



THE BEACON BEAM

November 2015

STANDING FOR TRUTH IN A CONFUSING AGE

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

By Albert Mohler

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

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“The leading emerging church figures appeared to be pushing Protestant Liberalism—just about a century late.”

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Schedule of Services:

Sunday
Morning Worship...9:30 AM
Sunday School.....11:10 AM
Evening Worship.....6:00 PM

Wednesday
Prayer Meeting.....7:00 PM
IMPACT Clubs.....7:00 PM
Teen Ministry.....7:00 PM

Beacon Highlights for November

Special Events for November

01	ESL	22	ESL
	Senior High YAC	24	Coffee n' Courage/ <i>a.m. only</i>
03	Coffee n' Courage/ <i>p.m. only</i>		Thanksgiving Praise Service
04	Teen/Parent Focus	26	Thanksgiving Day
08	ESL	27	Church Office Closed
10	Coffee n' Courage	29	ESL
	Elders/Deacons Meeting		Lord's Table
14	Teen Homeplace Ministry		
15	ESL		
	Member's Meeting		
	Junior High YAC		
17	Coffee n' Courage		
19	Silver Saints		
	Men Sharpening Men		



November Missions Month

November 1	Missionary Andy Rice/Zambia
November 8	Missionary Tony Honeycutt/Piedmont Rescue Mission
November 15	Missionary Joel Weaver/Kenya
November 22	Missionary Herb Taylor/Hispanic Ministries with Baptist Church Planters
December 6	Missionary Dave Rudolph/South Africa

Sympathy ~ We express our heartfelt sympathy to the family of:

Ervin Menking

John Poteat

Ann Sykes

The Beacon Broadcast

Monday thru Friday

WITA 1490 AM (Knoxville, TN)	9:30 a.m.
WKBA 1550 AM (Roanoke, VA)	10:00 a.m.
WKPA 1390 AM (Lynchburg, VA)	10:00 a.m.
WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC)	12:15 p.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC)	2:00 p.m.

Monday thru Sunday

WXTH-LP 101.7 FM (Richwood, WV)	10:05 a.m.
	10:05 p.m.

Sunday

WPCM 920 AM (Burlington, NC)	9:00 a.m.
WCRU 960 AM (Charlotte, NC)	9:30 a.m.
WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC)	10:30 a.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC)	10:30 a.m.
WDRU 1030 AM (Raleigh, NC)	10:30 a.m.
WSML 1200 AM (Graham, NC)	8:30 p.m.
WLES 560 AM (Richmond, VA)	10:30 a.m.
Harbour Light of the Windwards	9:30 p.m.
1400 AM/94.5 FM (Caribbean)	

November Member Birthdays



01	Carol Shaw
08	Mary Sue Wright
09	Connie Beaver
	Jane Faucette
10	Duane Burns
13	Rebecca Burns
	Laura Warner
21	Sue Vestal
22	Joey Beck
	Jeremy Fairchild
25	Frieda King
	Ann Whittington
29	Clara Driver
	Todd Wilson

Happy Birthday!

November Missionary Birthdays

09	Ruth Bixby
	Melanie Webster
10	Sillas Campos
12	Marc Blackwell
23	Judie Blackwell
26	Becca Jensen*
30	Wanger Campos

*Children of Missionaries

Beacon Pastors

Gregory N. Barkman	<i>Senior Pastor</i>
Michael R. Karns	<i>Minister of Christian Education</i>
Robert F. La Tour	<i>Minister of Families</i>
Gerald J. Counts	<i>Minister of Visitation</i>
Gregory L. Phillips	<i>Minister of Music</i>

Many of God's people are troubled about their salvation. Although they have professed faith in Christ and endeavor to live a Christian life, they lack assurance that they are God's true children. It is one of the ironies of Christianity that those who struggle most with assurance are usually saved, while many who are never troubled, are actually lost. False assurance is worse than no assurance. Better to be troubled and saved, than assume that you are saved when you are actually lost. Salvation, and assurance of salvation are two different matters. It is possible to be saved and lack assurance, and it is possible to possess assurance and be lost. What we need is true Biblical assurance, not presumption based upon misunderstanding and folly.

