

UNIVERSAL SALVATION IS NOT A BIBLICAL TEACHING

This teaching is really a reaction to the blasphemous teaching that God tortures the incorrigibly wicked for eternity in flames of fire. So Universalism promotes the idea that God will finally save everyone who has ever lived because:

1. It is His desire that everyone will be saved and so they will be saved.
2. God allows **no genuine human free will** and so all individuals will eventually repent.
3. Christ's sacrifice ensures the salvation of absolutely everyone who has ever lived.
4. Salvation will be accomplished through a refining process of all individuals.
5. Certain Scriptures using the phrase "all men" indicate the all-encompassing nature of salvation.
6. God's love and mercy will extend to the incorrigibly wicked because God is all-forgiving.

NOTE:

- Some Universal Salvationists even propose that Satan and the demons will finally be saved.
- The majority of Universalists assume the unbiblical Gnostic concept of an immortal soul as part of the human constitution.

It is the purpose of this study to show from the Scriptures that all the above views are not biblical and that the finally unrepentant and incorrigibly wicked will be destroyed – i.e. suffer extinction/annihilation as has been demonstrated in Study 7.

The key passages of Scripture appealed to by Universalists are: Romans 5:18; 1Timothy 2:4; 4:10; Colossians 1:20; 11:32; Ephesians 1:10; and 1 Corinthians 15:22. There are other Scriptures which express the same or very similar thoughts to these.

1. DOES GOD'S DESIRE FOR EVERYONE TO BE SAVED MEAN THAT THEY WILL BE SAVED?

❖ Paul speaks of "...God our saviour, who **desires all men to be saved...**" (1Tim. 2:3, 4). However, later in this letter, he speaks of "harmful desires which plunge people into ruin and **destruction**" (1Tim. 6:9, 10). So God's desire does not mean that He will force salvation onto people who don't want it and Peter shows what God wishes for:

❖ "The Lord is...patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish** but for **all** to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

*These statements demonstrate, not that God will save all men, but that he impartially desires to do so; it shows the scope of His purpose in salvation and that He has provided the means through His Son to do so—He has brought "salvation to **all** men." In other words God makes an offer to all individual humans that will be either accepted or rejected by them. So while it is true that God wants everyone to be saved, yet He recognizes the fact that many will not finally respond even though He will exercise His patience, justice and love to the greatest extent possible for everyone to have their complete opportunity. A person has to willingly do what is right because:*

❖ "God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man that fears him and does what is right is welcome to him" (Acts 10:34, 35). *But won't everyone do what is right in the end.*

2. ARE HUMANS DENIED GENUINE FREE WILL?

The denial of genuine human free will is a major plank in the proposals of Universalists. They require this so that humans have no control over their final destiny. However, such a denial of free will is contrary to biblical statements and examples:

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

Because man is made in God's image he demonstrates God's qualities, although in lesser measure. So because God obviously has free will so, too, must man although to a lesser extent.

HUMAN CHOICE

❖ "Come now, and **let us reason together**, 'Says the LORD...'" (*Isa. 1:18-20*).

No one can engage in reason without making choices between differing opinions, options or courses of action.

❖ "So **choose** life in order that you may live, you and your descendants" (*Deut. 30:19*).

❖ "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by **his own desire**" (*Jas. 1:14*).

Unless there is genuine choice for people such statements are mere sham and so must be deceptive.

(Please see STUDY 10. THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT HUMANS HAVE GENUINE FREE WILL). So clearly, the free will of humans is genuine and therefore some will choose a direction in life that will be disastrous for them as for example the Pharaoh of Egypt. Such hard heartedness is daily evident and so, even when confronted with all that God offers some will reject it. Basically if the denial of genuine human free will by God were true it would show his lack of respect for his human creation and they may just as well be automatons.

3. DOES CHRIST'S SACRIFICE ENSURE SALVATION FOR EVERYONE

❖ "He is *the propitiation* for our sins, and not for ours only but also **for the sins of the whole world**"
(*1 John 2:2*).

