

Gospel Coalition panel discussion following Don Carson's talk, 14th April 2011.

(Transcribed by Andrew Tweedy from the official mp3 audio, 16th April 2011)

KD: I think by now you probably know who the folks here on the panel are. Dr Carson and Tim Keller, Crawford Loritts, Stephen Um and I'm Kevin DeYoung and I will be weighing in, but mostly trying to moderate this panel. We do want to give this panel some time to develop some thoughts. There are so many questions we could ask and all of these brothers would have very important things to say on all the questions but I'm going to try to keep a question to each person and try to move along so we can talk about a number of different themes. And we will go pretty close to 9 o'clock and then the Gettys will come on and may start just a few minutes after 9. And some of you will have to stand and stretch and other people will be coming in, but this is important, not only for those who are here but for those who will listen to this, those who may see this online.

I have some questions, some of them on my phone, so if I have it here I'm not playing "Angry Birds". If my finger keeps going like this then its gotten dull, but that won't happen.

TK: What's "Angry Birds"?

KD: There are things called "apps", now...

TK: What's an "app"?

KD: I want to start by asking Tim a couple of questions. Obviously the amount of attention that has arisen over Rob's book "Love Wins" has been unprecedented. Certainly in the blogosphere the number of page views and downloads for some of the main articles and reviews have not just been thousands or tens of thousands, but literally hundreds of thousands. And the mainstream media from USA Today to CNN to MSNBC to the New York Times, to just this morning we see that the cover story in Time Magazine is on Rob Bell and "Love Wins" and Justin Taylor of course already has a link to it and has it up on his blog, so this is a very controversial issue.

And my question for you Tim is simply this. Is this really worth all of the trouble? Is this worth fighting over?

TK: Well, yes, and I can think of a couple of reasons why. One, more generally, I think you realise that biblical doctrine is much more like a balanced ... the different doctrines relate to one another and every so often we find out that a ... in some biological ecosystems some little bird goes extinct and then nobody realises how important that bird was to the whole system and other things start to collapse and ... yes, I actually think the doctrine of everlasting punishment is important. I give you just two quick reasons why:

When you lessen the penalty for a wrong, you make the wrong less serious and you make the person wronged less serious. So for example, if you say here's a country in which if you kill somebody the penalty is \$100. Wow, that really devalues the life of the person. Well what if its \$1 million? Well what if its 5 years in prison, life in prison or capital punishment? Please, I'm not making an argument for capital punishment, just ... but you see the point is the greater the

penalty, the more serious the sin against the person wronged. And honestly, to say well, you go to purgatory, you go to hell for a while and then you get out or even annihilationism, or in other words anything other than endless punishment actually lessens sin and lessens the God who has been sinned against. It makes perfect sense to me that a sin against an infinite being is an infinite sin and therefore has infinite consequences.

And of course you know the other side is “what did Jesus really take?” I mean, if the penalty for sin is only this big, then Jesus only bore this much on the cross. If the penalty for sin is THIS big, then Jesus took much more than that somehow. And therefore his love for me is greater. So I mean it all ... its an ecosystem as it were. And if you take away the infinity of punishment, everything else starts to diminish. So I think its definitely worth fighting for.

KD: Let me talk about a few of the threads that have been out there, especially in the media, in the internet, some of the themes that maybe aren't accurate and one of them, and this is also for you Tim, one of those threads is that “Isn't Rob Bell saying essentially what CS Lewis did?” So, speak really on two levels. One, what's the distinction if there is one and two, our allegiance is to the Bible, not to the creator of “Chronicles of Narnia” so, are there ways in which we simply have to say “yep, Lewis is good here but ... mm, not so good there”?

TK: Let me say where I think Lewis is good. First of all he was actually rebelling against the spirit of the age. The spirit of the age was “Oh hell's bad and judgement's bad and you can't believe in a God like that.” And Lewis's whole project whenever he talked about this was to tweak the spirit of the age and to show that hell makes sense, that judgement makes sense. There's no indication he doesn't believe that in the end there's a great division, permanent division between the saved and the unsaved.

