

FOREWORD BY RANDY ALCORN

**MARK GALLI**

SR. MANAGING EDITOR FOR *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*

# God wins

**Heaven, Hell, and Why**

**the Good News Is Better**

**than *Love Wins***

**MARK GALLI**

**God  
wins**

**Heaven, Hell, and Why  
the Good News Is Better  
than *Love Wins***



*Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.*  
*Carol Stream, Illinois*

Visit Tyndale online at [www.tyndale.com](http://www.tyndale.com).

*TYNDALE* and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

*God Wins: Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News Is Better than Love Wins*

Copyright © 2011 by Mark Galli. All rights reserved.

Designed by Stephen Vosloo

Published in association with James Stuart Bell at the literary agency of Whitestone Communications, Inc.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ASV are taken from *The Holy Bible*, American Standard Version.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,<sup>®</sup> *NIV*<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011, by Biblica, Inc.<sup>™</sup> Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com).

---

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Galli, Mark.

God wins : heaven, hell, and why the Good News is better than Love wins / Mark Galli.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. ).

ISBN 978-1-4143-6666-1 (sc)

1. Apologetics. 2. Christianity. 3. Love—Religious aspects—Christianity. 4. Bell, Rob. Love wins. I. Title.

BT1103.G35 2011

239—dc23

2011022665

---

Printed in the United States of America

17 16 15 14 13 12 11  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To the Sunday school teacher (whose name I've long ago forgotten)  
at Evangelical Free Church in Felton, California, who first taught me  
at age thirteen that Jesus' words are true because Jesus said them.*

# Contents

Foreword by Randy Alcorn *vii*

Introduction *xiii*

1. The Really Important Question *1*
2. Who Is This God? *15*
3. Becoming One Again *35*
4. The Wonder of Faith *59*
5. The Point of Heaven *77*
6. Hell and Judgment *93*
7. The Bad News: Universalism *113*
8. The Victory of a Personal God *135*

Appendix 1: Discussion Guide *153*

Appendix 2: Further Reading *185*

Appendix 3: Charitable Engagement *189*

Notes *197*

Acknowledgments *201*

About the Author *203*

# Foreword

As a journalist educated at UC Santa Cruz, Fuller Seminary, and UC Davis, Mark Galli is not someone whose résumé screams “intolerant fundamentalist.” Whether it’s meant as a compliment or otherwise, most who know Mark would call him open minded. He doesn’t rush to judgment or hastily draw lines in the sand.

Mark is a big-tent evangelical, but his penetrating critique of Rob Bell’s *Love Wins* is a reminder that even a big tent can be only so big before terms such as *Bible-believing* and *evangelical*, in the historic sense, begin to lose their meaning.

Evangelical churches, both Calvinist and Arminian—while holding divergent positions on baptism, church government, and eschatology—have consistently held the common belief that everyone will go to one of two eternal destinations: heaven or hell.

As a historian and a former editor of *Christian History* magazine, Mark Galli is acutely aware of something many modern authors appear not to grasp: God hasn’t given this generation—so accustomed to opinion polls that want to

know what we think—the luxury of remaking theology on the fly and redefining the gospel.

Mark graciously and skillfully shows how the *Love Wins* version of the Good News is actually bad news. Our culture needs us not to reinforce its soft, malleable, and fleeting worldview but to offer a God revealed, redemptive alternative. Mark's trinitarian emphasis roots the gospel not in personal experience but in God's own nature, which is what ultimately led to his creation and redemptive plan. That's why this book is much more than a critique, and something of a manifesto.

C. S. Lewis warned against chronological snobbery—the assumption that recent viewpoints are better than ancient ones. *Love Wins* minimizes the doctrines of penal sacrifice and substitutionary atonement, ascribing them to “primitive cultures.” In contrast, Galli embraces these doctrines and quotes unapologetically (and in context) Jesus and Paul, as well as Luther, Edwards, and Spurgeon. The gospel he affirms is timely precisely because it is timeless.

Mark's book is built on biblical and historical rock, not cultural sand. That's exactly the needed foundation for a response to *Love Wins*, an attractive book heavy on feelings but light on biblical and historical reasoning.

*Love Wins* asks hundreds of questions but offers few answers. What *God Wins* says about asking questions is worth the price of the book: “There are questions, and then there are questions.” Mark Galli examines the justice questions of Job and Habakkuk, contrasting them with the self-absorbed

questions of Pilate. He quotes God, who says to Job, “Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them” (Job 38:2-3).