However, this does not mean that all individuals would accept and appreciate this free gift. The gift must be received by faith (John 3:16).

❖ "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more **those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness** will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted *condemnation to all men*, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted **justification of life to all men**. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One *the many* will be made righteous. The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"
(*Rom. 5:17-21*).

Because of human genuine free will the grace and the free gift may be rejected:

❖ "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there **no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will *consume* the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses **dies without mercy** on the evidence of two or three witnesses. **How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God**, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (*Heb. 10:26-31*).

Therefore, the "resulted **justification of life to all men**" in Romans 5 refers to all who receive the free gift and don't later reject it. There would be no point for the writer of Hebrews to have penned the above words if everyone was eventually to be saved. Also the teaching by some Universalists that even Satan and the demons would eventually be saved cannot be true because Jesus' sacrifice was offered **only on behalf of the world of mankind** and therefore could not possibly cover all the evil sins committed by Satan and the demons.

4. WILL SALVATION BE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH A REFINING PROCESS OF ALL INDIVIDUALS?

THREE VIEWS OF "THE LAKE OF FIRE"

1. Eternal torment
2. Destruction (annihilation)
3. A process for the refining of individuals (on the purgatory principle)

Universal Salvationists teach that God will finally save everyone who has ever lived. The mechanisms for this are that that God allows no genuine human free will and so all individuals will be refined, purified, repent and be saved at a future time, whether wish it or not. "The lake of fire" in the book of Revelation is viewed by them as depicting the process of the refining. However, Universalists confuse the way fire is generally used for destruction with the fewer occasions when it does concern refining. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the lake of fire is never presented in the Scriptures as being used for refining.

THE LAKE OF FIRE IS NOT A PLACE OF PURIFYING

Throughout the Scriptures fire is used figuratively in several ways:

- As descriptive of certain strong **emotions** (e.g. love and anger).
- As a symbol of **destruction of the wicked**—a fire that consumes. This is its major usage.
- As a symbol of **trials of Christians** which result in cleansing, purifying and refining. This usage is comparatively quite minor. The following passages are examples:

❖ "...For *he is like a refiner's fire* and like fullers' soap. *He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will **purify the sons** of Levi and refine them like gold and silver...*" (*Malachi 3:2, 3*).

In this case the Messiah is being compared to fire that is for testing precious metals. The fire is not being used on combustible materials and so consuming them as with the burning up of chaff or weeds and turning them into ashes (Matt. 3:12; 13:30b, 40; Mal. 4:1, 3; and Heb. 10:26, 27). Peter gives a similar picture of the refining of God's people:

❖ "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various **trials**, so that the **tested** genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold **that perishes** though it is **tested by fire**—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (*1 Peter 1:6, 7*).

❖ "Beloved, do not be surprised at the **fiery trial** when it comes upon you **to test you**, as though something strange were happening to you" (*1 Peter 4:12*).

Here, Peter compares the testing of faith by trial to the purifying of gold by fire. Again the fire is not being used on materials that would be "consumed" by burning, such as chaff or weeds that get burned to ashes.

ILLUSTRATION OF HOW FIRE TESTS MATERIALS

❖ "Now if anyone builds on the foundation with **gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw**—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed **by fire**, and the fire will *test* what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (*1 Cor. 3:12-14*).

The application of this passage has always been a little difficult. However, the most likely application is:

MATERIALS USED FOR BUILDING THE CHURCH

- *Enduring materials*: Pure Christian teaching based on the good news of the Kingdom & the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12).
- *Combustible materials*: The wisdom of the world—philosophies which mislead believers

THE “LAKE OF FIRE” REFERS TO DESTRUCTION

The “lake of fire” is acknowledged by most biblical scholars to mean the same as Jesus’ term *gehenna*. It is also defined as being “the second death.” So Jesus speaks of:

- ❖ “...the fiery Gehenna” (Matt. 5:22b) and “the one who can **destroy** both soul and body **in Gehenna**” (Matt. 10:28).