At the end of “The Last Battle” when all of, you know, Aslan represents Jesus, everybody in the world comes into the door and when they see Aslan, they either, it fills them with joy and they go off to heaven, or it fills them with terror and anger and they go off into the darkness. That is such a vivid description of just what the Bible says, that the face of God is going to be either an eternal joy, or people who are outside of Christ, its going to be an eternal terror. I don't know how that fits into any kind of universalism. So Lewis was definitely tweaking the spirit of the age and I actually think an awful lot of what I read in the Rob Bell book was sympathising with the spirit of the age that says “Oh you know isn't it awful to believe in a God of judgement.” Lewis was doing the very opposite.

However, you know Lewis was won to faith by a Catholic, JRR Tolkien. Tolkien was very upset that Lewis never went all the way to Catholicism, but Lewis, I mean there's a couple of places in “Letters to Malcolm” where he seems to indicate maybe he did believe in purgatory. I mean Lewis was on the border between Protestantism and Catholicism and I don't follow him in lots of places. But its very clear in some of those spots that he's going in a very different direction than people who are trying to fudge on the doctrine of eternal judgement.

KD: A question for Dr Carson, a specific simple exegetical question. One of I gather the talking points, when I've heard and seen in print Rob Bell talk about this. One of the talking points that he'll frequently mention is John 10.16 where Jesus says “I have many sheep who are not of this fold.” You've written a commentary on John, spent a fair amount of time

reading on John. Is there anyone you've read who would share that understanding and that exegesis of John 10.16, that these are other religions, Jesus is saying "Yep, Buddhists, Hindus, those are the other sheep."

DC: There are some popular expositions that try to take it that way. But amongst serious commentators, whether they believe what the text says or not, whether they come out of a protestant or a catholic or a liberal or whatever tradition, they all recognise that the sheep of another fold are not people of a completely different religion or the like, but Gentiles who are now brought in to become Christians and thus part of Christ's flock. So the fold, in that language, is the fold of Judaism, the fold of the historical heritage from Old Testament revelation, in what we call the Old Testament, the first part of the Christian canon.

And Jesus says that he is going to bring in sheep that are not of this fold and they will constitute one flock, that is the flock of the Messiah. That is people who are outside the old covenant of Israel and they become allied to Jesus and his death and his Lordship and so on and thus in our terms become Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, to constitute one flock. It is not saying now we've got the Christian church here and now, outside of that we draw in people from completely different points of view and they are all saved regardless of whether they become Christians or not. It is simply reading the text anachronistically and not paying attention to the context.

KD: What do you think, Dr Carson, this whole

DC: I got a question for you. How come he's Tim Keller and I'm Dr Carson?

KD: Cos ... its just who you are.

DC: Maybe its cos I'm three or four years older.

TK: Yeah those four years make a big difference Don.

DC: Just checking.

KD: We could call you "The Don". Yeah, I'll be happy to call you whatever you want.

DC: "Your Reverance" will do.

KD: So, what do you think this may or may not signify about underlying shifts in evangelical Christianity here in North America. In particular, you know one of the things I was looking at this real briefly in the Time Magazine article, that suggested that this is a shift with young people. I mean young people can't believe in hell any more. Young people are going where Rob Bell is going with hell. You've been around a few more years than I have. Give us some perspective. What does the whole controversy show about the Church and in particular the evangelical Church in this country?

DC: Well let me just say two things briefly. First, this is not new. In the 19th and 20th centuries people like Schleiermacher, people like Harnack and so on advocated a form of biblical theology that got rid of hell in the first instance and then got rid of a lot of other things, precisely on that ground. That is nobody can believe this stuff any more. And in other words it

was to defend Christianity, as Rob Bell is trying to defend Christianity, by getting rid of things that he thinks are so angular and offensive that they are stopping people from becoming Christians. And so there is a sense in which Rob's experiment has been done before, there's nothing new in it. It's really a form of liberalism from about a century and a half back, that's been updated with modern talk. It's not new in that respect.

The difficulty is, if you remove the angular bits such that you no longer have Christianity, you've taken away what you're supposed to be converting people to. And so, at the end of the day, it becomes a kind of, a form of self-mutilation, in order to promote Christianity you actually destroy Christianity, it's pretty sad.

