



Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith

Rob Bell

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In Velvet Elvis, Rob Bell frees us to consider God beyond the picture someone else painted for us in order to find an authentic understanding of the Christian faith. God doesn't have boundaries, and faith doesn't have to be limited to what someone else has told us. God is alive. Faith is alive. Velvet Elvis helps us find our faith. And even if it doesn't, it encourages us to keep looking. Faith doesn't end with this book. But it just might begin...

Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith Details

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From Reader Review Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith for online ebook

Michelle says

Pretty much the same line of thought as "Mere Christianity" addressing some crucial issues of our faith, but it fixed a fatal flaw of C.S. Lewis' work: It was written in a contemporary format that invites younger, less academic, but sold-out-for-Jesus readers to carry on with verve to the end in a way that Rob Bell has perfected over time with his Nooma clips. The book is written in the exact way that he speaks, making it a true trade mark accomplishment and a different style all together. A must read for EVERY ONE!!!

Tim says

Did I enjoy this book? Yes and no. Do I think this book makes a valuable contribution to Christian literature? Yes and no.

Firstly, there is nothing exorbitantly wrong in this book. I think there are ideas in it which are over emphasized and exalted maybe a little too much.

I like Rob Bell's vision of reaching out to people where they are and giving them the opportunity to experience a relationship with Christ and then gradually come into a full knowledge of Christianity. It makes sense. That's how it goes. First milk, then solid food.

I like that he talks about the need of understanding the setting, the cultural values of the time, and so on to be able to understand the Bible better.

I like that he encourages people to think critically and discern what they take in. He even exhorts the reader to do this with his book!

I don't like that his idea of a fluid faith (the whole spring analogy) that is growing and adapting seems pretty flimsy. It's hard to get an idea of just how far he might "Repaint" the Christian faith.

I don't like that his writing seems to speak of an idea that the Bible is almost unreadable without the full context of history and a full knowledge of the bible. Yea, the Bible is a difficult book, and there is a lot of nuances, treasures in scripture to be gleaned, and even things to stumble over. But, the bible is also pretty straight forward in a lot of areas. On this note I do like that he does talk about studying the Bible in community. That's a good idea no matter the other things.

Lastly, I'm not sure I understand Rob Bell's eschatology (the stuff that happens at the end of the world). He talks a lot about either bringing heaven here now or bringing hell here now. It seems a bit... odd. It just doesn't sit right.

Rob Bell has enormous influence and this book enjoys enormous popularity. Unfortunately, I think the truths that are in this book to claim are surrounded by a lot of mis-truth or at the very least unclear truth.

Feel free to pass this one up.

Phil Ward says

I think this book has tremendously helpful applications. There are so many challenges that are expressed through the genuine reflection of the current state of Christianity. The challenge to think deeply and to ask questions about what Christianity is and what it means. These are helpful bits of advice. There are great nuggets of wisdom that challenge people to read the Bible with the understanding that the events themselves really did happen. They are real stories about real people in real places. Moreover, the challenge to live authentically is prevalent within the writing of Rob Bell. One can truly appreciate his candid way of expressing his ideas and concerns.

The danger lies from the consistent use of argumentation that Christianity must let go of Doctrine and the need to fight for Orthodox doctrine and instead the fight should be to love Jesus and to love others as Jesus loved others. This on the surface sounds great. But if we are to implement the very things that Rob Bell writes about, such as asking questions, then we find ourselves in a place where we are forming ideas about God, these are often called doctrines. For example Bell says that we ought not fight for correct doctrine but instead we ought to live like Jesus lived, authentically and passionately obeying God's will in serving and loving others. Here are the questions: who was Jesus? what was Jesus like? who did Jesus think he was? who did his disciples think he is? was he morally correct? why should one follow this guy Jesus? By answering these questions we begin to formulate a belief and an understanding about who Jesus is. This is called Christology. The need to define who Jesus was in the New Testament is a doctrine with significant importance because it alone can differentiate correct and incorrect ideas of Jesus of the New Testament. Mormons believe in the Jesus of the New Testament and so do the Evangelicals. Who is right? Can both be right? No, because that is a logical fallacy. Then which is right? Only a set of beliefs about Jesus, a doctrine of Jesus, can sufficiently answer that question. Doctrine is important, but it is not the end, it is the means; the means to the end of thinking and worshiping God correctly and avoiding intellectual idolatry.