Though Christ’s words about hell are clear, emphatic, and repeated, our temptation is to think he didn’t mean what he said. But isn’t the most obvious conclusion that he really did? And that the doctrine of hell isn’t a ballot measure, and God doesn’t give us a vote? Hell is dreadful, but it is not evil—it’s a place where evil gets punished. Something can be profoundly disturbing yet still be moral. Hell is moral because a good God must punish evil.

C. S. Lewis said of hell, “There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of our Lord’s own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason.”\* Dorothy Sayers, another broad-minded Christian, claimed, “We cannot repudiate Hell without altogether repudiating Christ.”†

If we are free to reinterpret God’s Word at will, then it is not authoritative. Christ is not authoritative. I am authoritative. My faith becomes merely a collection of fleeting opinions, always subject to revision. And that is something quite different from historic, biblically grounded Christian faith.

*Love Wins* argues, “God gets what he wants.” Yes, but

---

\* C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 118.

† Dorothy Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante* (London: Methuen, 1954), 44.



what he wants is not limited to everyone's salvation. It also includes justice. The God revealed in Scripture is not a love-only, single-attribute God. Vital as his love is, the seraphim in his presence do not cry out day and night, "Love, love, love is the Lord God Almighty."

Love—as moderns narrowly define it—doesn't win. Rather, as Mark's title so aptly puts it, God wins. And not just any God, but the true God. The Father who is both loving and righteous, the Son who is full of both grace and truth, the merciful Spirit who has the word *Holy* in his very name. God's attributes aren't a menu from which we may choose only what we wish—he is all that he is, all the time.

The issues underlying both *Love Wins* and *God Wins* are, in the end, far bigger than hell. If we can still claim to be Bible believers while radically reinterpreting Christ's words about hell, stripping them of their straightforward meaning, why should it end there? What about Christ's virgin birth? His physical resurrection? His deity? What about moral issues? Why not reject everything we can't figure out? And what would someone have to reject, short of the very existence of God or his Son, in order to no longer be an evangelical Christian?

If the orthodox views on salvation and damnation are up for grabs, then surely virtually everything in the Apostles' Creed is also. Evangelicalism may survive attacks from the outside, but it faces the impending sinkhole of inner erosion. That's why I believe *God Wins* offers help not just for the issues of hell and universalism but also for many other issues the church is already facing, or inevitably will.

This all has profound implications about what it means to speak on behalf of God. Our job is not to be God's public relations manager or make him popular. The Almighty doesn't need us to give him a face-lift and airbrush his image. "But surely it isn't bad to try to make God look good, is it?" The question is, look good on whose terms? God has his own terms. Our task is not to help people see God favorably but to see him accurately. God has the power to touch hearts and draw people to his love and grace while they fully affirm his holiness and justice. It's not either/or but both/and.

God has appointed us to faithfully deliver his message, not to compose and edit it. He has already written the message—it's called the Bible. Who are we to spin it and tame it, or presume to be more loving than Jesus, who with outrageous love took upon himself the horrific penalty for our sin?

God's position is already taken; we need not apply. We do not own the Christian faith. It isn't ours to revise. God's Word wasn't entrusted to us so we could give it away piecemeal, leaving the next generation with the leftovers. If we go on decade after decade parceling out fragments of the faith, what will be left? When we abandon truths Christians once died for, will we no longer have truths worth living for?

Mark Galli clearly grasps the miracle that God's amazing grace delivers us from the hell we deserve. God can and will bridge the gap between himself and people, not through our doctrinal revisionism but through his sovereign grace.

I love the fact that *God Wins* doesn't discourage honest questions but calls on us to go to God's Word for honest

answers. Mark encourages us to recognize the mysteries of God and respectfully bow our knees to his divine authority.

I pray you'll read this book with the knowledge that our churches are at a doctrinal and leadership crossroads, and much is at stake. If our sins aren't big enough to warrant eternal punishment, then perhaps the grace God showed us on the cross isn't big enough to warrant eternal praise. (God forbid that we should believe this.)

We are sometimes tempted to shrink God so he fits inside the borders of our minds. But those are small borders, and he is a big God. There is great comfort in knowing a God who loves me but doesn't need my counsel. The best part about *God Wins*, from my perspective, is that as I read it, God became greater and I became less.