Whereas, John adds that “the cowards...portion will be in **the lake that burns with fire** and sulphur, which is **the second death**” (Rev. 21:8). However, from the fact that it is defined as being “the second death,” along with other details concerning **the lake of fire** it is evident that it refers to the permanent cessation of life i.e. destruction, rather than to trials which purify.

5. DOES THE PHRASE “ALL MEN” INDICATE THE ALL-EMCOMPASSING NATURE OF SALVATION?

Universalism is partly based on certain Scriptures concerning the phrase “all men” and the idea that God’s mercy will extend to the incorrigibly wicked because God is all forgiving in spite of the failure of the wicked to repent. Initially the following text certainly gives an all-encompassing impression concerning salvation:

- ❖ “Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for **all** people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for **all** people.” (Rom.5:18 NIV).

However, it is the context which determines whether or not this is an absolutist statement or not as seen later in Romans. Acknowledging the difficulty of this passage commentator C.K. Barratt states that:

One is to suppose that when Paul says “all men” he means ‘all men who are “on Adam’s side” and ‘all men who are “on Christ’s side”’. All who (with Adam) choose to sin will be condemned; all who (with Christ) choose righteousness will be justified. The other way out of the difficulty is harder to state but more probably true. There are two ways of looking at men. They may be considered ‘in Adam’...members of a race which has cut itself off from its creator and wages war against him...But it is also possible to see mankind ‘in Christ’, the new Man. Men are then clothed in a righteousness which is not their own, and in virtue of it they can and will be justified.

The Epistle to the Romans p.109.

Also please note that verse 19 says “the many were made sinners” and “the **many** were made righteous.” So it appears that Paul does not mean all absolutely in verse 18.

WHEN “ALL” REFERS TO TWO GROUPS

- ❖ “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy **on all**” (Rom. 11:32). In the context of Romans 11 the “all” is a reference to the two groups of ‘Israel’ and the ‘Gentiles’ which Paul has been discussing. Here Paul does not intend to make a pronouncement about the ultimate destiny of each individual man.

WHEN “ALL” REFERS TO DISCIPLES ONLY

- ❖ “...since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to **all whom** you have given him.” (John 17:2).

- ❖ “For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ shall all be made alive**. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death”

(1 Cor. 15:22-26).

The phrase “in Christ” means **in union with or in association with Christ** and so does not include those who, using their free will, finally reject him.

SALVATION IS OFFERED TO ALL MEN

The following 'universalist' passages declare the scope of God's universal saving purpose, but not the fact of universal salvation for every human:

- ❖ "...the grace of God has appeared, **bringing salvation to all men** instructing **us** to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11). This is a further text with a limiting "all men" phrase, because the "**all men**" in this verse are evidently Christians – "us" because of "the grace of God" working in their lives. Just because God is "bringing salvation to all men" it doesn't mean that all will accept it. Again does Jesus force people when he says:
- ❖ "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will **draw all men** to Myself" (John 12:32).

This is not some kind of forced 'drawing' of people, but is by kind persuasion which may be rebuffed and rejected by some.

- ❖ "For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, especially of those who believe" (1Tim. 4:10).

The Adam Clark Commentary says concerning 1Timothy 4:10:

[God] has provided salvation for the whole human race, and has freely offered it to them in his word and by his Spirit. What God intends for ALL, he actually gives to *them* that believe in Christ, who died for the sins of the world, and tasted death for every man. As *all* have been purchased by his blood so all may believe; and consequently all may be saved. Those that perish, perish through their own fault.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary states that: "To interpret this in terms of universal salvation would be contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture." So the above three Scriptures merely make the same point that is made in 2 Peter 3:9, namely that God wishes all to be saved and makes salvation available to all. Yet not all will finally respond to the offer because it is not possible to bring about reconciliation of those who are unwilling. Hence, God is **potentially** the saviour of all men, and **actually** the saviour of believers as in the case of the jailor: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31.). Note also John 3:16 John 3:18 and 1 Peter 4:18.