Michael says

I read it/studied it 5 times (underlined, highlighted, scribbled 6 pages of interesting quotes) trying to understand what my friends find so intriguing about this disillusioned "post-Christian" and what he is trying to propagate. I finally came to the conclusion that he spends the pages playing devil's advocate, both discrediting and disproving the foundations of Christendom, (i.e. Virgin birth, resurrection of Christ, authority of Scripture, etc.) Fine by me...believe what you want...but after successfully disproving it, he says that he still believes it. What the freak? Either believe it or don't. That would be like Al Gore going around striving to DISPROVE Global Warming and then wrapping up the lecture by saying "However, I believe that it is happening".

One of the many memorable quotes of the book is when he is quoting "one of the great 'theologians' of our time", Sean Penn, when he said "The mystery is the truth". WTF?

I would best sum up Bell's literary (piece of)work with the quote "Choke me in the shallow water before I get too deep". Or how about my own quote "What have you been smoking?" or "Get a real job!" (I better stop there)

I-LOVE-JESUS says

Rob Bell has fashioned a "kool-aid" that would make Jim Jones blush in "Velvet Elvis". While the ideas of Bell sounds wonderful, are they Biblically based? The answer? NOT ON YOUR LIFE! The strict guidelines of God's word is not the easiest thing to hear, much less abide by. If we are CHRISTIAN leaders we can not afford to teach anything less than the WHOLE truth. Why is it, that the mind set of the church today is, "change the truth to fit the sinners lifestyle?" If a man go's to a pastor and says, "I can't picture God letting me go to Hell," the Rob Bell answer would be to not hurt his feelings at all cost, even if means compromising BASIC christian beliefs. He has taken well known Bible passages and twisted them to such an unrecognizable product, that the combined imagination of M.C. Escher and Pablo Picasso couldn't have dreamed up such a distorted creation. I realize this will offend all of his followers but consider this. If God is so BIG and POWERFUL, why does he need one of His creations making excuses for Him. He doesn't. He gave His holy word to Paul, Luke, David..ect to pen down for the benefit of humanity as a guideline to compare to how we conduct ourselves. If you're looking for a great christian book full of intrigue, mystery, romance and pages and pages of names that you could never in your wildest dreams, be able to pronounce, then get the Bible. Its a book that will never let you down and will bring you up close and personal to the God of the universe that LOVES you with an everlasting LOVE. Do'nt trust false prophets. GOD IS GOD WITH YOU, BUT HE IS STILL GOD WITHOUT YOU. HE DOES'NT NEED OUR HELP GETTING HIS POINT ACROSS. I'm 21 and I do'nt know much, but I do know that God didnt create Hell for us, but we will go there if we lead people astray. TRUST IN GOD, NOT THE WORDS OF MEN. ok im done ranting ;)

y

Bob says

This book was everything I feared it would be. I trust "emerging" Christianity about as much as previous iterations (boomers, mega churches, the religious right, etc)...which is to say, not much.

Bell sounds just like every other emerging guy out there...interpreting the bible for himself based on personal experience, passion, and liberal use of unsubstantiated metaphor, rather than solid education, classical study, and reverence for the seriousness of the topic. I think on many issues, he has good points, but none of them are new or original and are based more on emotion or ego than on scripture.

I'm not some old, uncool, bible thumper who is mad that 'emerging' thought is taking over...I'm a younger 'hip' Christian who is tired of all the 'new thinking' being just another 'movement' that will be discredited as soon as the next generation 'emerges'.

Blah.

Genevieve Heinrich says

Recently, I've been doing a lot of writing concerning my own beliefs and faith practices. It tends to come up occasionally amongst my group of friends, as I'm one of only a few (if any?) practicing Christians, and I tend

to think a lot about faith issues generally because my church tends to be very thought-provoking and inspiring.

About a month ago, I emailed one of my writings to my pastor, almost half-expecting him to call me a nutter and suggest I not return. Instead, he said "Read this book, I think you'll love it!"