The First Epistle of John was written to enable God's people to obtain true assurance. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (I John 5:13). This tells us that assurance of salvation is based upon a knowledge of God's Word, specifically "these things" that the Apostle John wrote in his first epistle. We do not have assurance simply because the Bible says it is possible to have assurance. Our assurance must be based upon truth. "My heart is leaning on the Word, the written Word of God." We need to understand those divinely given truths that pertain to Biblical assurance of salvation. And what are they? An examination of I John 3:19, 20, reveals two of them.

Biblical Assurance is based upon a changed life. "And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him" (I John 3:19). Notice the words "know" and "assure." This verse contains valuable information about assurance of salva-

tion. How can we "know that we are of the truth," or more literally, "out of the truth," which is to say, "born of God"? We want to know that we have been born out of the Word of Truth (I Peter 1:23), and are thereby a child of the truth who lives in the realm of truth, not deception. How

"Some unregenerate people manage to 'clean up their act' outwardly, and refrain from some of the grosser sins in order to fit into church culture..."

can we know this for certain? "And by *this* we know that we are of the truth." *This* refers to the preceding section about loving other Christians. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death" (I John 3:14).

The practice of brotherly love assures of genuine salvation. And why is this? Because brotherly love is not natural. It is an outgrowth of the new birth, which is a supernatural work of God's Spirit. If we love the brethren, it is only because God has changed our hearts to give us a love for God's people that did not exist before we were saved. If such love is absent, salvation is absent. If brotherly love is present, it can only be explained by the regenerating work of God's Spirit. Self-sacrificing love offers strong evidence of salvation because it is only truly present in the

lives of those who have been changed by God.

Do you, dear reader, have a supernatural love for the people of God? If the answer is "yes," then you must be saved. If the answer is "no," then you must be lost and in need of salvation. Although this is not the test we might expect, it is the one given us in God's Word. John doesn't say that we can know we are of the truth because we don't "cuss and chew, and run with those who do," although surely no genuine Christian would do that either. Rather he gives us a test that is very difficult to counterfeit. Some unregenerate people manage to "clean up their act" outwardly, and refrain from some of the grosser sins in order to fit into church culture, but only those who have been given new life by God will have a god-like love for other Christians.

If your life has been changed in such a way that it can only be explained by the supernatural work of God, you have been born from above. If your life is basically no different from what it was before your profession of faith, and little different from the unconverted people around you, minus your Christian profession, you must be unconverted, profession of faith notwithstanding. The first evidence of salvation is a life changed by God's Spirit, a life that reflects Biblical values of godliness that are not natural to fallen sons and daughters of Adam. When such evidence is present, it brings comforting assurance. If such evidence is lacking, it ought to raise serious doubts.

Biblical assurance is based upon communion with God. John continues, "and shall assure our hearts before Him, for if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things" (I John 3:19b, 20). A second evidence of genuine saving

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We Have Seen All This Before...

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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.

"Rob Bell believes that the doctrine of the eternal punishment of unrepentant sinners in hell is keeping people from coming to Jesus."

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

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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.

“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.”

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

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Error Intolerant

John MacArthur

As Christians we must understand that whatever opposes God's Word or departs from it in any way is a danger to the very cause of truth. Passivity toward known error is not an option for the Christian. Staunch intolerance of error is built into the very fabric of Scripture. And tolerance of known error is anything but a virtue. Jesus clearly and unashamedly affirmed the utter exclusivity of Christianity. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Obviously, that sort of exclusivity is fundamentally incompatible with post-modern tolerance.

Truth and error cannot be combined to yield something beneficial. Truth and error are as incompatible as light and darkness. "What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

We can't tell the world, "This is truth, but whatever you want to be-

lieve is fine, too. It's *not* fine. Scripture commands us to be *intolerant* of any idea that denies the truth.

Lest anyone misunderstand, I'm not defending dogmatism on any and every theological issue. Some things in Scripture are not perfectly clear. But the central teachings of Scripture (in particular, those things related to the way of salvation) are so simple and so clear that even a child can understand.

Those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (*Westminster Confession*, 1:7).

All the truth that is necessary for our salvation can be easily understood in a true way by anyone who applies common sense and due diligence in seeking to understand what the Bible teaches. And that truth—the core message of Scripture—is incompatible with every other system of belief. We *ought* to be dogmatic about it.

No wonder post-modernism, which prides itself on being tolerant of every competing world-view, is nonetheless hostile to biblical Christianity. Even the most determined post-modernist recognizes that biblical Christianity by its very nature is totally incompatible with a position of uncritical broad-mindedness. If we accept the fact that Scripture is the objective, authoritative truth of God, we are bound to see that every other view is *not* equally or potentially valid.

