

General Topics :: Francis Chan Q&A about "Erasing Hell"**Francis Chan Q&A about "Erasing Hell" - posted by Jeremy221, on: 2011/8/30 16:14**

This is the transcript of an article from Christianity Today with Francis Chan regarding what he learned while writing "Erasing Hell" with Preston Sprinkle. I have added some Q's and A's to make it clear who is speaking.

Q&A: Francis Chan on Rob Bell and Hell

Why 'Erasing Hell' was his most difficult book, how 'Love Wins' prompted repentance, and whether 'Believe in Jesus or you'll go to hell' is good news.

Erasing Hell: What God Said About Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up
by Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle

Few books have generated as much theological conversation as Rob Bell's *Love Wins*—and fewer still have sparked several response books within months of their appearance. Francis Chan, whose books *Crazy Love* and *Forgotten God* are still on bestseller lists, is a somewhat surprising addition to the pack with *Erasing Hell*. (Chan's coauthor, Preston Sprinkle, is associate professor of biblical studies at Chan's Eternity Bible College.) Christianity Today senior managing editor Mark Galli is the author of another of the response books, *God Wins*, and interviewed Chan last week.

Q: In several places in your book, it's clear that you are conflicted about even addressing this topic.

A: It's weird. I've never felt a need to really respond to someone else's writing. And yet reading *Love Wins* set a lot of things spinning in my mind. Some of it was concern, but some was doubt: Am I sure of what I believe? Let me go back and study. Several times in the middle of the night I couldn't even sleep. I really believe the Lord wanted me to do this, but there is a wrestling on that point because I thought, "Gosh, that's just not me. That's not what I'm comfortable with. I really don't think I'll enjoy this at all. I'm not looking forward to all the backlash and everything else."

The other side was that I was really hoping to discover some things I hadn't discovered before—or maybe this was an opportunity to soften my stance on hell. I was hoping to find that in Scripture. And so when I didn't find it, it made me even more sick to my stomach.

It's weird to write something that you really don't like. It's easy to write for God and about God, because what a thrill to remind the church that the Holy Spirit of God is in you. What a rush! What an amazing blessing! Who'd want to take the time to write about something that's so, so awful? So painful? That was the conflict for me.

Q: Your reaction to *Love Wins* was my experience as well and, I suspect, the reaction of a lot of its readers. That's the one thing that I've said is good about the book. It's forced us all to think more deeply, go back to Scripture, and read more carefully.

A: There was a lot that was good in that book. There are some good principles in there. Some of the things that he dislikes about the evangelical church today are things I have a real problem with as well. I told Rob that some of the stuff that he writes needs to be heard, and the people who need to hear it won't hear it because of the tone and some of the other things that he writes.

He didn't think that was the case, but I do think there is some value in some of the things that he writes.

I think that's where Rob is a little disingenuous. He claims that he's not a controversialist, but when it comes to his critique of fundamentalist and legalistic Christianity, he spares no sarcasm.

That was the hard part for me. I didn't see love toward those people—among whom I would be included. In some of those respects it seemed like a mockery of what I believe and the God that I believe in.

Q: Why did you write a book just on hell? It's only one chapter in Bell's book.

A: While his book spurred on this conviction that I need to respond, as I studied, my book became less and less of a response to Rob Bell and his book. More and more, I saw how studying hell was changing me. I saw a lot of sin I had to repent of and thought, "This is a much bigger issue."

Q: My book is pretty similar. It started off as a reaction, but then I realized I wanted to say something that transcended Love Wins. I approach it differently than you did. But I experienced the same kind of evolution.

Yeah. I wanted to write in such a way that five or ten years from now, when Love Wins isn't the issue, it's a book that stands on its own.

When you say that your study caused you to realize that you had some sins to repent of, what type of things are you talking about?

A: As I reread the Gospel passages, Jesus' words are much harsher than I remember. There's a tone in some of the things that he said that are really difficult to stomach, and he says things in a way that I would not have.

Because we in America read certain passages over and over to the neglect of others, we start to believe that Jesus had a friendly tone all the time. And that there isn't any wrath or anger or judgment. When you read it all like you are reading it for the first time, you walk away going, "Wow, he was pretty hardcore."

Here's what I had to repent of: I had felt the need to soften a lot of Jesus' statements, because in my arrogance I think, "Okay Jesus, I'm not going to say that like that. Trust me, people will like you more and be more willing to accept you if I say it like this." Obviously I've never said that to God. But that's the attitude I've taken, and it made me sick. Who in the heck do I think I am? To think that I can make God more palatable or attractive if I try and change the tone in which he says some things. I know people say, "Well it's just cultural this or that." That's garbage. People back then had a much deeper reverence for God than we do. Especially the religious community. Yet it's to those people whom he speaks so harshly.

What in the world would he say to us today? I don't think it'd be a softer message. I had to come before God and say, "Lord I feel sick." And I confessed to Mark and Preston as we were working on the book, "I confess to you guys, I confess to the church, I know I have backed away from certain things because of my arrogance. I thought I could attract more people to Jesus by hiding certain things about him." I had to confess my arrogance.