He was right!

Sometimes, especially living in the conservative midwest, I become convinced that my views on the state of modern Christianity and on faith and belief in general are "out there," "wacky," or downright sacreligious. It's very nice to be reassured that, all of a sudden, I appear to be part of a "movement." There really are people out there reading their Bibles and NOT falling into the psycho-fundie trap! There really are people out there who think that Jesus' message and mission are a damn sight more important than traditions that end up driving more people away from God than drawing them in. There really are other folks who realize that the bottom line isn't how many rules you follow correctly, but (oh what was it that crazy kook called Christ said??) "Love the Lord your God" and "Love your neighbor as yourself."

At the core of Rob Bell's teachings is the historically-focused practice of humble questioning. He points out that in the Judaic tradition of Jesus, learning was more than just rote memorization - you were *supposed* to answer a question with a question. Furthermore, the faith tradition of Jesus was always intended to grow and change with the times... and it always has! It's an easy trap to fall into, to accept the revolutionary teachings of a wise predecessor, and forget that they *weren't tradition* when they were first suggested.

This book had me almost constantly smiling, and not just because Bell was simply eloquently stating my own thoughts. His writing style is casual, conversational and accessible. His history was in-depth enough to engender trust, yet interesting enough to make me want to actually read up on ancient Judaic practices myself! It would be a great book for anyone who is new to Christianity, and CERTAINLY for anyone who finds themselves put off by the current public face of the faith.

Just be forewarned - his end-notes will have you running to the library to increase your personal Mt. To-Be-Read!

Jonny says

Rob Bell is an interesting Christian leader. I hold some negative opinions toward the "Emerging/Emergent" church--I don't particularly care for the way they obsess about marketing Jesus. In general, the movement treats Jesus as a product and although they advertise Him in a very attractive way, I don't think that's the point.

Bell brings up a lot of good points in this book. He challenges readers to think and use their minds and "test everything." I think a lot of Christians could benefit from his general ideas. With that said, I fear like he deceives himself into believing that his church is incredibly different and safer than other megachurches. My main gripe with the book isn't the arguments Bell brings up, but that he doesn't apply his arguments to his ministry and the church that he leads.

Eric says

This was my first theology book by a "modern" author. I suppose I shouldn't say modern, as that word is now associated with the thinking patterns from 1800-2000ish. But some people are getting tired of "post-modern," and even "emerging" has its connotations.

This was my first theology book not written by a super-conservative Christian who wants you to wear a tie to church.

My first reading (3 years ago) really stretched my thinking about all the issues addressed. Since that time (in which Claiborne and McLaren have become household names), my thinking has stretched a bit. And I can't remember the last time I wore a tie to church.

This time through I found nothing very new anymore. It seems as if the concepts in this book have either become the new standard from which everyone else springs off and just assumes to be true, or else it was written when these things were already assumed to be true and was simply a basic primer for those (like me) who were unfamiliar with these concepts and perhaps hostile to anything which may have been seen as "liberal."

I was especially touched this time through by Bell's reminder that all truth is God's truth, and so we should claim and embrace truth wherever we find it. If something appears to be true but doesn't necessarily fit our belief system, then we need to change our belief system. Our "belief system" should be flexible enough to allow that.

I was also encouraged by the author's recommendation to dig into my soul and deal with all the junk I find there. He states that very few people actually live from their heart, but those who do are the ones who make a difference. I'm not sure how to begin that process, but I know it needs to happen.

Other than the content, the book itself is beautiful in its design. More books need to be intentional about being a piece of art instead of just paper in binding.

Rebecca says

I am watching the Nooma video series that Rob Bell does so I decided to read this book to understand his theology. I was concerned. For one, I found often that his analogies or explanations were so vague that I often wondered "and what does that mean!"

Unfortunately as I read Velvet Elvis, I actually found myself getting bored with Christianity...taking out the element of faith in God feels like taking out the adventure. Bell's theology diminishes the sovereignty of God, the historical reality of the Bible, and gives a skewed description of human nature [particularly in the passage about Peter walking on water... that it was losing faith in himself that made him sink...why then did Peter worship God when Jesus rescued him and took him back to the boat? It was Jesus's enabling that Peter was able to walk at all!] Rob Bell dilutes the offensiveness of the Gospel in order to make it seem more applicable and palatable to post-moderns. Faith is never easy but it cannot be written off.