UNIVERSAL HONOURING OF GOD AND CHRIST

Philippians 2:10, 11:

"...that at (*in*) the name of Jesus **every knee should bow**, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that **every tongue should confess** that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Hard Sayings of the Bible states:

...but it is not a willing submission nor a salvation. It is the confession of defeated enemies...but all of the promises are made to the people who have believed on Christ...In fact, in Ephesians 2:1-13 it is clear that those who do not believe in Christ are in a bad place: "objects of wrath...without hope and without God"

p. 653.

The David Guzik commentary states that:

Paul does not imply by this a universal salvation, but means that every personal being will ultimately confess Christ's lordship, either with joyful faith or with resentment and despair.

Because such acknowledgement by bending of the knee to Jesus may be made quite unwillingly, i.e. not from the heart, such unwilling ones would not be saved. Also the fact that God will make Messiah's "enemies a footstool for [his] feet" (Ps. 110:1) shows that not everyone willingly submits to Christ.

Ephesians 1:9, 10:

“And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to **bring all things** in heaven and on earth together **under one head**, even Christ.”

The bringing of “**all things** in heaven and on earth together **under one head**, even Christ” does not mean that everyone willingly submits to Christ as shown by Psalm 11:1 where God makes Messiah’s “enemies a footstool for [his] feet.” Please note the earlier quotation from *Hard Sayings of the Bible* on p. 653.

Revelation 5:13:

“And **every creature** which is in heaven and on the earth and **under the earth** and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

The phrase “*of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth*” is a conventional phrase used to express the universality of the proclamation. Hence, this verse concerns the fact that **the lordship of Christ is to be universal** and not that all individuals who have ever lived will be brought within the blessings of Christ’s salvation.

So when all the above passages are viewed in context it is evident that they do not posit the concept of universal salvation. Furthermore, they should not be viewed in isolation from the rest of Scripture. The following passages bring balance to one’s understanding of the subject of salvation:

RECONCILIATION OF THE WORLD

❖ “Now all things are of God, who has **reconciled us** to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ **reconciling the world to Himself**, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation”
(2 Cor. 5:18-19).

❖ “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him **to reconcile all things to Himself**, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, **if indeed you continue in the faith**, stable and steadfast, **not shifting from the hope** of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister” (*Col. 1:19-23*).

*So the reconciliation is on the condition that one must “continue in the faith...not shifting from the hope. If all individuals were certain to be reconciled to God there would be no need for Paul to say: “We implore you on behalf of Christ, **be reconciled to God**” (2 Cor. 5:20).*

God’s love and mercy will extend to the incorrigibly wicked because God is all forgiving.

5. DOES GOD’S LOVE AND MERCY MEAN THAT HE IS FORGIVING OF UNREPENTANT PEOPLE?

THERE IS ONLY A CHOICE FROM TWO FINAL DESTINIES

- ❖ “I...**set before you life and death**, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life...” (*Deut. 30:19*).
- ❖ “Enter through *the narrow gate*; for the gate is wide and the *way is broad* that leads **to destruction**, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the *way is narrow* that leads **to life**, and there are few who find it” (*Matt. 7:13-14*).

DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED

- ❖ "...the wicked...are doomed to **destruction forever**" (Ps. 92:7).
 - ❖ "And do not be afraid of those who **kill the body** but not the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can **destroy both soul and body** in Gehenna" (Matt. 10:28 NAB).
- Those holding Universalist beliefs argue that when Jesus said that God "**can** destroy both soul and body in Gehenna" that it doesn't mean He will do so. This argument is ruled out because of the many Scripture statements showing that God will destroy the wicked e.g. "The wicked will be no more" (Ps. 37:10) because "their end is their **destruction**" (Phil 3:19).

Please see STUDY 7: DESTINY OF THE INCORRIGIBLY WICKED.