But there is a broader thing in the second place that's going on. Evangelicalism so-called is now so broad and diverse. There are so many things that are called evangelical that your grandmother's evangelicalism wouldn't have recognised as such. And it has got broader and broader and thinner and thinner, with less and less content. Then what's happening now is the the under 35s, give or take, under 40s, under 25s, have no allegiance to that old evangelicalism any more. There's just none. But that doesn't mean that they're all drifting off toward Rob Bell. Lots of them are. What's happening instead I think, is that the new generation is making choices. They don't feel allegiance to the older generation any more, but some are then trying to get a somewhat diluted and more culturally acceptable form.

And some are saying no, we need a robust gospel. Let's hear what scripture says, let Jesus speak for himself. Let the truth of historic Christianity which has nurtured millions of people on every continent, in every country, in every culture across the centuries, where they have been despised or liked, or depreciated, appreciated. Let it speak for what it is. And within that framework of bowing the knee to Christ and trying to understand in his terms, exactly what biblical, faithful Christianity is. And that side is represented by the thousands who are at this conference, and by a number of other movements around the country that are flocking to Christ.

So instead of everybody sidling to just one side or the other, there's a big divide that's taking place over a number of issues. There's a sense in which Rob's book is just a marker of a bigger division that's going on.

KD: And I think it's, you know those of us who are sort of in the TGC world get this, but those on the outside may not, or those who would never darken the doors of this conference, realise this is a very young group of folks here, as Matt Chandler said last night. There's a lot of people, their planes haven't reached cruising altitude. I mean there are people who are, a lot of 20s, 30s, young pastors, young leaders, so to think that somehow you have to be, if you want to be relevant, or you want to really have an "in" with this generation, that you have to go in this "Love Wins" direction is simply not true. Now many will flock to it as you said but just as many, and who knows, the truth is not a popularity contest so we want to be faithful to the truth, no matter what the response is but we are seeing in our day a great response to robust biblical doctrine. Many people, but the young in particular, as you said, who are saying we want to know the truth, we want to hear what the Bible says.

I want to have, ask a question of Stephen and give you a few sentences at the beginning of "Love Wins". There's a number of quotes that we could give. This just sort of sets the stage for what the book is about. As much as the book has in places some studied ambiguity and as much as Rob would try to say "I'm simply offering and asking questions. When you read what he's saying and, from the outset where his angst is and his criticism lies, you understand that he is trying to communicate something. And I think this, these few sentences get at it, and I want you to respond Stephen.

He says "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 majority of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell, with no chance for anything better. Its 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." So what he's saying right there, not the nuance we would like, but he's trying to describe this traditional evangelicalism. People go to heaven, people who do not know Christ go to hell. This sort of evangelicalism he grew up with, and then he says this:

"This is misguided, toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness and joy that our world desperately needs to hear.

SU: I think there are several assumptions that Rob makes here in this statement which I think needs to be addressed. I think the first assumption is when he says "the rest of humanity", he is saying that a sinful, rebellious world is deserving of God's favour. In some way the holy God is obligated to show favour to a sinful humanity. He also says to reject Jesus, holding to this position is essentially to reject Jesus. Well Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else, so that's another assumption that I don't think we can make. He also says that this subverts Jesus's message of love. Well his central teaching in the gospels is the kingdom of God. This is not to diminish the love of God in any way, but it is emphasising the rule of Christ that was talked about in the Old Testament, although the word kingdom is not necessarily used all throughout the Old Testament but 80+ times in the synoptics. This is to essentially undermine what the scriptures have to say about the ministry of Jesus, because the ministry of Jesus is about the kingdom of God.

Now I think there are a couple of problems here and again I think I can be sympathetic to the heart here. No one delights to see people suffering for ever in conscious torment. I mean its not as though anyone delights to see that. But what do the scriptures say about this? I think there are a couple of things quickly, number one, I think there are all sorts of exegetical fallacies that Rob makes when he begins his book by talking about "for God so loved the world" John 3.16, and then of course he doesn't go to 17 and 18, where it says those who reject the Son are already condemned.

But there I think the assumption again is when it says "for God so loved the world" Don talked a little bit about the different ways that we can understand love. The word there "so" is an adverb. Its not, it doesn't mean it in a quantatative sense, but it means it in a qualitative sense. For God "in this manner" loved the world, not "so much" loved the world. Then what manner did he love the worl? Then you go to verses 14 and 15 and Numbers 21.