On the other hand, I agree with Bell full-heartedly that God meets us and loves us as individuals. And it is

important that we recognize the lenses we bring- our cultures, our generation, our own personal stories- as we enter into relationship with God, as we read Scripture, pray, attend church, or whatever.

I also appreciated the way Bell speaks about the mission of the church, bringing Heaven to earth. I do think that God invites us to participate in the renewal of the earth and I do really hope that we are living in a generation that will move beyond our church walls.

Bell's running statement: "God has spoken, and the rest is commentary" highlights his theme of questioning everything. This is why the book has so much appeal. And this is why you should read it for yourself.

Jennifer says

I took issue with enough in this book that I stopped reading it in the middle of chapter 3.

Brian Robbins says

Having already read and thoroughly enjoyed Bell's "Love Wins" I approached this one with high expectations. In some respects he didn't disappoint. On the plus side he begins from a perspective of Christian faith as a dynamic process lived through the whole of life, rather than a static set of truths to be accepted and held onto:

"The Christian faith is alive only when it is listening ... innovating, letting go of whatever has gotten in the way of Jesus and embracing whatever will help us to be more and more the people God wants us to be."

He speaks of having "as many questions as answers" about his faith, and about "contributing to the discussion" rather than trying to provide definitive answers. So far I am wholeheartedly with him; I am with him in many of his questions, and with him in many of his answers.

For instance in questioning of a simplistic, literalist approach to scripture, which takes isolated texts lifted out of context and uses them to justify condemnations and exclusions of whole groups of people, he is clear and helpful:

"To take statements out of context and apply them today without first understanding their original context sucks the life right out of them. They aren't isolated statements that float unattached, out in space. They aren't first and foremost timeless truths."

Rather he suggests that we should:

"...embrace the Bible as the wild, uncensored, passionate account it is of people experiencing the living God. Doubting the one true God
Wrestling with, arguing with, getting angry with, reconciling with, loving, worshipping, thanking, following the one who gives us everything."

In a similar manner he discusses quite a wide-ranging selection of other issues.

He has an ability to sum up constructive views of scripture in succinct and challenging little sentences. E.g.:

“For Jesus, the question wasn’t ‘How do I get into heaven? But how do I bring heaven here?’”

Or

“Christian is a great noun and a poor adjective.”

So far, so good. The style and content is not that of a theologian or scriptural scholar, it is the work of a preacher and each section is written like the transcript of an extended sermon. In many places this is effective and helpful.

However, there are considerable short-comings to the book. At a less important level there is a jarring quality in the tone, in the sense that he adopts a ‘cool’ or ‘hip’ way (or whatever the current phrase is for such speak – afraid I show my age here). Such assumed tones always leave me with some suspicion, maybe unjustly so, that at least some of the content is assumed and manipulated to target an imagined audience.

There are also a number of passages in the book that could have been more effective if he had been far more succinct. For instance he writes about a meal with friends and writes a rather rambling long paragraph regarding his response to his friends;

“I was looking around the table at my wife, whom I just adore; our friend Shauna, who may be one of the best story-tellers on the planet; Tom whom I could take a bullet for … etc, etc.”

He does have the grace to admit it sounds like something out of a greetings card (one that would rapidly get put back on the shelf by most people, I think), but what is the point? He then leads to this reasonable suggestion:

“Ordinary moments in ordinary settings that all of a sudden become infused with something else. With meaning. Significance. Hope.”

But why the lengthy baloney first?

More seriously his style of argument often lacks precision and solid basis. Many of his statements appear to be plucked out of the air with no supportive evidence provided.

On occasions when he does provide ‘evidence’ the reasoning behind it can be suspect to say the least. One bizarre little example of this:

“A city is more advanced, more complicated than a garden. If a garden is developed and managed and cared for, it is eventually going to turn into a city.”

What?! In Biblical imagery we may find near the beginning of Genesis a garden & at the end Revelation an eternal city, but this isn’t related to symbolic imagery of the bible, nor is it related to any aspect of history. What is the man on about?