Q: I wrote a book a number of years ago called Jesus Mean and Wild in which I tried to look at all the passages in the Gospel in Mark where Jesus is anything but compassionate, kind, and patient. And I tried to answer the question, If Jesus is in fact God and God is love incarnate, how are those expressions of love? But even as I look back on it, I think even then I bent over backwards in chapters to make Jesus sound a little nicer than he really was. Because if you're a modern communicator in modern culture, your temptation is to turn yourself into God's PR man. It's a really tough thing not to succumb to.

A: I want to be careful. Sometimes I think, "Okay Lord, you've given me a gift to communicate, and I can say some hard things and still have people listen. I'm using that for your glory." But then I read Stephen's speech in the middle of the night. And as I read it I thought, "I don't think I would have been stoned. Stephen, you didn't really communicate well. I don't even think you got your point across. You just made them angry and they killed you. If you had said it like this Â... "

Again, I'm searching my soul, and there's still a lot of people-pleasing in me and I don't want that in there. But I don't know. You see Paul in Athens in Acts 17, and it seems like he was careful. He could have said certain things more abrasively, yet he tended to reason. So I'm praying, "Oh God, I don't want to be fake. If you want me to say it and get crucified, I think I would do it."

Q: The key is to know when the Spirit is leading you to do the one, and when to do the other.

A: Yeah, I guess that's it. I guess I have to count on the Holy Spirit on that one.

What do you think is the biggest misunderstanding contemporary Christians have about hell?

Q: I don't know if it's a misunderstanding or just an unwillingness to think about it, or accept the fact that it's there, to live our life in light of it.

A: I think there is also some misunderstanding on degrees of punishment. I do see Jesus saying that judgment is going to be worse for some, like the rewards are going to be better for some. But that might be a slight issue.

But the main thing is that we have tried to block it out of our minds. Yet because it's written about so often in Scripture, I think God does want it on the forefront.

Q: Is that what makes it compelling for you to continue to affirm the reality of hell? That it's so frequently mentioned?

A: It comes down to God and people. I have to warn people. I don't want people going there. And if they ignore it, there's a much more likely chance that they'll end up there. Obviously I take that in light of the sovereignty of God, but looking at it from a pragmatic perspective, it's like canoeing before Niagara Falls if you don't know it's there or you've got yourself deceived that there's no drop off. So one reason is my desire to love people and care for people and warn people.

The other is what I mentioned about God himself. I want to make sure that I'm being faithful to present him as he presents himself. I'm not ashamed of this, I don't understand it completely, but I surrender to it, I submit to it. And I want to proclaim it boldly now.

Q: I would say for me the most compelling thing is that it's woven all through Jesus' teaching. You can't possibly talk about him and what he said faithfully and ignore judgment and hell.

A: Yeah. I read Scripture pretty simply even though I've been through seminary and everything else. I try to read with an open mind and be led by the Spirit. I try to picture myself stuck on an island reading it over and over and ask, What would I naturally conclude? What would be the thing about God that I'd be most struck by? I would definitely be shocked and awed by his love, but I'm more stunned by his power, and his seriousness, his holiness maybe even more than his love. I don't want to say his love's no big deal. He loves us but nonetheless the reoccurring theme is about his power, his glory, his holiness.

Q: In your book you seem agnostic as to whether hell is a conscious eternal torment or annihilation.

A: That was one of the things I was a little surprised by: the language. I would definitely have to say that if I leaned a certain direction I would lean toward the conscious torment that's eternal. But I couldn't say I'm sure of that, because there are some passages that really seem to emphasize a destruction. And then I look in history and find that's not really a strange view. There are some good, godly men—and maybe even the majority—that seem to take the annihilation view. I was surprised because all I was brought up with was conscious torment. And I see that. I see that in Scripture and I would lean more that way but, I'm not ready to say okay I know it's this one. So say here "Here are a couple of views." I don't even remember if I wrote that I lean towards that, but maybe it comes across.

I'm still open. And I hope that's because of my study and not because I'd rather have the annihilation view. I don't know what was harder, researching or keeping a check on my heart and making sure there are no weird, ungodly motives in everything I wrote.

Q: I hadn't thought about it that much, but I probably leaned toward annihilationism and probably still do. But I read Randy Alcorn's book on heaven again and he made such a strong case for eternal conscious punishment I had to revise one chapter to give that view stronger resonance. In the end, I'm with you: I'm agnostic. I probably lean toward annihilationism, but I'm open to hearing a good argument from either side.

In terms of the how we actually make use of this as a pastor and as communicators, should we use hell to motivate people into believing in Christ? Fear is not a very good or lasting motivator, yet Jesus seemed to matter-of-factly talk about hell.

A: I don't think there is a general method. Jesus presents the good news in such different ways all the time. And even the apostles do that all through the book of Acts. The good news comes to bear in different ways. You need to know who you are speaking to. What is the area of this person's life that refuses to be under the Lordship of Jesus? Is it arrogance? Self-righteousness? Is it a sin issue they just won't bow the knee to? Is there no fear? Is it a misunderstanding of the eternal state?

