

## WHY I BELIEVE

### Universalism is Heresy

#### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Universalism (all men are or will be saved) takes many forms and subtly causes many professing Christians to go astray from the Biblical truth of eternal judgment for all men outside of Jesus Christ.
- B. Universalism is heresy and is not taught in the Bible and has been consistently condemned by the historical church. Those who are universalists in the modern Christian church are guilty of believing and propagating false teaching and are condemned by God (Jude 3-4; II Peter 2:11).

#### II. UNIVERSALISTS BELIEVE THAT CHRIST'S DEATH WAS EFFECTIVE FOR THE WHO HUMAN RACE

- A. Introduction: Universalists believe that Christ died as a substitution for the whole human race. If He bore the curse, sin, judgment and damnation of all men indiscriminately, then all men will ultimately be saved. Therefore, the death of Christ is effective for all men whether they receive it or not.
- B. II Cor. 5:19: Universalists believe that Christ in His death has reconciled the whole world to Himself and does not impute (account, reckon) their sins to them. Therefore they will all be saved.

#### ANSWER:

1. Unlimited Atonement: They say that Christ made a provision for the reconciliation of the whole world in a positional sense, but the death of Christ is applied only to those who believe or the elect.
2. Limited Atonement:
  - a. The context clearly says that the world does not have their sins charged to their account. The world

is not all men in general but to all in the world who lay hold of Christ by faith. The term “world” is qualified by the statement “not imputing their trespasses unto them” (cf. II Cor. 5:21).

- b. The context tells us that Christ is not the sin-bearer for all men indiscriminately, for some are reconciled to God (“us” – 5:18) and some are not (“you” -- 5:20).

C. John 1:29: Universalists believe that the death of Christ, God’s Lamb, takes away the sin of all the world, and all men will be saved.

ANSWER:

1. Unlimited Atonement: The death of Christ is provisional for all but applicable only to those who believe or the elect.
2. Limited Atonement: If Christ takes away the sin of the whole world indiscriminately, then all men will be saved. The context is about the Jews who thought that salvation was shut up to the Jews and Gentiles had no part in the blessings of salvation. Jews called Gentiles “dogs” and “the world.” When John the Baptist announced the Lamb of God, he was stating that salvation was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Christ takes away the sin of all in the world who believe or trust in Christ. This is not a pronouncement that all men are saved but a declaration that any man may be saved by trusting in Christ as Savior and Lord.

D. Hebrews 2:9: Universalists teach that Christ tasted death for every man indiscriminately and all men will be saved.

ANSWER:

1. Unlimited Atonement: The death of Christ is provisional for all but works only for those who believe or the elect.
2. Limited Atonement: The word “man” is not in the Greek and was added by the translators for what they felt was a clearer meaning. The Greek text literally says, “Christ tasted death for every” and the word “every” is in the masculine gender. The context, therefore, must determine who the “every” refers to. In Hebrews 2:10 it says that Christ brought “many sons into glory.” “Sons” is

masculine in gender, so we can say that Christ tasted death for every son or every true believer or the elect of God.

- E. I John 2:1-2: Universalists teach that Christ not only propitiated (satisfied God's righteous demands against sin) Christian's sins but the sins of the whole world. Therefore the whole world will be saved.

ANSWER:

1. Unlimited Atonement: Provisional for all but a reality to those who believe or the elect.
2. Limited Atonement
  - a. The "our" refers to the Apostle John and all he was writing this letter to, and Christ is also a propitiation for the whole world; that is His death is effective to all Jews and Gentiles in the world who believe in Christ.
  - b. The term "whole world" must be given a limited meaning to refer to all who believe or the elect. The Apostle John often limits that meaning of "whole world." I John 5:19 on the surface indicates that the whole world is in the wicked one, the devil, but further reflection shows that this is not true for true Christians do not lie in the lap of the wicked one. Therefore this means all in the world except true Christians. Revelation 12:9 says that Satan will deceive the "whole world" in the Tribulation period but we know that the elect of God will not be deceived and go after the devil's scheme. NOTE: The whole world in I John 2:1-2 could refer to all in the world who believe.
  - c. All other passages that mention propitiation limit it to those who have faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; I John 4:10). Therefore, Christ was a propitiation for John and those Christians he was writing to plus all in the world who believe in Jesus Christ.

F. Conclusion

1. Those evangelicals who hold to an unlimited atonement have several problems which logically are unanswerable.

They simply must see two phases of the atonement, one non-redemptive for all mankind and one redemptive for those who believe. Those who hold unlimited atonement must admit a mystery, ignoring the whole concept of substitution. Unlimited atonement opens the door for universalism in a very subtle way. The real issue is over substitution. Did Christ substitute for the sins of all men indiscriminately, bearing their curse, judgment and condemnation as He did for true believers? If so, then the death of Christ does no more for the Christian than the non-Christian. In fact, it does the very same thing for both, and the result is universalism.