HUMANS MUST ALSO DO THEIR PART TO GAIN SALVATION

Salvation involves two parties—the giver of the gift namely, God, and the willing receiver of it:

- ❖ "...by [God's] **grace** you have been saved **through** (your) **faith**; and that not of yourselves, it (*the having been saved*) is the gift of God; not as a result of works (*i.e. without God's grace*)" (Eph. 2:8, 9).
 - ❖ "... (you) **work out your own salvation** with fear ... for it is **God** who is at work in you, both to will and to work" (Phil. 2:12, 13).
- Yet God does not force the gift onto anyone, but rather He attempts to kindly persuade us.

THE FIRST STEP—RESPONSE TO JESUS' KINGDOM MESSAGE (WORD)

- ❖ "I must preach **the kingdom of God** to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43).
- ❖ "My mother and my brothers are these who *hear the word of God* and **do it**" (Luke 8:21).
- ❖ "...blessed are those who *hear the word of God* and **observe it**" (Luke 11:28).
- ❖ "If any one loves me he will keep *my word*...the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me" (John 14:23).

The word of God is the kingdom message as shown in Jesus' parable of the sower/seed (Matt.13:18-23; Luke 8:10-15). So the moment one believes the kingdom message, one is born again and has hope:

- ❖ "...unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).
- ❖ "For we are saved in **hope**" (Rom. 8:24).

THE NEXT STEP

- ❖ "...**baptism**...the appeal to God because of a good conscience" (1 Peter 3:21).
- ❖ "...just as you have always **obeyed**..." (Phil. 2:12).
- ❖ "He became to all those who **obey** him the source of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9).
- ❖ "...a man is justified by works and not by faith alone...faith without **works** (obedience) is dead" (James 2:24, 26).

So after one has put faith in the kingdom message one gets baptized (fully immersed) in water and obeys Jesus which includes refraining from what is bad and engaging in Christian works. None of these things would be done by the incorrigibly wicked who have no faith in God or Christ.

FURTHER OBJECTIONS TO THE UNIVERSAL SALVATION TEACHING

1. God's justice demands that individuals **pay for their sins**. In some cases the **unrepentant** sinners

sins are grave enough to demand the depriving him of his life. If this was only temporary it would be no worse than the depriving of life of an innocent person due to human miscarriage of justice, an accident or natural causes. Furthermore, Mark 3:29 speaks of “an everlasting sin” i.e. one that can never be forgiven.

2. The Universalist claim that God will eventually forgive everyone runs counter to a number of Scriptures concerning **unforgivable sin** e.g.:
 - ❖ “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit **will not be forgiven men**. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it **will not be forgiven him**, either in this age **or in the age to come**” (Matt. 12:31, 32).
3. The large volume of *exclusion language* in the Scriptures dwarfs the minimal apparently Universalist language, which in any case is seen in context not to be genuinely Universalist. E.g. “will not see life” (John 3:36), “will go away into everlasting punishment (*Lit. lopping off*)” (Matt. 25:46).
4. Those holding Universalist beliefs argue that when Jesus said in Matthew 10:28 that God is “the one who **can** destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” that it doesn’t mean He will do so. This argument is ruled out because of the many statements in Scripture, listed in Study 3, showing that God will destroy the wicked e.g. “For though **the wicked** sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to **destruction forever**” (Ps. 92:7). “The wicked will be no more” (Ps. 37:10) because “their end is their **destruction**” (Phil 3:19).
5. Furthermore, as with Calvinism, the Universalist theory means that there would be little point engaging in preaching so that individuals could become reconciled to God because they supposedly will be made to eventually.

SALVATION IS ONLY FOR THE BELIEVING RIGHTEOUS

- ❖ “...whoever does *not believe* is **condemned already**...” (John 3:18).
- ❖ “If *the righteous* is scarcely **saved**, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”
(1 Peter 4:18).
- ❖ “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in Him shall **not perish**, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Paul and Silas said to the jailor in Philippi:

- ❖ “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

There will be those who will be consumed in the metaphorical fire:

- ❖ “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there **no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that **will consume** the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26, 27).

Yet the Wicked are just not going to believe and be saved.

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