*Randy Alcorn*

# Introduction

IN RECENT MONTHS, a new book has captured the attention of people around the world. In churches and book groups and countless blog posts, folks have been talking about *Love Wins*. Some are intrigued by it; others are infuriated. Whether readers agree with some of it, most of it, or little of it, nearly everyone has a strong opinion about the book. At the very least, it has prompted many Christians to think more deeply about what they believe.

*Love Wins* is definitely a provocative book. The concept of love winning isn't a new insight, but author Rob Bell has a gift for helping us hear it afresh. And he's right as far as that message goes: love *does* win. But, of course, that depends on what you mean by the word *love*. And it depends on what you mean by *wins*. As arresting as that title phrase is, it simply doesn't go far enough. As we dig deeper into God's Word, we discover it is less important that love wins than that God wins. The purpose of this book is to explain that crucial difference.

## Lyrical Preaching

The fact that so many people are talking about *Love Wins* is a great development. In one of the two great commandments of Jesus, he instructs us to love God with our minds.<sup>1</sup> Sparked by this book, thousands of Christians are pondering anew many of the great teachings of the Christian faith. Some who previously thought theology dry and dull have discovered, along with novelist and Christian apologist and writer Dorothy Sayers, that “the dogma is the drama.” And maybe most important, we are rediscovering how crucial theology truly is for the life of the church.

The pastor of a popular megachurch that attracts thousands of people each weekend, Rob Bell is a dynamic and effective communicator. He asks pointed questions that prompt people to think, and he has an instinct for the questions people are already asking. When he starts talking about God’s love or the power of the Resurrection, few can match his dynamism. This is one reason *Love Wins* has taken off and quickly landed on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

*Love Wins* gives readers reason to reexamine the story of Jesus. It sets that story in its largest context, but without minimizing its individual dimension. Rob Bell says it’s true that Jesus came to die on the cross so we can have a relationship with God. “But . . . for the first Christians,” he says, “the story was, first and foremost, bigger, grander. More massive. . . . God has inaugurated a movement in Jesus’s

resurrection to renew, restore, and reconcile everything.” Later he adds, “A gospel that leaves out its cosmic scope will always feel small.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed.

In another passage *Love Wins* waxes eloquent about the grace of God in ways the great champion of grace Martin Luther would have resonated with. The book says the Good News

begins with the sure and certain truth that we are loved.

That in spite of whatever has gone horribly  
wrong deep in our hearts  
and has spread to every corner of the world,  
in spite of our sins,  
failures,  
rebellion,  
and hard hearts,  
in spite of what’s been done to us or what we’ve  
done,

God has made peace with us.

Done. Complete.

As Jesus said, “It is finished.”<sup>3</sup>

And the book ends with a plea no evangelical could argue with:

May you experience this vast,  
expansive, infinite, indestructible love

that has been yours all along. . . .  
And may you know,  
deep in your bones,  
that love wins.<sup>4</sup>

These and many other such passages are true to the gospel and beautiful in their execution. Certainly, there is common theological ground to be found in this book. But it doesn't paint the entire picture of the gospel.

### **Questions and Confusion**

The discussion in *Love Wins* is peppered with numerous questions. And not just any questions, but questions that get at the heart of some of the most theologically troubling issues in the Christian faith. Take just one that is raised at the very beginning of the book:

Of all the billions of people who have ever lived, will only a select number “make it to a better place” and every single other person suffer in torment and punishment forever? Is this acceptable to God? Has God created millions of people over tens of thousands of years who are going to spend eternity in anguish? Can God do this, or even allow this, and still claim to be a loving God?<sup>5</sup>

Who among us hasn't pondered such questions, if not with friends or in church, in the middle of the night as we stare up at the ceiling, unable to sleep?

At other points in *Love Wins*, the reader is assaulted with the seeming contradictions of Scripture. Other times the book raises questions in a way that suggests that no thinking, compassionate person could possibly believe such nonsense. But whatever tone the book takes, it always seems to get at questions that are at the core of our biblical faith.

Unfortunately, Bell's answers are difficult to grasp. Though a compelling communicator, he can be equally as mystifying at times. Some of his arguments lack coherence, and at times no real resolution is sought.