He was prone to making some generalised statements which flew in the face of basic evidence. Discussing the early Christian communities he suggests:

“These Christians made sure everybody in their midst had enough to eat. They made sure everybody was able to pay their bills. They made sure there was enough to go around”

This may be the ideal, but Paul’s letters sent to these very same communities are constantly stressing those qualities alongside the failure of those communities to live up to them.

Overall I enjoyed the book. Like his “Love Wins” it is very positive and encouraging in its approach to faith. At its best it put forward very constructive ideas about what a live Christian faith and community should be like. However, the flaws in style and content reduced the effectiveness of his message.

Leah says

I have been rather reluctant to start this book, but last night I could barely put it down. The book really does attempt to "repaint the Christian faith" by asking questions and exploring different interpretations of scripture in such a way that would probably offend many traditional churchgoers today. In my own search to find some reality in the church and my own relationship with God, this book comes at a perfect time, reassuring me that it's ok to ask questions, it's ok to doubt. This would really be a good read for someone who is on the fence about Christianity, someone who is tired of the Church as it exists today with its outdated legalities, or someone who just wants to gain a refreshing perspective on their faith...more to come!

Ok, have finished the book and I'm a huge fan of the fresh ideas presented by Rob Bell. He is a pastor, so he's not anti-church, but rather updated church. He sheds light on the cliches used by Christians everyday that never appear in scripture, but most importantly, he gives the history of the life of Jesus and why the things he said and did were so radical in his time. So worth the read!!!

Bill says

I liked this book more than I expected. If I had read it years ago before knowing the direction Rob Bell has taken since he wrote this, I might have liked it a lot more. But because I have read some of his recent books, I couldn't help but 'fill in' some of his characteristic silences, pauses and rhetorical questions with the answers he has more recently provided.

Overall: Rob Bell asks helpful, uncomfortable questions of the church establishment. It's his answers that aren't that helpful. He emphasises those aspects of Christianity which have currency in our culture at present -- love, acceptance, forgiveness, grace etc. But he's very light on those elements of the gospel which are counter cultural -- e.g. Jesus death and resurrection to remove our sins and reunite us to God, a gospel that is distinctive, confronting and offensive to the world. It is easy to misunderstand Rob Bell, to fill the gaps with your own assumptions. Christian readers may assume the gospel message, and thus be quite encouraged. Non-Christian readers might assume a postmodern relativity and pluralism, and also be encouraged in their existing beliefs. Rob Bell builds great bridges to non-Christians, but does he ask people to walk over them, or does he stay on the other side and chat?

I will say there was quite a lot of encouraging stuff in this book, mixed in with stuff I can't agree with.

Chapter 1 was about the need to update Christian doctrine to make it relevant to contemporary society, so he lost me there. I think he overstates (significantly) the unknowability of God and the open ended nature of the Bible. I quite appreciated the emphasis on the Jewish context of the New Testament in Chapters 2, 3 & 5. Chapter 4 was a great chapter on being real, letting Jesus heal your soul, seeking restoration (shalom) not just forgiveness -- I was encouraged by this chapter. I appreciated some of the content on our new identity and hope in Chapters 6 & 7, but that may have been because I was bringing a lot of underlying gospel assumptions to those chapters which were not explicitly present. I noticed the seeds of his rejection of Hell (fully developed in Love Wins) in a few places.

Whenever I read these books (emerging church books, for want of a better label), I have the same frustration. What version of Christianity are they reacting against? It's just not a version I'm familiar with. Maybe it's because I'm Australian, so I haven't really encountered the worst examples of U.S. evangelicalism. But my response is always the same: addressing these (very significant) issues doesn't require an updated gospel, doesn't require the relegation of the Bible to a place of lesser authority. Careful reading of the Bible ("good exegesis") provides all the correction needed. We need to call people back to wholeheartedly living for Jesus, based on the historic, orthodox Christian understanding of the Bible, not invite them to move on to a 'new way of being Christian'.

