], where 'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' " Jesus is referring to the maggots that live in the corpses on the garbage heap. When all the flesh is consumed, the maggots die. Jesus is saying, however, that the decomposition of hell never ends, and that is why 'their worm does not die.'

Those living above the valley could look out and see the smoldering flames. And when the winds would shift they would smell the stench of Gehenna.

Jesus says that Hell is like Gehenna. There is a forever burning — a stench is that is forever. That's hell — the place for all people who do not love and serve God and are not repentant of sin. Clearly, for Jesus hell was a real place

**QUOTE: Timothy Keller** — *If Jesus, the Lord of Love and Author of Grace spoke about hell more often, and in a more vivid, blood-curdling manner than anyone else, it must be a crucial truth.*

The man or woman who simply chooses to say that God could never and would never commit someone to eternal torment in Hell has to realize that they are saying to Jesus, the pre-eminent teacher of love and grace in history — "I am less barbaric than you, Jesus--I am more compassionate and wiser than you."

**QUOTE: Timothy Keller** — *Indeed, upon reflection, it is because of the doctrine of judgment and hell that Jesus' proclamations of grace and love are so astounding.*

## **Revelation 20:7-15 And when the thousand years are ended,**

I skipped the millennial kingdom — the 1,000 year reign of Jesus upon the earth.

**Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup>and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.**

FIRST — Satan never repents. Even after being crushed. Even after being imprisoned for 1,000 years, he never repents.

SECOND — Even after the reign of Jesus for 1,000 years that is filled with perfect peace — perfect unity — perfect love and perfect righteousness — as soon as Satan and demons and sinners are given the opportunity — they declare war on Jesus again.

Again — there are those who say — “*Jesus shouldn’t judge people*” and “*Jesus shouldn’t send anyone to hell.*” **LISTEN** — These are not innocent victims. Jesus lets Satan loose on planet earth to PROVE that Satan is beyond reforming and that unrepentant man is beyond reforming. And thus Jesus is not unjust in sending Satan and all who follow him into the lake of Fire.

**<sup>9</sup>And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, <sup>10</sup>and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**

Those who don’t love Jesus will be in Hell forever, as those who do love Jesus will be in Heaven forever.

**<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.**

There is a resurrection that has preceded this resurrection

***Revelation 20:5-6** The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup>Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup>And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup>Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup>And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Hell is going to be terrible beyond anything we can imagine. Some of you might be thinking — “I can't believe I'm hearing this. This 2020! This is the age of tolerance.”

**QUOTE: H. Richard Niebuhr** — Distilled liberal theology into this sentence: *“A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”*

Hell is real. Judgment is real. Sin is real. Sin is essentially the **de-godding of God**. Hell will be the place where those who have de-godded God will experience God's **unending** and **active wrath**. Hell will be the place where those who have de-godded will not only be put out of His favorable presence forever — they will also experience the reality and presence of God by way of His active, unending, perfect, righteous judgment for all eternity.

We really need to let that sink in — not just to overwhelm us with gratitude and the corresponding worship — but concerning those who if they perished today would be facing THAT eternity. Here's an exhortation to that concern from a very unexpected source — an atheist!

**QUOTE: Penn Jillette** (Las Vegas entertainer) — On *You Tube* he says he has no respect for Christians who don't preach the Gospel because they feel it's socially awkward. Jillette comments —

*“How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them? If I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming to hit you, and you didn't believe it, and that truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that.”*

There are plenty of objections to the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment.

**1.)** “If God sends people to Hell, that makes him cruel. That makes him mean.” Here’s the truth.

God is not cruel or mean. How do I know that? Look at the cross of Jesus. The truth is that God sent His only begotten Son to suffer and die **for** mean people — and **at the hands of** the meanest of people. The God who would become man and suffer and die for mean people is not mean. His death on the cross proves that He is perfectly loving! To be condemned by a God of perfect love shows how damnable our sin truly is. Man does not end up in Hell because God is mean!