Obviously everything always comes back to the Cross and the Resurrection. I think there has to be some openness and leading by the Spirit on how we present hell and in what context. I was sharing with a guy the other day and we'd become friends, this guy I'd met on the plane. And I didn't really bring up hell. But then as I was studying for the book and we went out to coffee and I said "Look, dude, I want you to take your time and I know that God is going to reveal himself to you

u when he chooses to and you'll either get it or you won't. I can tell you all day long about how great he is to me."

And this guy's really searching yet I felt compelled at the moment that I would be dishonest if I didn't bring it up. "Look, I have to say this to you about God and what I read about his punishment, and there is a sense of urgency. I don't want to make it all about that because I don't see in the Bible that it's all about that. Nonetheless I do see that this is real and that's why I pray for you, man. I don't want to see you there."

I believe that I was led by the Spirit at that time, but I certainly don't want to say that that's the template, that's how you share.

Q: I thought one of Rob Bell's compelling statements was that sometimes we make the gospel sound like "Believe in Jesus or you'll go to hell." Which turns the gospel not into good news but into a threat. Have you thought about how we can talk about this reality without making it sound like a threat or spiritual extortion?

A: Well, that's difficult. Because don't you kind of get that when you read the Scriptures? That's a struggle I have. When I read the Scriptures, it sure seems threatening. "Don't fear man who can just kill your body. Fear God who can destroy your body and soul in hell."

I see God in his love warning me of hell because he wants me to embrace him so badly. And I don't see that as a bad thing. It's like warning my kids about not being careful in crossing the street: "Do you understand what will happen?" Maybe I overdramatize what it's like to be hit by a car. What if you got dragged under it? But I'm telling them because I so don't want that to happen."

And that's what I was telling my friend, I go "yeah, you have a choice. But in some ways, it's almost like you don't. If you really look at all the facts, how could I choose the other if I believe this?"

Q: I read a book by Augustine some years ago on some of his meditations on the fear of the Lord, and he said it's not beneath God to use fear to move people closer to him, but he wants to eventually get us to a place where we can affirm that perfect love casts out fear. God might even use something that we would consider beneath us to use. But he doesn't want to leave us there; he wants to move us onto something more confident, hopeful, and assuring.

A: I preached at Cornerstone two weeks ago. It was kind of an interview with Preston and I about the book. Oddly it fell on Father's Day. We let people text questions during the service and one of those questions was, "What in the world does this have to do with Father's Day?"

I explained that our job is to represent God well. As a dad I've seen my shortcomings. At times I want to distance myself from the child that's bothering me or rebellious and go play with the other ones. And I realized, I'm not representing God. And there are dads who let their kids get away with everything and there is no sense of authority. And it's because of that kids grow up also having a weak God himself. He doesn't have the right to do this. We kind of learn that from our dads, who weren't strong enough to say, no, I can tell you to quit throwing a tantrum.

I see in Scripture a God who says. "Look, when I say something it goes, I don't care if your feelings are this or that. At the end of the day, I am God and I say and do what I want."

And I've been careful to communicate that to my children. And make sure that they do respect me. Why? Because I want them growing up with the respect of God that I see in Scripture. Are my kids afraid of me? No, they are secure in me. We're in love. I don't want to boast because this is all to the glory of God, but I've got an awesome family and I'm best friends with my kids. At the same time, they aren't going to talk back to me.

Our culture has become one where kids talk back to their parents and people openly mock our president. And in the church, the things the people say about their pastors, the elders! There really is no respect for authority. So how do we help people understand a God who is free to do as he pleases?

Q: Is there anything you wanted to be sure to say that we haven't talked about?

A: It may be healthy for people to know that this was the most difficult thing for me to dwell on. I went through a real, you could almost call it a depression, as I as I studied some of this. I can't imagine anything being harder to write from here on out.

General Topics :: Francis Chan Q&A about "Erasing Hell"

Q: That resonates with what Lewis said at the beginning of Screwtape Letters. He found it very disturbing to get into the mindset of a tempter. In the end he was glad to be done with it. It's not a pleasant topic to think about. But it's not designed to be.

A: Yeah. And the other thing that I really want people to know, that I believe I can say with integrity, is I really love Rob Bell. While he spurred on my thinking, this was not meant to be an attack on him. In my conversation with him, he said, "I don't mean to be the final word on any of this. I'm hoping that others will continue the discussion." And so I guess that's what I'm doing. I felt like I owed it to the people who listen to me to share with them where I stand. I believe I've done my best with what I can do, but I really do encourage people to study it for themselves. But also remember that along with the diligent study and mental effort there really needs to be a begging of God, a pleading with him for truth and not to forget the Holy Spirit's sovereign role in respect to truth.

Source: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/julyweb-only/francis-chan-hell.html>

Re: Francis Chan Q&A about "Erasing Hell" - posted by learjet, on: 2011/8/30 17:32

This is excellent reading!