But also the reference there to “for God so loved the world”, and Don has said this nicely, the word there “world”, cosmos, in the Greek in the Johannine corpus is not referring to the bigness, but it is referring to the badness of the world, I think that’s how you put it Don, and in other words the word there “world” is referring to the sinful world system. Not necessarily every individual in the world, which I think is assumed right through the book and by many universalists, but its talking specifically about the badness of the world.

Now, lastly, I had a grandfather who was a Confucianist, he was not a Christian, he believed in the existence of some higher being, and he died several years ago, he was like 95 or 96 so that works to my favour I think. For him, who grew up in an eastern culture where the Koreans, that’s my ethnicity, lived under Japanese oppression. For him, he has no difficulty with the justice of God. For him, coming from an eastern perspective, has no problems that people who were wicked and evil and oppressive ought to be judged. But he would have more difficulty with the love of God. How can a loving God simply wipe away somehow all of the oppression and the wickedness?

And I think that is, not an exegetical fallacy on the part of Rob Bell and others, but it is an epistemological fallacy. In the sense that people, that we all ought to understand this doctrine, will read the scriptures primarily from a western perspective. Because easterners, or others who are non-western, view the doctrine of the justice of God and the doctrine of love very differently. So again, we have to read the scriptures trying to understand the authors’ intention and not try to assume that our social location is the appropriate way of reading the scriptures.

KD: Yeah, that is very, very important. Yeah, great point because we’re reading through a certain context what we think are the issues and the way we need to massage the scriptural text and we don’t even see the ways in which we’re so inculturated. These are not the questions, these are not the issues that others are dealing with.

Crawford, as a pastor, and four of us are pastors here, what would you say to someone who, you know, has cut their teeth on Rob Bell and seen some of the NOOMAs and liked some of those and some of the other things he’s written. So they are drawn to this, they are sympathetic to him. And they have also imbibed some of the spirit of the age and so they come to you as their pastor and say “God is love, right? God is love. I really like what I’m hearing here. How can I reconcile the love of God with this eternal conscious torment?” How do you help people as a pastor?

CL: It all depends at what level of immersion they are, because I think it would require more than one conversation, obviously in terms of their thinking. I want to get to that but let me just back up a little bit. I think that we all need to be careful when we correct these things that obviously we want to strike a balance that we’re to love unbelievers. We’re to preach the love of God. We need to be careful that we don’t over-correct in our demeanor the error that’s there, then all of a sudden we’re just at the polar opposite. And so that is always a tension when these things happen.

But Kevin, getting back to your question, what I would push that person toward is not so much just an exegesis of what’s wrong with Rob’s perspective in the book, although that’s important.

But its kind of like the way you spot a counterfeit \$20 bill is by studying the real thing. And I would encourage them, I would say let's back up and let's look at the nature of God. Let's look at his attributes. Let's look at who he is. Let's not "a la carte" his attributes. To leverage one attribute over the other is to prostitute God. So let's take a look at the wholeness of who he is.

Secondly let's be careful, let's take a look at how we really view scripture. The scripture is, its authoritative, and what God says is important.

An thirdly, we need to understand that God does not need a publicist or a PR agent or a marketing firm. Our job, and God is not standing around wondering if people like him. And so this is, we've got to be careful, the whole idea of wanting the culture to embrace a Jesus that is likeable is a dangerous thing. And that's where all these things start.

You know nobody wakes up one morning saying "I'm going to disbelieve some things." I think you wake up and you see people responding and the points that you share that has a close of the audience on and that they identify with that, and it sounds compassionate and wonderful and you've marketed Jesus in such an inviting way. Then all of a sudden, from the audience backwards, you begin to question the framework of your teaching and theology. So I would push them toward seeing God for who he is and challenging them about their view of the scriptures and to surgically remove, if they can, this whole idea of God needing to be embraced. If that makes any sense.

KD: I remember hearing a Lloyd-Jones sermon powerfully on this point talking about how the nations have judged God. They have put him in the balance and this is at the very heart of human idolotry and rebellion that we make ourselves the judge of God. We would dare to tell God what he ought to be like. We would dare to speak back to his word and say what we want it to say. And that's why I think these issues are so critically important. Its not just a little doctrine here or there around the edges but gets to the very heart of, not only what the cross accomplished and who God is, but what will be our approach to the holy God.