**QUOTE: Timothy Keller** — *“In short, hell is simply one’s freely chose identity, apart from God, on a trajectory into infinity. God gives people over to exactly what they want. My identity is not found in you; I’m worshipping creation rather than Creator, but by definition you are making your very foundation on something that is corruptible and therefore you, too, will become corrupted.”*

**QUOTE: GK Chesterton** — *“Hell is the greatest compliment God has ever paid to the dignity of human freedom.”*

**QUOTE: C.S. Lewis** — *“I willingly believed that the damned are, in some sense, successful, rebels to the end, that the doors of hell are locked on the inside and in the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question. What are you asking God to do? To wipe out past sins and at cost give people a fresh start? He did. At Calvary. To forgive them? But they’re not asking for forgiveness. To leave them alone? That’s what hell is. There are only two kinds of people:*



*those who say “Thy will be done,” to God, or those to whom God, in the end, says, “Thy will be done.” All that are in hell choose it. If God is a God of love, this requires justice and righteousness and wrath and the object of wrath, unfortunately, but necessarily, is mankind. Because we’ve embraced the very thing that He is absolutely opposed to.*

**2.)** If God is loving, how can He be full of wrath? Here’s the truth —

If someone you loved was getting raped, would you be angry? You must be angry! You’re a coward if you’re not angry. You’re indifferent if you’re not angry. Yet THAT is what people want God to be. They want a God who is indifferent to rape and murder. Is that a God you could worship?

The argument is not is He a God of love or a God of wrath? The truth is that *God’s wrath is because of love*. It’s because you love someone that you are so full of wrath. If God is good, and God is love, and He loves all that is right — it must also mean that He hates everything that is in opposition to Him.

Again — it is not wrath or love. It is **WRATH and LOVE**. *Wrath by itself* would lead to fear and dread. But God is both a God of love **and** wrath at the same time. God is not a God of wrath in spite of His love; He is a God of wrath because of His love. He is a God of wrath because of His love, not in spite of it.

**3.)** If God is a God of love everyone should go to heaven. Here’s the truth —

For God to let everyone into heaven is neither loving nor kind. What makes you think people who spent their whole life hostile to God and His authority want to submit to Him for eternity? If people who hate God are sent to heaven — it’s not heaven for them — it’s more like hell. And if God sends rapists, and murderers, and thieves, and liars to heaven what does that do to heaven for the people who love Jesus? Do you want unrepentant pedophiles and serial killers in heaven? In this life we have death and prisons to stop such behavior. What kind of God would allow

these same people to run free in heaven forever? That would mean that in the new heaven and the new earth I've still got to lock my doors at night — still need an in-home alarm. It makes no sense for God to send *everyone* to heaven.

**Here's how one guy put it —**

*To get to hell someone must reject the God who shows them his goodness and out of love for all “gives to all mankind life and breath and everything”*

*To get to hell someone must reject the Spirit who “convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment”*

*To get to hell someone must reject the crucified Son who said, “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”*

You have to climb over all of that to go to hell!

## **VII. The Kingdom of Heaven**

**Revelation 21:1-5 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.**

Don't think of the Eternal Kingdom as an immaterial existence. It's a new heaven and a new earth. When sin came into the earth, it effected creation. **Romans 8** says that creation is longing for liberation from the curse and the effects of sin.

The sea was no more = nothing to divide and separate between people.

**<sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**

**<sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the**

**dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.**

The Kingdom of God is a new creation and God is with us in it. Heaven and earth come together and we're with God, forever living in a perfect city.

**<sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” <sup>5</sup>And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” <sup>6</sup>And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. <sup>7</sup>The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. <sup>8</sup>But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”**

**Revelation 22:1-6 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will **worship** him. <sup>4</sup>They will see his face,**

Not just by singing — we will worship Him with our service — loving the redeemed — doing the jobs that God has apportioned for us in His eternal

kingdom in bodies that will never fatigue or wear out; with perfect motive out of perfect love.

**QUOTE: Alexander Maclaren** — *“The caricature of heaven as an eternity of idleness has no basis in Scripture. Instead, the N.T. conception unites the two thoughts of being with Christ and of service for Christ. This blending is definitely set forth in the last chapter of Revelation where we read of ‘those who serve Him, and see His face.’ Here the life of contemplation and the life of active service are welded together as being not only compatible, but absolutely necessary for completeness. But remember that if there is to be service there, the exercising ground is here. I do not know what we are in this world for unless it is to apprentice us for heaven. Life on earth is a bewilderment unless we are being trained here for a nobler work which lies beyond the grave.”*

It’s like the world was supposed to be before sin entered it. And we will SEE HIS FACE. **We need to live for that day.**

**and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.<sup>6</sup>And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.” <sup>7</sup>“And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”**

**<sup>14</sup>Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. <sup>15</sup>Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. <sup>16</sup>“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” <sup>17</sup>The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.”**

**And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.**

**<sup>18</sup>I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, <sup>19</sup>and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.**

**<sup>20</sup>He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!**

**<sup>21</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.**

In Genesis 1:1, we read ‘ “In the beginning, God.” At the end of the Bible we are told that “The Lord Jesus is that God” and the final word of the Bible is grace. It’s grace. Unmerited favor. Undeserved love.