2. There is the problem in unlimited atonement of men being in hell for whom Christ died. This would make the death of Christ ineffective in keeping men out of hell. If His death could not keep the unbeliever out of hell, then how does the true believer know His death will keep him out of hell? It seems as though the blood of Christ is wasted and of no power if men are in hell, for whom Christ died.  
NOTE: Those who believe in a limited atonement believe that there was a specific design for the atonement – to save men. They believe that the death of Christ is sufficient for all men but efficient to those who believe or the elect. The death of Christ is potential for all men but actual for those who lay hold of it by faith. The atonement is to be made available to all men through the preaching and teaching of the gospel but Christ's death works only for those who trust the Savior.
3. Another logical problem in the unlimited atonement theory is the matter of unbelief. If Christ died for every sin of mankind, then he must have died for the sin of unbelief, for unbelief is the greatest of all sins. If Christ died for every man's unbelief, then we have universalism. The unlimited atonement advocate must put "unbelief" as a special category, and say that Christ died for all sins except that of unbelief. If He died for every sin except unbelief, then it cannot be said that Christ made a complete and perfect sacrifice for sin. If Christ did not die for every sin of the Christian, then there is no one who is truly saved.

### III. UNIVERSALISTS BELIEVE IN THE FINAL RECONCILIATION OF ALL THINGS

- A. Col. 1:20: Universalists teach that someday in the future all men and angels without exception will be reconciled to God and saved.

ANSWER:

1. One possible way to view Colossians 1:20 is to see it as dealing with the universe in general. The word “reconciliation” means “a complete restoration back to a previous state of harmony.” The whole universe of things both material and spiritual, shall be restored to God sometime in the future based on the death of Jesus Christ. The universe is somehow out of harmony and joint because of sin and will be set right because of Christ’s death. The “all things” refers to inanimate things and creatures also, and it may or may not refer to men because the reconciliation of men is definitely mentioned in Col. 2:21. This reconciliation involves “things in heaven” and “things in earth.” This reconciliation will free the earth from the curse of sin (Rom. 8:19-23). It will also purify the heavens, for apparently at least a portion of heaven needs to be cleansed because Satan sinned in heaven and one-third of the angelic hosts followed Satan in his rebellion (Isa. 14:12-15). We know that the death of Christ somehow does cleanse heavenly things (Heb. 9:23). NOTE: If this verse refers to men as well as things, then it refers to the “all things” God chooses to reconcile and He does not choose to reconcile sinners who have not Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Notice also that the words “under the earth” are not used here in Colossians as in Phil. 2:10-11. It is obvious that Colossians is not dealing with the destiny of the wicked. NOTE: The Bible does teach universal subjugation of all men to Christ in eternity, for even the wicked will acknowledge Christ’s Lordship when suffering the pangs of an eternal hell (Phil. 2:9-11), but the Bible does not teach universal reconciliation of all men indiscriminately to God.
2. Another possibility is to accept a limited meaning of “all things,” and make it refer to the redeemed in heaven and the redeemed on earth. The death of Christ guarantees the final reconciliation of all the redeemed of all time. NOTE: Scripture does not contradict itself. Reconciliation is not referred to in relation to the sun, moon and stars, for they do not need to be reconciled. Animals have no need to be reconciled. Good angels do not need to be reconciled and bad angels cannot be reconciled, for they are confined to an

eternal hell (Matt. 25:41; II Pet. 2:4). Nor does it mean all men in general, for the Bible teaches elsewhere that all men are not reconciled to God (cf. Lesson #18). NOTE: The “all things” therefore refers to the multiple-missions of people that God chooses to reconcile through the death of Christ.

- B. Eph. 1:10: Universalists believe that in the eternal state all things, including persons, will be gathered to Christ and all men will ultimately be saved.

ANSWER: This context is about true believers in Christ. In the eternal state, God will gather the elect or redeemed of all ages to Himself, and Christ shall be the Head of the redeemed people of God.

#### IV. UNIVERSALISTS HAVE BEEN AND ARE CONDEMNED BY THE CHURCH

- A. Origen, a third century church father, set forth his views on the ultimate reconciliation of all men and angels. He did believe in judgment after life but held to a “short hell,” believing that men would have to spend time in hell for the bad works they did but would finally be released. His concept of hell was remedial, not penal. NOTE: Origen’s views were condemned as heretical by the church at the second Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. Since that time until just recently most of the Roman, Greek Orthodox and Protestants have rejected universalism.
- B. Universalism was never a problem among the Reformers but some Anabaptists during this time were committed universalists and were condemned by the orthodox Protestant Church.
- C. All cultists are universalists in one form or another – Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, Unitarians, Mormons, etc.
- D. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, all liberals and modernists have been universalists, and they are widely scattered throughout many denominations. This most subtle error is modern day neo-orthodoxy which speaks of God’s loving all men and His electing all men in Christ. Christ was a substitute for all the sins of all men and all men are saved whether they know it or not. The task of the Christian is to go tell men that they are already saved in Christ and they should yield to God’s love (so say modern day liberals). If men accept God’s love, they will enjoy God much more in this life but all men will accept God’s love in eternity. They maintain that the Christian knows and acknowledges that he is reconciled; the non-Christian does not know it

– yet. NOTE: The true Church is so doctrinally weak that it cannot muster enough strength to really put down modern day heresy. Universalism, however, needs to be condemned for what it is, Heresy!