I think Lloyd-Jones was given to overstatement, these dramatic sentences, but his definition of a Christian was a person whose mouth had been shut, and he gets that from Job. One who would be silenced in the awe, holiness, majesty, unfathomable grace of God, so that our posture is always "let God be God, though every man be a liar." God will be God. He does not need a publicist, he needs preachers who are not just provocateurs but have clarity. And I just say this, now I'm going to ask more questions but this is so critical because some of you, many of you are preachers or teachers. James says that teachers will be judged more strictly.

We need to be clear, questions, we love questions. There's a difference between a junior high school student coming with questions. How many, you have a hundred thousand questions? Let's talk about all those questions. Let's meet, coffee, let's go, let's play Wii together – that's a video game thing – That we will meet with people and listen to questions. But if you are a teacher and a preacher, at some point, after the mysteries, after the implicit statements, after the inviting questions, clarity must be king. Because Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, he has renounced disgraceful and underhanded ways and now, by an open statement of the truth would present himself to the sight of all men's consciences. And if the gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing because the god of this age has blinded their minds. But the

Spirit will work when there is clarity to open the eyes that they might see the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ. We must be clear. Now, end of sermon.

I want to ask Tim, as you read at least parts of the book and have engaged with the book. Give us just, sort of a gut level response. I think one of the dangers is we can have an academic conversation and yet the emotional weight is all on the other side, and the angst and the hurt. I mean, what did you, to sound like Oprah, what did you feel? I mean here you have devoted your life to the most precious things of the cross and Christ's substitutionary atonement and then to read this book, what's your gut reaction?

TK: Yeah, I would say that was the first thing that disappointed me about the book was not the content, because he's very indirect of course, and elusive. Very hard to actually say where he's landing. So the first thing that impresses you is actually the level of ridicule of people who have a different view. Which is surprising because it's presented as a way of being open-minded and opening conversations that closed-minded people want to shut down. But I know that if I want to open a conversation with my wife about an area in which we have conflict, I don't start off by ridiculing her or belittling her, so that was I guess pretty shocking.

I mean, to me the best content points against it have already been made. Stephen is absolutely right, the assumption is that all thoughtful people think it's awful that God would judge a whole lot of folks and send them to hell and the answer is no, some modern western people do. I think Crawford is absolutely right in saying it's pitting the different attributes of God against one another. It's like the love of God wins but the holiness of God does not win. Well no, on the cross all of the attributes win. And I think Don is absolutely right in what he did very masterfully earlier on, talking about universalism etcetera.

But I think the thing that struck me, in fact the part I read to my wife, which was the first chapter, I just read it out loud to her and we were both, frankly it hurt us that you would start off a book like this saying "look I know there's people who believe this and with all due respect I think you're wrong." But that wasn't the attitude at all and that's the oddest thing about the book to me.

KD: And Tim, you've written "Reason for God" and are very in tune with secular, sceptical arguments for Christianity. I mean, as you interacted with the book, did it feel to you like, this is really scratching right where unbelievers itch and this is a book for the kind of questions I'm finding in Manhattan? Or was it more of, this is for folks who are at the last rung of evangelicalism about to fall off?

TK: Well I'm not sure who the audience is. I suppose, I know one of the cardinal rules of engagement is you state the view that you are going to critique in its strongest form. You state it so well that your opponent would say "couldn't have said it better myself." Then when you start to dismantle it, the people who are on the other side are going to feel like "well, you listened to me." See to say "you gave my position well, you stated it well, is another way of saying "you showed me the respect to listen to me and you put me in the best light. Now you're dismantling me I'll listen to you." But when a person hears their position kind of caricatured and ridiculed and then dismantled, you've lost the audience. So I'm trying to find out if you're trying to, it doesn't seem as if he's trying to convince anybody that doesn't

already think the traditional view is stupid. So it would be like a rallying. It reminds me a little bit of fundraising letters that go to people that already believe it, but you're trying to rally your base I guess.

So I mean I know Rob likes my books. He says so in the book and it makes me feel a little strange about even making ... this criticism isn't a content criticism, its an attitude criticism I guess. Which surprised me very much.