Mark says

Trendy to be trendy. I felt like Rob Bell was trying to be different, when there was no other reason than to fool people to think he is trendy. Maybe it was his way of hiding his wishy washy Christianity. Allowing people to question the virgin birth and divinity of Christ is a grievous error. I am sad that so many people have been deceived by some "trendy", but not truthful writing. Beyond the theological errors, I felt like I was just trying to finish the book the whole time.

Mandy says

I was surprised at how much of the time I found myself agreeing with Rob Bell. His central theme—that we can't continue to talk to people about faith and do things the same old way—is true. The way my parents talked about faith, entered into worship, and told others about God really just don't work in today's world. That said, I think Rob Bell starts out with a truth, but in taking his repainting of the Christian faith to the upmost extreme, he gets on some theological shaky ground. He suggests that his book is not about "dressing up" church or faith, but challenging it and rethinking it. I would challenge all believers to test their faith and strive to challenge themselves, but Rob Bell talks about rethinking and reformatting theology. . . . and there are some points of theology that can't be changed! They just are. I'm not talking about thinking over the things you once believed about God and have now discovered are totally inaccurate descriptions of His character, unbiblical, or simply your projections onto Him. I'm talking about the points of the gospel message, truths about God's character, Jesus' role in salvation, and so forth. Also Bell seems to be positing that heaven will be on earth. I agree with him that the kingdom of God begins in the lives of believers at salvation. The kingdom of God is here and now and later, but Scripture says that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us. According to the Bible, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. . . .

Bell's voice is an interesting one in all the thinkers calling out from the emerging church in today's world. But it's also proof that taking the emerging church's pick-and-choose theology to its natural end leaves you on shaky theological ground a lot of the time.

Penny says

After reading Rob Bell's *Velvet Elvis* and a few ranting and raving reviews, I'm not going to comment on the fine points of Bell's theology. Some are fine, and some are brittle. But, I would like to comment on the spiritual trampoline metaphor from my own experience.

I had a friend who owned a trampoline. We neighbor kids spent many hours at his house. It was amazing to watch him do flips. He could go forward and backward as high or as low as he wanted. He tried to teach me. I could only manage to do a low, forward roll (is that a somersault?). I'm 6'2," and I'm just not that flexible. So, I knew when to sit on the edge and watch him flip. I knew when to jump with him, the two of us feeding off a unified rhythm. It was great fun.

Until, one of our friends fell off and broke her leg. She healed, but the trampoline wasn't as thrilling anymore. It was still fun, but not as fun. I didn't turn into a complete coward and never jump again. But, I was certainly more careful when I did.

I also learned trampolines aren't for everyone. I have three boys. My oldest—who is naturally cautious—and my youngest—who jumps with or without a trampoline—would probably be just fine. But, if my middle son—who has balance issues even when walking—got on one, we might as well file an insurance claim in advance!

So, I think this metaphor is a good one for this book. I'm thankful to Rob Bell for the opportunity to jump with him on his spiritual trampoline awhile. He certainly knows how to flip forward and backward better than I ever could. So, I'll remember those moments of unified rhythm, but I also know I'm not as flexible as he is. And spiritual trampolines aren't for everyone. For those cautious and more experienced jumpers?

Maybe. For those who struggle with simply walking? No. My recommendation is just choose carefully when inviting someone to this spiritual trampoline.

Lyn says

On the shelf next to *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality and Divine Nobodies: Shedding Religion to Find God*.

Makes you think about religion in a whole new way, challenging.

Matt Moment says

Keeping in mind that this is the first "Christian" book I've ever finished and that I loath going into "Christian" stores and purchasing things produced by "Christian" companies my review of this book will consist only of a single idea portrayed in the piece that is worth all four of the stars I gave it.

I can't find the exact quote but here's the idea (and it's geared toward proclaimed "Christians"); If you woke up tomorrow and there were irrefutable evidence that Mary, Mother of Jesus, was NOT a virgin would it discredit all that Jesus Christ taught and did?

This idea BLEW my mind. The idea that all of the Christian faith is built up like a wall, some of us are in and some of us are out and some us us think "evangelism" simply means pulling people to our side of the wall and "saving" them. Furthermore the idea that if a brick were to be removed from the wall (i.e. Mary NOT being a virgin as we understand it) would cause the whole thing to shake and eventually crumble. This idea is so powerful to me that it redeems any shortcomings this book may or may not posses.