There is no need to seek middle ground through dialogue with proponents of anti-Christian world-views, as if the truth could be refined by the dialectical method. It is folly to think truth given by divine revelation *needs* any refining or updating. Nor should we imagine that we can meet opposing world-views on some philosophically neutral ground. The ground between us is not neutral. If we really believe the Word of God is true, we know that everything opposing it is error. And we are to yield no ground whatsoever to error.

John MacArthur is the pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, as well as an author, conference speaker, president of The Master's College and Seminary, and featured teacher with the *Grace to You* media ministry.

Inerrancy means the word of God always stands over us and we never stand over the word of God. When we reject inerrancy we put ourselves in judgment over God's word. We claim the right to determine which parts of God's revelation can be trusted and which cannot. When we deny the complete trustworthiness of the Scriptures—in its claims with regards to history; its teachings on the material world; its miracles; in the tiniest "jots and tittles" of all that it affirms—then we are forced to accept one of two conclusions: either Scripture is not all from God, or God is not always dependable. To make either statement is to affirm a sub-Christian point of view. These conclusions do not express a proper submission to the Father, do not work for our joy in Christ, and do not bring honor to the Spirit, who carried along the men to speak the prophetic word and to author God's holy book.

Taking God at His Word, Kevin DeYoung

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faith is a desire for, and active participation in communion with God. The assurance true Christians seek is to “assure our hearts before Him,” which involves meditation upon the Bible coupled with prayer. Carnal solutions may satisfy those who possess only an empty profession of faith, but true Christians derive their assurance from God Himself through the process of spiritual communion.

Please do not tell a person seeking assurance to look to a past profession of faith as the basis of assurance. Please do not tell him to write down a date when he “asked Jesus into his heart,” and remind himself of that date as the basis of assurance. Biblical assurance is not found at the end of an aisle, or at the side of a personal worker. Biblical assurance is found by communion with God Himself.

“For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart.” Why would the heart of a Christian condemn him? Because he knows that he is not all he ought to be, nor all he wants to be. Does he love the brethren? Yes, but not as much as he should, and thus his heart condemns

him. Has he experienced a fundamental change of life by the work of God’s Spirit? Yes, but he still stumbles and fails more than he should, and thus his heart condemns him. If only God’s troubled children would realize that the very thoughts that trouble them are valuable assurances that they have been born of God! What hypocrite worries that he does not love the brethren as much as he should? What unsaved church member agonizes over remaining sin in his life? Unconverted church members are undisturbed by their sins. They believe their life is acceptable as is, and are seldom troubled by remaining sin. They compare themselves favorably with others, and like the Pharisees of Christ’s day, are proud of their religious credentials. But regenerated Christians are dissatisfied with their lack of Christ-like perfection, and are troubled by their failures, and rightly so.

And what do they do about this? They go to God, to assure their hearts before Him. “If our heart condemns us (as it surely will if we are saved), God is greater than our heart and knows all things.” The troubled saint seeks solace in prayer and the

Word, and there he finds the precious truth of the Gospel as a fresh balm for his troubled soul. Does his heart condemn him? Yes, but God is greater than his heart. Jesus died for the sins of those who trust in Him. Christ does not save us because we are good, but because we acknowledge that we are bad, and desperately need His cleansing blood. When we preach the Gospel to ourselves afresh, we find the assurance we desire. I am not saved because of my merits, for I have none, and I constantly fall short of God’s glory. But I am saved because He is righteous, and imputes His perfection to the account of those who cast themselves upon Him in repentance and faith. We preach the Gospel to ourselves again and cast ourselves upon Christ anew, and go away from our communion with God having received Divine assurance of His promised forgiveness and justifying grace. Biblical assurance is found upon our knees before an open Bible. And that’s the only assurance that will never deceive us, for “God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.”

1689 London Baptist Confession Chapter 18

Chapter 18: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation

Although temporary believers, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and state of salvation, which hope of theirs shall perish; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.

This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it; yet being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of means, attain thereunto and therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of his assurance; —so far is it from inclining men to looseness.

We Have Seen All This Before...

Albert Mohler

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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 con-

scious 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.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
President of The Southern Baptist
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In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

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