KD: Don, you write at a number of different levels, popular stuff and academic and obviously scholarly things. And at times have had to write polemical, you've had to correct errors and give criticism and you've also taken criticism. Let me talk a little bit about why you've done that. How you've tried to do that. And what's beneath that question is, sort of the skittishness that especially younger folks have, if you disagree, immediately you're the bad guy and they're the martyrs. So how have you thought through both being criticised and having to give criticism and where do you see maybe younger folks need some tweaking in how they look at it?

DC: Well I'm not sure if I've got the balance right here, but in the first place what I'd want to say is that I worry about ministries that focus just on correcting everybody. A ministry of refutation of all the cults and errors that ever happened on the face of the earth sort of thing. Because all you're doing is going around saying everybody is wrong all the time. There's something not only overly negative about that, but it'll eat like a cancer at your own soul. It finally promotes a kind of egocentricity, "I'm right and everybody else is wrong", that is spiritually really, really dangerous.

So therefore what I've wanted to do in most of my books and preaching is to promote the truth as I understand it, to explain the scriptures, to bring glory to Christ. I want people to see his magnificence, I want people to see his glory, I want people to see the sweep of biblical truth. And if they accept it or reject it, there's not much I can do about that. At the end of the day that's in God's hands. But I want that proclaimed out there positively.

So where you start thinking, OK but now its time to say something here. I think this approach to the scripture or this interpretation of the scripture is wrong. You don't want to do it just to score points. But where you think that somehow this is diminishing Christ or diminishing the truth, or its distorting something badly enough that it is actually becoming dangerous. And even there you make a number of judgement calls. There's some slightly screwball ideas that come around every once in a while where quite frankly you shouldn't answer them. Because if you answer them you just actually give them more publicity. Its just foolish to answer them. They have to have a certain kind of weight and a certain kind of popularity before you begin to even think about addressing them.

And even then maybe its time for somebody else to do something or other. So I would say if you're going to offer correction, and you really must, then it needs to be in the framework of a ministry that's first and foremost articulating what the gospel of God really is, joyfully, gratefully, reverantly, thoughtfully, humbly. Christians are never more than poor beggars telling other poor beggars where there is bread. It must not be done with arrogance. Yet at the same time all you have to do is return to the pages of the New Testament itself and see how

often the apostles think that it is necessary to inject a word of correction, even from apostle to apostle, as in Galatians 2. Or re-read Jude and 2 Peter, or Paul when he's warning about false christians who are masquerading as the real Christ when they're nothing of the sort. Those sorts of things are happening all the time. So part of a positive faithfulness in articulating what the gospel of God really is is going to involve something of refuting.

In fact that can sometimes bring clarity. You sometimes don't see really clearly what something good is until you see what its opposite is. And in fact in the whole history of the church you get some clarity of thought on exactly how to confess Jesus is truly God and truly a human being when, in the 3rd and 4th and early 5th centuries, you're getting more and more disputes along these lines and Councils form and they meet and they debate and so on.

And again at the time of the Reformation when there's so much fuzziness about how you really do approach God; "do indulgences get you in?" and that sort of thing. Then there comes to be a lot of debate and back and forth and defending the truth and argument, precisely so you can see what justification is and it isn't.

And the same in more recent centuries over the nature of scripture. It's not that in the early church people didn't have a high view of scripture, didn't believe the Bible was authoritative, didn't believe the Bible was inerrant. You can show that they really did. But they didn't fight over it because everybody believed it. But they were a bit fuzzy on how things worked out. Nevertheless when you get enough people starting to say that something's wrong, or they're taking away from the doctrine, then part of articulating what the doctrine is is precisely being able to say what it isn't. And that inevitably involves some sort of confrontation.

KD: Yeah, that's very wise and I remember hearing a story from Ben Patterson, who was my chaplain at Hope College and is now at Westmont. And he was talking about a wonderful pastor he knew who had a very fruitful ministry, a warm-hearted evangelical man. It was a good church and then he was reflecting that shortly after this man moved on or retired, it didn't take very long before the church drifted significantly, went liberal, the theology went off in a big way and was sort of asking people who knew the situation what happened. How did this, following this man's ... who was an evangelical, warm-hearted, taught us well from the scriptures ... how did this happen so quickly in this church? And I'll never forget what he said. He said "he always told us what was right and he never told us what was wrong." And so there is a time and place where we need to say this is right and because this is right, this is an error. And I think this is maybe one of those times that can be instructive for the church.