It is true that there will always be unanswered questions when we think about the deeper issues of faith. The Bible is a book full of mystery and wonder. If we find we have created a doctrine of God that makes perfect sense to us, then we're probably no longer talking about the God of the Bible. We are finite and sinful; he is infinite and holy. There are aspects of God's being that we won't ever be able to grasp. We can only say with Paul,

*Who can know the Lord's thoughts?*

*Who knows enough to give him advice?*

*And who has given him so much*

*that he needs to pay it back?*

*For everything comes from him and exists by his power*

*and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever!*

*Amen.*

(ROMANS I I : 3 4 - 3 6)



That being said, there are many issues on which the Bible is much clearer than *Love Wins* lets on. The book does not do justice to the Bible's grand narrative; it is simply not an adequate reflection of the historic Christian faith that has been taught through the centuries. At points, *Love Wins* gets close to grasping the immensity of the Good News, but it never quite gets there. It's like a football team driving down the field and settling for a field goal instead of scoring a touchdown.

### **Great News**

I need to be clear up front about one thing. This is not a book about Rob Bell or Rob Bell's theology. (That is why in referring to ideas in the book, I do so in terms of what *Love Wins* says, not what Rob Bell believes.) This is a book that uses *Love Wins* as a starting point to talk about key theological issues we as a church and as individuals are thinking about today.

My goal is not to merely wrestle with *Love Wins* and the questions it raises. I want to place those questions in a larger biblical context. In the end, I want this book to be a call back to the Good News, which in my view is even better than "love wins." I'd like to invite you to immerse yourself in a gospel that is richer, deeper, and more amazing than we often imagine.

—Mark Galli

# The Really Important Question

THERE ARE QUESTIONS, and then there are questions.

In *Love Wins*, there are lots of questions—eighty-six in the first chapter alone. The book you are currently reading will address a number of them, because they are good questions. But before that, the first thing we need to do is think about the very nature of questions. Because there are questions, and then there are *questions*.

There are questions like the one Mary, the mother of Jesus, asks the angel when he tells her some astounding news. Mary is a young woman engaged to marry Joseph when the angel Gabriel appears to her.

“Greetings, favored woman!” he bursts out. “The Lord is with you!”

Suddenly finding herself in the presence of a messenger of God, Mary is naturally “confused and disturbed.”

“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” Gabriel reassures her, “for you have found favor with God!”

And then he drops the bombshell: “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.” This Jesus, he says, will be very great, will be called the Son of the Most High, will be given the throne of his ancestor David, and will reign over Israel forever in a Kingdom that will never end.

That’s a lot to take in. Most mothers just want to know they’ll have a baby with all ten fingers and ten toes. But what exactly all this means—Son of the Most High? ruler like King David? reign forever?—seems not as perplexing to Mary as one other detail. “But how can this happen?” she asks. “I am a virgin.”

That’s her question, and it’s a good one. A virgin getting pregnant without the help of a man—well, this sort of thing doesn’t happen every day. It’s an honest question, prompted by natural curiosity and driven, not by fear and doubt, but by wonder: how is God going to pull this off?

Mary asked one type of question; the other type was posed by Zechariah a few months earlier. A priest married to Mary’s cousin Elizabeth, Zechariah was an old man at the other end of life and the reproduction cycle when the angel Gabriel appeared to him (see Luke 1:5-23).

It happened in the Temple, as Zechariah burned incense in the sanctuary. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared

before him. “Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear,” Luke’s Gospel says.

“Don’t be afraid, Zechariah!” Gabriel reassures. “God has heard your prayer.”

What prayer? For a son? For Elijah to come to herald the Messiah? For the Messiah to come? We’re not told what Zechariah’s prayer had been, only that it has been heard. This is what Gabriel told him: Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a son whom they were to name John, and this John would be an extraordinary man.

Again, Gabriel piles on the attributes. John will be great in the eyes of the Lord, will be filled with the Holy Spirit—even before his birth—will turn many Israelites to the Lord, will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah, will prepare people for the coming of the Lord, will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and will cause the rebellious to accept godly wisdom.

Again, that’s a lot to take in. And the thing that bothers Zechariah is the thing that bothers Mary: biology. “How can I be sure this will happen?” he asks the angel. “I am an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”

His question seems like a logical one. But it is not a good question. Gabriel chastises Zechariah, telling him in no uncertain terms that he, Gabriel, stands in the very presence of God. Of course God can deliver on this promise of good news!

“Since you didn’t believe what I said,” Gabriel continues, “you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is

born.” The consequence for asking a bad question: Zechariah is made mute. No more questions. Only silence.

So what’s the difference here? The questions are so similar. Why is Mary’s treated with respect while Zechariah’s is an occasion for spiritual discipline? Why does the angel seem indifferent to Mary’s natural curiosity and angry about Zechariah’s?