Jesus is so wonderful! Some of you need to come back to Jesus.

And as we wait to see him face to face, we need to understand that we are — right here and right now — citizens of His Kingdom. Right now — He is our king — and we should be living here and now for his glory. Our lives should be one unbroken so that one day we might take off our crown and lay it at his feet. As citizens in His Kingdom we relate to money, sex, power, marriage and relationships differently because of love for our King.

And we live worshipping Jesus in the cultures of the earth so that we might invite others to come and meet Jesus — and in knowing Jesus they can have a new life that begins the moment that they meet him — and continues forever in His Kingdom.

I pray that NO ONE reading this would end up in hell! The only way you will end up in hell is by rejecting His revelation concerning Heaven and Hell and His Son, Jesus Christ. God made you in His image and His likeness, with the power to say no and to reject the revelation of Himself in creation, in

Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ. Those who end up damned will have no one to blame but themselves. BELIEVE THE GOSPEL!

Metro — you have been stellar through these past 12 weeks! I appreciate all of you so much for the heart you have for God and the truth of His Word!

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## FOR FURTHER STUDY

A summary of the Bible’s teaching on the pain of hell says:

- Those in hell suffer intense and excruciating pain. This pain is likely both emotional/spiritual and physical (John 5:28–29).
- Hell is a fate worse than being drowned in the sea (Mark 9:42).
- It is worse than any earthly suffering—even being maimed (Matthew 5:29–30; Mark 9:43).
- The suffering never ends (Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:48).
- The wicked will be “burned with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12).
- Those in hell will be thrown into the fiery furnace and will experience unimaginable sorrow, regret, remorse, and pain. The fire produces the pain described as “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).
- The intensity of the suffering seems to be according to the wickedness of the person’s behavior (Romans 2:5–8).
- Hell is utterly fearful and dreadful (Hebrews 10:27–31).
- This punishment is depicted as “coming misery,” “eating flesh with fire,” and the “day of slaughter” (James 5:1–5).

- Those in hell will feel the full force of God’s fury and wrath (Revelations 14:10).
- They will be “tormented” with fire (14:10–11).
- This suffering is best understood as endless since the “smoke of their torment rises forever and ever” (14:11).
- This suffering is constant because it is said that those in hell “will have no rest day or night” (14:11) and “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (20:10).

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**Albert Mohler’s Review of “Love Wins” Wednesday, March 16, 2011**

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., serves as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

**We Have Seen All This Before: Rob Bell and the (Re)Emergence of Liberal Theology**

In this new book, Rob Bell takes his stand with those who have tried to rescue Christianity from itself. This is a massive tragedy by any measure.

The novelist Saul Bellow once remarked that being a prophet is nice work if you can get it. The only problem, he suggested, is that sooner or later a prophet has to speak of God, and at that point the prophet has to speak clearly. In other words, the prophet will have to speak with specificity about who God is, and at that point the options narrow.

For the last twenty years or so, a movement identified as emerging or emergent Christianity has done its determined best to avoid speaking with specificity. Leading figures in the movement have offered trenchant criticisms of mainstream evangelicalism. Most pointedly, they have accused evangelical Christianity, variously, as being excessively concerned with doctrine, culturally tone-deaf, overly propositional, unnecessarily offensive, aesthetically malnourished, and basically uncool.

Many of their criticisms hit home — especially those rooted in cultural concerns — but others betrayed what can only be described as an awkward

relationship with orthodox Christian theology. From the very beginning of the movement, many of the emerging church's leaders called for a major transformation in evangelical theology.

And yet, even as many of these leaders insisted that they remained within the evangelical circle, it was clear that many were moving into a post-evangelical posture. There were early hints that the direction of the movement was toward theological liberalism and radical revisionism, but the predominant mode of their argument was suggestion, rather than assertion.

Rather than make a clear theological or doctrinal assertion, emerging figures generally raise questions and offer suggestive comments. Influenced by postmodern narrative theories, most within the movement lean into story rather than formal argument. Nevertheless, the general direction seemed clear enough. The leading emerging church figures appeared to be pushing Protestant Liberalism –just about a century late.

Protestant Liberalism emerged in the 19th century as influential theologians argued for a doctrinal revolution. Their challenge to the church was simple and straightforward: The intellectual challenges of the modern age made belief in traditional Christian doctrines impossible. Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote his impassioned speeches to the “cultured despisers” of religion, arguing that something of spiritual value remained in Christianity even when its doctrines were no longer credible. Church historians, such as Adolf von Harnack, argued that a kernel of spiritual truth and power remained even when the shell of Christianity's doctrinal claims was removed. In the United States, preachers such as Harry Emerson Fosdick preached that Christianity must come to terms with the modern age and surrender its supernatural claims.