We are coming to the two minute warning and I want to just, this'll be dangerous, but see if the pastors here, if we can just go down and maybe end with Tim and give maybe 60 seconds, just speaking to someone who may be here or may listen or watch this. You know there's lots of people who aren't going to be convinced by anything that we're saying. People who are already convinced. But I'm thinking of people who are sort of in the middle and they're just very confused and they've had an affinity for Rob and some of the things he's done and taught. And now they're seeing this controversy and all this very strong criticism come out, and they're just confused what to think, how to make sense of it.

What would you say as a pastor who's in that murky sort of I'm hurt but I don't know what to think about all of this?

SU: I think this form of theodicy is not only rejecting the glory of God, that is people's attempt to justify a holy God. But that its also not very helpful for sinners, who are in need of atonement. And so I would say the last time, we have to search the scriptures to realise that a Holy God does not need to be justified. The Bible says that there are sinners who need to be justified by a Holy God. And so once we're able to see that, then it will ultimately drive us to the cross. Because I think when we get this issue wrong then it, as both you Kevin and Don mentioned already, it diminishes, it subverts the work of Jesus on the cross.

And I would also say that I think this is a wonderful opportunity for there to be correction, because when you look through all of the great ecumenical creeds, the 5th ecumenical creed, Constantinople, or when you look at Paul's letters, the primary occasion for his response to all the churches was false teaching. And so I think this is a wonderful opportunity for us to see that this is what is being stated. So that we will be able to emphasise the finished work of Christ.

KD: Yeah, Crawford give us just a minute on how you would help someone confused in this situation.

CL: Well I don't know if I can say it in a minute Kevin but I think, you know, top line, I'm sitting here thinking about what my kids used to say around the dinner table, when we were having family devotions and they were not plugged in and I'd ask a question, they'd say "the answer's... Jesus?" And I think, and I hope this isn't too simple, but what I would encourage someone who's struggling with these issues, is to push back and write down on a piece of paper the issues that you're struggling with and then go to the word of God. Go to the word of God. God does not have a speech impediment. And go to his truth and ask the Spirit of God to illumine your mind and go to the primary source. The problem is truthfully that we've listened to too many other voices and allowed them to be the sieve by which we pull the truth through. There comes a point when you have to trust the source. Go to it. And then also, you know, read ... your review of the book, there have been other reviews of the book. But go back to the text. That's what I would tell them to do.

TK: I don't think that ... that's a great way to end. I think Crawford's word is the best way to end it. I have nothing to add.

KD: Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly Father, we come to you in a spirit of humility, confessing first of all that we are often proud. We're often proud of what we know, of what we have experienced, of what we have seen. And we of all people who trust in your sovereign, undeserved, electing grace ought never to be proud. And we come with great hope in the power of the gospel, great confidence in the word of God to do the work of God. It will not return void.

We pray that you would stiffen the spines of any here who are wavering, who have become soft. We pray that you will melt the hearts of any who have become hardened, jaded, cynical. We pray for all of those whose work is to proclaim the word, Sunday after Sunday, that they

would leave this conference with renewed vigour and passion and energy to preach the word, knowing that it is in the seed of the word of God that men and women and children will be born again, and that we must be born again if we are to see the kingdom and receive the kingdom.

O Lord give us in these days a gracious, grateful heart, a winsome spirit, a sharp mind and great courage to say and to do what is true. We pray for all those who are confused, that you would instruct them by your word. We pray for any watching, listening, anywhere, that you would bring them to a place of clarity. Bring us all to repentance. Show us where we have de-godded you our God.

And we pray that in all of this we might decrease and Christ might increase and you would, you would counter the effects of false teaching, so that the cross of Christ might not be diminished in any heart, but would be exalted. You have exalted above all things your name and your word. So may it be in every pulpit in this country, every pastor who has authority over the flock, that there would be an understanding and passion for the cross, not just an example of your love, it is, but as the place, the only place, where love won.

Holy love won and it is our great joy to preach it and pray it and sing it and love it with all of our heart. In this is love, that you have loved us and sent your Son to be the sustaining, wrath-absorbing sacrifice for our sins. In whose name we pray. Amen.