If you think yourself a Christian than I challange you to consider the idea of "repainting" the faith with Rob Bell.

If you aren't a Christian than maybe you can take solace in reading this piece and realizing that not all Christians fit the socially conservative, politically motivated, and biblically selective mold that the last 1500 years of bad church decisions has put us in.

Josh Summers says

- 1) I really like Bell's enthusiasm and passion for helping people break out of a religious system that many times can be boring and basically anything but alive. Sometimes I think that I myself am far too intertwined with this system which, although good in many ways, is still man-made.
- 2) Bell's call to "test it. Probe it." is good advice. I have the awful tendency to read books, accepting most everything that I read as long as I trust the author or person who recommended the book to me.
- 3) I think that the way we respond to testing and probing is what can separate believers from non-believers, but unfortunately it doesn't. As you'll see below, there are some very big disagreements I have with Bell, but some of the things I've seen written and done in protest of his teachings is unbelievable. Protesting outside Bell's fellowship telling people they're going to hades isn't much of a disagreement, it borders on hatred.
- 4) All that being said, I have some very significant problems with some of Bell's theology. The first is his use of the trampoline analogy. Now obviously no analogy can be perfect, but the statement that all tenets of faith outside of Jesus are springs, and therefore we must be willing to allow them to flex, is very unBiblical. Now I agree with him regarding the man who said that if you don't believe in a 24-hour day creation, you don't believe in the cross. If by springs he means that we need to be open to various interpretation, I am all for that. It is when he wants my foundation to flex that I have a problem. Speaking of the virgin birth he says, "What if that spring was seriously questioned? Could a person still keep jumping?" My personal answer is that if I found that the virgin birth was untrue, the gospel writers knowingly putting a myth into their writings and thus compromising the inspiration of the Word, yes I would have some serious questions. But my personal answer doesn't carry as much weight as Paul's in regard to the resurrection saying, "...if [the Son] is not risen...then your faith is also vain." (I Cor 15:14). That doesn't sounds like a spring to me. I believe there are certain things which are bricks, or if I may add to Bell's analogy, maybe the stands on which the trampoline is raised. You take that away and you'll find that jumping on the trampoline is no different than jumping on the regular ground.
- 5) There was something that bothered me all through the first half of the book which I couldn't put my finger on until he basically wrote it out. Although I admire Bell's passion, I'm wary of his focus. Although he's not fully a "saved by works" preacher, he gets far too close in my mind by not emphasizing the power of the cross. Like I said, I couldn't put my finger on it until he got to his theory about Peter walking on water. That just blew my mind. Bell states, "Who does Peter lose faith in? Not Jesus; Jesus is doing fine. Peter loses faith

in himself." The idea that the Son willingly gave up His life so that people like me could realize how great I already am and all of the things I am capable of borders on blasphemy. In response to that I want to ask Bell what happened when Peter got back into the boat. Did he apologize for not meeting his potential? Did he promise that next time he would be more confident in himself? Of course not. He worships the Son. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". I think those two words were missing in too much of Bell's ideology.

6) Bell far too often portrays the Word as full of metaphors. Yes, we desperately need to find the relevance for today, to apply it to our lives. I agree that this might be why so much of our "system" seems dead. However, what gives me hope in the life to come is not a personal, very subjective "...experience of [the Son] that transcends place and time" as Bell says, but rather the fact that the Son died and rose again on my behalf. I think the writers themselves make it clear that their purpose wasn't to provide metaphors, but to give us the story of our existence. Luke says, "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Lk 1:3-4).

To conclude my thoughts, I think that Bell is very well-intentioned and should serve as a wake-up call for many people, including myself, to see how much of what I consider to be my faith is in actuality just my system or culture. While I think that I should stand against what I believe to be foundational errors in Bell's theology, I think that the best reaction I or any person can have to objections is to expend my energy not on combative arguments but on being just as passionate for what I hold to be true. I hold that in Him, and not of myself or anything that I can do, grace is given as a gift through the sacrifice of the Son for our justification - but more importantly for His glory.