The liberals did not set out to destroy Christianity. To the contrary, they were certain that they were rescuing Christianity from itself. Their rescue effort required the surrender of the doctrines that the modern age found most difficult to accept, and the doctrine of hell was front and center on their list of doctrines that must go.



As historian Gary Dorrien of Union Theological Seminary — the citadel of Protestant Liberalism — has observed, it was the doctrine of hell that marked the first major departures from theological orthodoxy in the United States. The early liberals just could not and would not accept a doctrine of hell that included conscious eternal punishment and the pouring out of God’s wrath upon sin.

Thus, they rejected it. They argued that the doctrine of hell, though clearly revealed in the Bible, slandered God’s character. They offered proposed evasions of the Bible’s teachings, revisions of the doctrine, and the rejection of what the church had affirmed throughout its long history. By the time the 20th century came to a close, liberal theology had largely emptied the mainline Protestant churches and denominations. As it turns out, theological liberalism is not only a rejection of biblical Christianity — it is a failed attempt to rescue the church from its doctrines. At the end of the day, a secular society feels no need to attend or support secularized churches with a secularized theology. The denial of hell did not win relevance for the liberal churches. It simply misled millions about their eternal destiny.

This brings us to the controversy over Rob Bell’s new book, *Love Wins*. As its cover announces, the book is “about heaven, hell, and the fate of every person who ever lived.” Reading the book is a heart-breaking experience. We have read this book before. Not the exact words, and never so artfully presented, but the same book, the same argument, the same attempt to rescue Christianity from the Bible.

As a communicator, Rob Bell is a genius. He is the master of the pungent question, the turn-the-picture-upside-down story, and the personal anecdote. Like Harry Emerson Fosdick, the paladin of pulpit liberalism, Rob Bell is a master communicator. Had he set out to defend the biblical doctrine of hell, he could have done so marvelously. He would have done the church a great service. But that is not what he set out to do.

Like Fosdick, Rob Bell cares deeply for people. It comes through in his writings. There is no reason to doubt that Bell wrote this book out of his own personal concern for people who are put off by the doctrine of hell. Had that concern been turned toward a presentation of how the biblical

doctrine of hell fits within the larger context of God's love and justice and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that would have been a help to untold thousands of Christians and others seeking to understand the Christian faith. But that is not what Bell does in this new book.

Instead, Rob Bell uses his incredible power of literary skill and communication to unravel the Bible's message and to cast doubt on its teachings.

*He states his concern clearly: A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better. It's been clearly communicated to many that this belief is a central truth of the Christian faith and to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus. This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear.*

That is a huge statement, and it is clear enough. Rob Bell believes that the doctrine of the eternal punishment of unrepentant sinners in hell is keeping people from coming to Jesus. That is an unsettling thought, but on closer look, it falls in upon itself. In the first place, Jesus spoke very clearly about hell, using language that can only be described as explicit. He warned of "him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." [Matthew 10:28]

In *Love Wins*, Bell does his best to argue that the church has allowed the story of Jesus' love to be perverted by other stories. The story of an eternal hell is not, he believes, a good story. He suggests that a better story would involve the possibility of a sinner coming to faith in Christ after death, or hell being a cessation of being, or hell being eventually emptied of all its inhabitants. The problem, of course, is that the Bible provides no hint whatsoever of any possibility of a sinner's salvation after death. Instead, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." [Hebrews 9:27]

He also argues for a form of universal salvation. Once again, his statements are more suggestive than declarative, but he clearly intends his reader to

be persuaded that it is possible — even probable — that those who resist, reject, or never hear of Christ may be saved through Christ nonetheless. That means no conscious faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. He knows that he must deal with a text like Romans 10 in making this argument, “How are they to hear without someone preaching?” [Romans 10:14] Bell says that he wholeheartedly agrees with that argument from the Apostle Paul, but then he dumps the entire argument overboard and suggests that this cannot be God’s plan. He completely avoids Paul’s conclusion that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” [Romans 10:17] He rejects the idea that a person must come to a personal knowledge of Christ in this life in order to be saved. “What if the missionary gets a flat tire?” he asks.

But this is how Rob Bell deals with the Bible. He argues that the gates that never shut in the New Jerusalem [Revelation 21:25] mean that the opportunity for salvation is never closed, but he just avoids dealing with the preceding chapter, which includes this clear statement of God’s justice: “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” [Revelation 20:15] The eternally open gates of the New Jerusalem come only after that judgment.