The difference appears in one little additional clause Zechariah adds to his question. Mary simply asks, “How can this happen?” Zechariah asks, “How can *I be sure* this will happen?”

Mary’s question is about God. Zechariah’s question is about himself.

Mary’s question assumes God will do something good and great, and seeks to know how it will unfold. Zechariah is not at all sure that God is good and great, and seeks proof.

Mary wants to learn more about the goodness of God. Zechariah mostly wants to be self-assured.

As I said, there are questions, and then there are questions.

As these two stories show, questions driven by faith and questions driven by self-justification can sound very similar. Sometimes they can be identical in their wording, but they are not identical in their motives. A question can be grounded in trust in God’s goodness—or it can be a demand for a sign. God is pleased with the former, but not so pleased with the latter.

As Jesus put it, “Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign” (Matthew 16:4). The demand for signs is a demand for proof. It’s a clue that the heart is not

right. It's putting God on trial. We don the judge's robes and climb into the judicial bench, looking down at the accused.<sup>6</sup>

The problem with requests for signs is that they mask unbelief—and ultimately they become an attempt to justify a lack of faith. Such is the case with the theologian described in Luke 10, whose questions prompt Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan. Asked how one gains eternal life, Jesus answers clearly, but the theologian only asks another question because, as Luke notes, “the man wanted to justify his actions” (verse 29).

Questions driven by a demand for signs never cease—and they never satisfy. The unfortunate conclusion in the Gospel of John is, “Despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him” (John 12:37).

The point is that questions are not just questions. There is no such thing as a neutral inquiry when it comes to questions about God.

*Love Wins* is a book running over with questions. In chapter 1, we are presented with questions like

Does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite, eternal torment for things they did in their few finite years of life?

Is there really no hope for someone who dies an atheist?

Is the salvation of others dependent on what we do—that is, our ability to send missionaries to them?

And that's just the beginning. No question asked in *Love Wins* is actually new. Many questions raised in the book were asked in the Bible. But we certainly feel the force of the questions in a new way today.

No matter the questions, here's the point: for some, these questions arise out of a trusting faith. For others, they arise out of a desire to have God prove himself on human terms.

We can't tell which is which simply by listening to the question. What drives the question resides in the human heart. We cannot judge anyone else because we cannot see into their hearts. But when we start asking questions of God, we can look into our own hearts. And we can ask ourselves a couple of hard questions. First, why am I asking these questions? Second, are they grounded in God's goodness or in a desire to justify myself?

Sometimes the answers to these self-directed questions are obvious. Sometimes they are not. Most of the time it's a mix. But given human nature—the heart is desperately wicked, according to Jeremiah 17:9—we can safely assume that the questions are largely driven by a desire to justify ourselves, to put God in the dock, and to don those judicial robes.

This does not mean we don't have any legitimate questions. It does not mean that we are forbidden to ask God anything. God is not threatened by our questions. But when we start asking questions, we are called to begin with a prayer grounded in repentance and humility.

As in, "Lord, help me overcome my unbelief."

Or, even more crucial, “O God, be merciful to me . . . a sinner.”

As James says, “You don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong” (4:2-3).

So before we ask our questions, we are wise to pray for both help and mercy that we will learn to ask with the right spirit.

### **You Call That an Answer?**

People have been asking hard questions since biblical days. But some of those questions have also been answered. Let’s note two of them, and how God answered. It will help us see what we’re up against when we start asking tough questions of the Creator of heaven and earth.

One example comes from the little-read book of Habakkuk. It was written during the brutal Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. This spawned a plethora of violence and injustice, leading to various forms of human misery. When Habakkuk had seen enough, he started to interrogate God:

*How long, O LORD, must I call for help?*

*But you do not listen!*

*“Violence is everywhere!” I cry,*

*but you do not come to save.*

*Must I forever see these evil deeds?*

*Why must I watch all this misery?*



God Wins

*Wherever I look,  
I see destruction and violence.  
I am surrounded by people  
who love to argue and fight.  
The law has become paralyzed,  
and there is no justice in the courts.  
The wicked far outnumber the righteous,  
so that justice has become perverted.*

(HABAKKUK 1:2-4)

After God tells him that because of the sins of his people, things may actually get worse, Habakkuk questions whether the punishment fits the crime:

*O LORD my God, my Holy One, you who are eternal—  
surely you do not plan to wipe us out?  
O LORD, our Rock, you have sent these Babylonians  
to correct us,  
to punish us for our many sins.  
But you are pure and cannot stand the sight of evil.  
Will you wink at their treachery?  
Should you be silent while the wicked  
swallow up people more righteous than they?*

(HABAKKUK 1:12-13)

Or to put it as we might today, in light of all the suffering around us, how can God be just? God's answer to Habakkuk is this:

*Write my answer plainly on tablets,  
so that a runner can carry the correct message to others.  
This vision is for a future time.  
It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled.  
If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently,  
for it will surely take place.*

(HABAKKUK 2:2-3)

In other words, “I’ll take care of the Babylonians in my time. It will all work out in the end. Be patient.”

The answer to Habakkuk’s cry is to be patient? Is that the type of thing a compassionate God tells his anguished people? Apparently. And it’s an answer that Habakkuk accepts at face value: “I have heard all about you, LORD,” he says. “I am filled with awe by your amazing works. . . . I will wait quietly for the coming day when disaster will strike the people who invade us” (Habakkuk 3:2, 16).

### **None of Job’s Business**

As another example, take the champion questioner of God in the Old Testament, Job. He certainly seems to have the right to complain. He has lost his home, his children, his livestock, and his health—everything that was a blessing is gone, and now his life is nothing but a curse. And why? Job can’t spot a single thing he did to deserve his fate. So he cries out to God:

*Why wasn’t I born dead?  
Why didn’t I die as I came from the womb? . . .*

God Wins

*Why wasn't I buried like a stillborn child,  
like a baby who never lives to see the light?*

(JOB 3:11, 16)

*Oh, why give light to those in misery,  
and life to those who are bitter?  
They long for death, and it won't come.  
They search for death more eagerly than for hidden  
treasure.*

*They're filled with joy when they finally die,  
and rejoice when they find the grave.  
Why is life given to those with no future,  
those God has surrounded with difficulties?*

(JOB 3:20-23)

Job pummels God with question after question after question—until God shows up and queries his accuser:

*Who is this that questions my wisdom  
with such ignorant words?  
Brace yourself like a man,  
because I have some questions for you,  
and you must answer them.*

(JOB 38:2-3)

That's the beginning of an onslaught of divine questions for Job:

*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?  
Tell me, if you know so much.*

(JOB 38:4)

*Who kept the sea inside its boundaries  
as it burst from the womb,  
and as I clothed it with clouds  
and wrapped it in thick darkness?*

(JOB 38:8-9)

*Have you given the horse its strength  
or clothed its neck with a flowing mane?  
Did you give it the ability to leap like a locust?  
Its majestic snorting is terrifying!*

(JOB 39:19-20)

And then the clincher question, which leaves Job dumb-founded:

*Will you discredit my justice  
and condemn me just to prove you are right?*

(JOB 40:8)

This is not a very empathetic response. Looks as though God could take a few lessons in grief counseling. But Job tells us that, finally, he is able to trust God.

God Wins

*You asked, “Who is this that questions my wisdom with  
such ignorance?”*

*It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing  
about,*

*things far too wonderful for me. . . .*

*I take back everything I said,*

*and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance.*

(JOB 42:3, 6)

What we see in these two incidents is that God seems relatively unconcerned with giving specific answers to the anguished questions of Habakkuk and Job. He answers them, but not point for point. This suggests that all our questions about God’s wisdom and justice and love may not be all that important to God in the end—or at least not as important as other things.

This doesn’t mean we can’t ask them. In Christ, we have the freedom to speak what’s on our hearts and minds. God isn’t going to cast us from his presence because we ask him some tough questions. It just means that we shouldn’t take our questions too seriously, because apparently God doesn’t take them too seriously.

It may shock us to hear it put that way. We think pretty highly of ourselves and our questions. We think it’s our right to ask such questions and to demand such answers, even from God. But God does not seem to share this view. In the Bible, whenever God is asked a question that throws into doubt his kindness or justice, he more or less refuses to answer. In some

instances he says, “You have no idea what you are talking about.” Or he says, “You’ll get an answer in my good time.”

### **Jesus’ Big Question**

Indeed, there is a deep mystery when it comes to our questions—and yet a deep *mercy*.

All our uncertainties about God’s justice and love are summed up in a single question, the one Jesus asks on our behalf as he hangs from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In this question, all our anguished questions about God’s goodness come together.

