

The Emperor's New Clothes

Perhaps you know the popular children's story, "The Emperor's New Clothes," by Hans Christian Andersen. It tells about two tailors who convince their Emperor that they can make him a new suit of clothes that only the intelligent, competent, and worthy population can see. The unqualified, stupid, and unworthy ones will not see them.

When the day came for the Emperor to parade in front of his subjects in his new clothes, he displayed them proudly, even though he did not see them himself. As he walked among his populace, a child from the crowd cried, "He isn't wearing anything at all." The emperor walked before them naked.

This story from the 1800s has frequent application in our day. It describes a politician without wisdom. It depicts an athlete who intimidates an opponent with bravado but lacks skill. It characterizes a speaker with an empty message. This last example fits today.

With a great splash, Rob Bell recently introduced his latest book, *Love Wins*. Bell's book has caused a stir in the Christian and non-Christian worlds. Defenders of his positions quickly endorsed it enthusiastically. With equal speed, those opposed to its message declared their dissent. In essence, the dissenters, as the child in the story, cried, "The Emperor isn't wearing anything at all." I join their chorus.

Many people have questioned the advisability of commentators voicing disagreement with *Love Wins*. I suggest this summary of the reservations against the commentators.

- Why enhance the popularity of Bell's book and his

beliefs? They suggest that such replies could create curiosity, thereby increasing its sale and deluding more people. Indeed, it may. However, at least they will read *Love Wins* having prior exposure to the book's fallacies instead of uninformed influence. Further, voiced opposition could also prevent some from purchasing the book who might otherwise have read it unaware of its errors. Last, the presentation of truth will provide the means by which some will believe the truth, instead of the errors of Bell's book.

- What makes one opinion have greater value than another does? Many believe that all opinions on Scripture have equal value. Thus, we should not criticize Bell, a declared evangelical, whose beliefs and opinions differ from ours, common accepted beliefs, and/or historical Christianity. Yet, the Scriptures provide abundant evidence of those who identified and opposed error. Jesus never condoned error or false beliefs without correction. The prophets of old constantly confronted the fallacies of their times. The apostles died in defense of the truth, identifying error and those who perpetrated it. Thus, we should confront the fallacies in *Love Wins*, too.

- Won't you just make a mountain out of a molehill? If you ignore Bell and his theses, they will decline in appeal. This, too, shall pass if given time, they say. It depends, I think, on whether or not you view Bell's statements as insignificant, those which relate to unimportant and questionable issues. I do not view them in that fashion. In his book *Love Wins*, Bell has made statements and accusations against crucial Biblical doctrines, e.g., the nature of God and the doctrines of salvation, to mention only two areas. Attacks against essential Biblical truth

require examination and refutation from Scripture. Doctrine does matter.

- At this time, doesn't the Church need unity more than disagreement? Besides, the Church needs to emphasize a positive gospel instead of a negative one. The public wrangling puts a black eye on the Church. If you examine the ministry of Jesus Christ, he did not dodge disagreement for a false unity. Truly, Jesus did not come to bring peace, but a sword (Matthew 10.34). The truth divides. Further, unity without truth brings compromise. Unity based upon truth brings authentic peace. Therefore, the correction of the truth against Bell's propositions in *Love Wins* could heal and bring freedom to those changed by the truth.

In each of these instances, an apparent reason for withholding rebuttal actually provides a basis to correct error with truth. Ignorance is not bliss. Truth sets you free.

In addition, the Scriptures establish the appropriateness and even the necessity for correction of error. I do not provide the following examples as a complete list. I simply provide some examples from the Bible that encourage examination and refutation of error present in Bell's book, *Love Wins*.

- God commanded Adam to keep the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.15). By this, God intended Adam to defend and protect the Garden from outside attack in order to preserve the reign of righteousness and the manifest presence of God there. Adam failed, because he followed the creature rather than the Creator. Believers have the responsibility to defend the truth of God's word against error such as presented by Bell.
- Jesus warned his disciples to beware of false

prophets and their errors (Matthew 7.15-23). At the very least, Rob Bell did what false prophets practice. He presents error for truth. (For a more detailed examination of false prophets, see my book, *Wolves in Sheep's Clothing*.) A proper concern for the spiritual well-being of fellow believers demands an examination, identification, and correction, where appropriate, of Bell's fallacies in *Love Wins*.

- Further, believers must have the same concern for the spiritual well-being of unbelievers who might accept Bell's theses as truth, to their detriment. Much of Christ's ministry included the refutation of false beliefs and instruction in the truth, both to his disciples and to unbelievers. In similar fashion, Paul addressed unbelievers with the truth, e.g., his message on Mars Hill (Acts 17.22-34). Such messages by Jesus and Paul often resulted in unbelievers turning to the truth in repentance and faith. I pray that a similar result will occur from these presentations.

In the next several weeks in this blog, I will identify fallacies that Rob Bell presents in *Love Wins* (which other authors and speakers may also hold and proclaim) and examine them in light of Scripture. I pray that God by his Holy Spirit will use these articles to enlighten, edify, and encourage those who read them.