Like so many others, Bell wants to separate the message of Jesus from other voices even in the New Testament, particularly the voice of the Apostle Paul. Here we face the inescapable question of biblical authority. We will either affirm that every word of the Bible is true, trustworthy, and authoritative, or we will create our own Bible according to our own preferences. Put bluntly, if Jesus and Paul are not telling the same story, we have no idea what the true story is.

Bell clearly prefers inclusivism, the belief that Christ is saving humanity through means other than the Gospel, including other religions. But he mixes up his story along the way, appearing to argue for outright universalism on some pages, but backing off of a full affirmation. He rejects the belief that conscious faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, but he never clearly lands on a specific account of what he does believe.

Tellingly, Bell attempts to reduce all of the Bible and the entirety of the Gospel to story, and he believes it is his right and duty to determine which story is better than another — which version of Christianity is going to be compelling and attractive to unbelievers. He has, after all, set that as his aim — to replace the received story with something he sees as better.

The first problem with this is obvious. We have no right to determine which “story” of the Gospel we prefer or think is most compelling. We must deal with the Gospel that we received from Christ and the Apostles, the faith once for all delivered to the church. Suggesting that some other story is better or more attractive than that story is an audacity of breathtaking proportions. The church is bound to the story revealed in the Bible — and in all of the Bible ... every word of it.

But there is a second problem, and it is one we might think would have been learned by now. Liberalism just does not work. Bell wants to argue that the love of God is so powerful that “God gets what God wants.” So, God desires the salvation of all, he argues, so all will eventually be saved — some even after death, even long after death. But he cannot maintain that account for long because of his absolute affirmation of human autonomy. Even God cannot or will not prevent someone from going to hell who is determined to go there. So, if Bell is taken on his own terms, even he does not believe that “God gets what God wants.”

Similarly, Bell’s argument is centered in his affirmation of God’s loving character, but he alienates love from justice and holiness. This is the traditional liberal line. Love is divorced from holiness and becomes mere sentimentality. Bell wants to rescue God from any teaching that his wrath is poured out upon sin and sinners, certainly in any eternally conscious sense. But Bell also wants God to vindicate the victims of murder, rape, child abuse, and similar evil. He seems not to recognize that he has undercut his own story, leaving God unable or unwilling to bring true justice.

In truth, any human effort to offer the world a story superior to the comprehensive story of the Bible fails on all fronts. It is an abdication of biblical authority, a denial of biblical truth, and a false Gospel. It misleads sinners and fails to save. It also fails in its central aim — to convince sinners

to think better of God. The real Gospel is the Gospel that saves — the Gospel that must be heard and believed if sinners are to be saved.

But this is where Rob Bell's book goes most off-course. He describes the Gospel in these words: *It begins in the sure and certain truth that we are loved. That in spite of whatever has gone horribly wrong deep in our hearts and has spread to every corner of the world, in spite of our sins, failures, rebellion, and hard hearts, in spite of what has been done to us or what we've done, God has made peace with us.*

Missing from his Gospel is any clear reference to Christ, any adequate understanding of our sin, any affirmation of the holiness of God and his pledge to punish sin, any reference to the shed blood of Christ, his death on the cross, his substitutionary atonement, and his resurrection, and, so tellingly, any reference to faith as the sinners response to the Good News of the Gospel. There is no genuine Gospel here. This is just a reissue of the powerless message of theological liberalism.

H. Richard Niebuhr famously once distilled liberal theology into this sentence: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

Yes, we have read this book before. With *Love Wins*, Rob Bell moves solidly within the world of Protestant Liberalism. His message is a liberalism arriving late on the scene. Tragically, his message will confuse many believers as well as countless unbelievers.

We dare not retreat from all that the Bible says about hell. We must never confuse the Gospel, nor offer suggestions that there may be any way of salvation outside of conscious faith in Jesus Christ. We must never believe that we can do a public relations job on the Gospel or on the character of God. We must never be unclear and subversively suggestive about what the Bible teaches.

In the opening pages of *Love Wins*, Rob Bell assures his readers that "nothing in this book hasn't been taught, suggested, or celebrated by many before me." That is true enough. But the tragedy is that those who did teach, suggest, or celebrate such things were those with whom no friend of the Gospel should want company. In this new book, Rob Bell takes his stand

with those who have tried to rescue Christianity from itself. This is a massive tragedy by any measure.

The problem begins even with the book's title. The message of the Gospel is not merely that love wins — it is that Jesus saves.