Does God forsake us? Is he indifferent to our suffering? Can he be trusted?

Jesus, representing us on the cross, as true man, is asking all that and more on our behalf.

And God’s response?

Silence.

When God hears this question, a question that examines his very goodness, he does not strike back or walk away in disgust. He simply absorbs the question in loving silence. And when our questions require his forgiveness, that forgiveness is available to cover every question we’ve ever asked or will ever ask, especially those questions that are nothing but a demand for a sign or an attempt to justify ourselves.

While Jesus as true man is asking the question behind all our questions—Can God be trusted to be good and just?—Jesus as true God is answering that question with another: “Can you trust and love the God who will die for you?”

As the Cross demonstrates, God takes us seriously. He takes our sin seriously. But he continues to show relative indifference to our questions. He does not answer them to our intellectual satisfaction; he refuses to submit himself to our interrogations.

That's because the really important question in the Bible is not any question we ask of God but the question he asks of us. And though it is appropriate to ponder any number of questions—for this is part of what it means to love God with all our minds—*our* questions must always take a backseat.

They take a backseat to the prayer for faith and mercy, not to mention the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

And they take a backseat to the only question that really matters: “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15).

The answer to that question is revealed on the cross. And until we embrace this answer, none of our questions even make sense, none of the questions raised in *Love Wins* can be properly addressed, and none of the answers the Bible supplies will satisfy. Until we comprehend who God is, all our questions are like chasing after the wind.

So let's see how the Bible talks about this God.

# Acknowledgments

A book of this nature—a “rapid response” book—does not come about except for the hard and quick work of many people. I thank . . .

David Neff, my boss at *Christianity Today*, for giving me space to write a number of online commentaries on *Love Wins*, which helped me shape this response,

Jim Bell, for suggesting my name to Tyndale as the author for this project,

Jon Farrar, who steadily guided the vision for the book through all the Tyndale editorial meetings,

Stephanie Voiland, whose encouragement and expert edits improved the manuscript from cover to cover,

And Barbara, my wife, who let me off the hook from all family chores while I wrote this book!





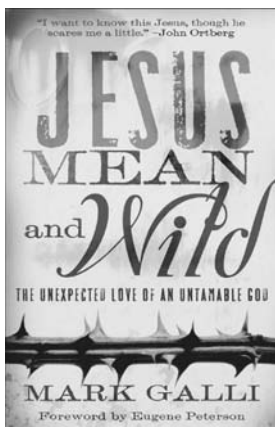
# About the Author

**MARK GALLI** was born and raised in California, received his BA in history from UC Santa Cruz and an MDiv from Fuller Theological Seminary, and did some doctoral work at UC Davis. He served as a Presbyterian pastor for ten years—four in Mexico City and six in Sacramento—before becoming a journalist. He has spent twenty-two years as an editor with the following magazines: *Leadership*, *Christian History*, and *Christianity Today*. Mark has been interviewed on numerous radio shows over the years and has been quoted in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, among others. He has been married to his wife, Barbara, for thirty-six years; has three grown children; and currently lives in Glen Ellyn, Illinois.



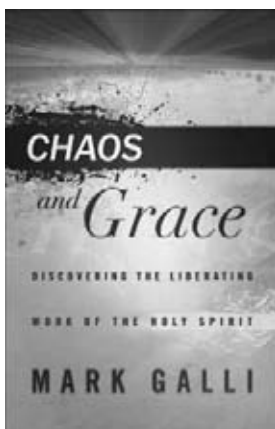
# MORE BOOKS FROM MARK GALLI

---



## *Jesus Mean and Wild*

In this book, Mark shows us that Jesus is not as “meek and mild” as we are sometimes led to believe. By examining the Gospel of Mark, he explains how the bracing words and actions of Jesus are actually demonstrations of his love.



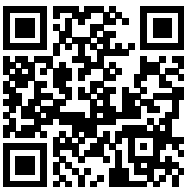
## *Chaos and Grace*

We work to control our time, our TVs, our weight, and even our faith lives. But all that control, we soon find out, is exhausting. *Chaos and Grace* offers readers freedom by reintroducing them to the liberating work of the Holy Spirit—which often comes to us through crisis.

*Releases October 2011*

**SOULWORK** is a biweekly column at ChristianityToday.com, where Mark discusses the implications of the Christian faith for our lives and our churches.

---



Visit <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/features/opinion/columns/markgalli> or scan the QR code.