

# Is There Universal Salvation?

***It is the position of some that ALL of Humanity will ultimately be brought to Salvation; That none will End their Life Experience Ultimately being excluded from an Eternal Existence by being burned up in a 'Lake of Fire'.***

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The Christian world, since the second century at least, has been exposed to the idea referred to as 'Universal Salvation', which effectively disallows any ultimate 'second death' experience <sup>1</sup> for the vast majority, and with some cases, for anyone!

Recognizing that the purpose for the post-millennial resurrection from the dead is to provide an era of opportunity for salvation to those who died not having had a real chance before their deaths, a segment of the Church of God finds certain appeal to the idea that it is the destiny of all of mankind to ultimately become absolved of all sin, despite a lifetime of ignorance of and, even for a time, deliberate rejection of provisions made for their reconciliation with God.

■ We'll need to consider this matter in regard to the subject of sin and particularly the unpardonable sin,

■ We'll need to consider this matter in regard to how this impacts the idea of predestination,

■ We'll need to consider this matter as it regards the subject of Gehenna: the Lake of Fire,

■ We'll need to consider this matter in regard to the reality of incorrigible wickedness.

Now, the belief of Universal Salvation as held in some Catholic persuasions may not have particular relevance to us. We have doctrinal areas that have no place in their teachings and some of theirs' no place in ours! But this author has an awareness of our teachings to a large degree.

So what you will be reading below is a position of a person in the Church of God, (with a fairly

high name recognition), who advocates the idea of Universal Salvation. I think it important that we consider the matter and resolve in our minds what is true and what isn't.

Much of the logical basis of those who hold this position is largely dependent upon the meaning of the word 'all'. When we take that simple word to mean *all without exception*, we are forced into a structured logic that disallows what other clear scriptures reveal. We need to take care how we regard this small but potent word.

In the alternate lighter typestyle below, this 'Universal Salvation' supporter makes his case. First, I will present his comments in full as written, without comment, then following each paragraph, responding with point-by-point commentary on his several considerations.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:**

"In verse 22-28, Paul makes a strong statement for universal salvation. In verse 22, he states: "For as in Adam *all die, even so* in Christ *shall all be made alive*." [Emphasis added.] Checking a Concordance confirms that the Greek word used in the Bible for "all" often means "all." However, Paul's wording is very clear on the matter. He says that the same percentage of people that "died" in Adam will be made alive in Christ. The words "even so" show Paul is making a direct linkage between the percentages of those who "die" in Adam and those who will "live" in Christ. We all know that "it is appointed unto men once to die" (Hebrews 9:27). There is no question that the percentage of humans who die is 100%. Paul says the same percentage will ultimately "live" in Christ.

This presents an interesting study in logic, reflecting a subtle leap across a rather indefinite

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<sup>1</sup> Request the article "Defining the Second Death".

chasm. It is true that all die (a physical death, irrespective of ones' spiritual state), but to then take that word all and use it to mean the identical thing (being fully inclusive) in any other case demonstrates a cognitive disconnect. It is also true that all who are in Adam will die, and all who are in Christ will be made alive, it does not indicate that the all in one place is the same number of individuals or all the same individuals as mentioned in the other. To say that would suggest all (100%) will die as Adam's progeny did or will, and the same 100% will live as Christ lives, exposes the conundrum of taking that position. No! Those who are "in Christ" will be made alive, but that doesn't mean all of humanity irrespective of their spiritual situation.

The very next point this author makes contradicts his premise. Notice: "...*afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.*" The TIME when these who are "in Christ" will be made alive occurs AT His coming! We then are introduced to a LIMITED "all". Only those who have become converted and who overcame to the end are to be made alive. The being made alive statement refers to only those who are raised in the first resurrection. The wicked or unconverted will NOT be raised at that event.

"In verses 23-24, Paul adds: "But *every man in his own order*, Christ the firstfruits, afterward *they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end*, when he shall have deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power." Paul repeats himself in verse 23 that "every man" will be saved (this also is a "100%" assertion), but Paul makes it clear that not everyone will be saved at the same time. He says "every man" will be saved "in his own order" (i.e. Successive resurrections). Christ was the firstfruits to be resurrected alone, then a group of mankind will be saved "at his coming" (the first resurrection), and then Paul refers to "the end" when every-thing opposed to Christ is overturned. We have understood "the end" to be the White Throne Judgment when all mankind (who has ever lived) is resurrected to a second, human lifetime (Rev. 20:5, Ezek. 37:1-14). I agree with that understanding."

The End referred to is not the White Throne Judgment, as that is a period of time in which those who are resurrected after the millennial age are restored to complete their physical lives. The White Throne period lasts at least a generation. This era provides the deceased with what they didn't have in their original lifetimes. The actual "end" as it regards a final determination of each individual's status is the Final Sentencing event, which is illustrated in the "sheep-from-the-goats" scene, described by Christ Himself in Matthew 25:31-46, the judgment of all nations. To realize that there are many who are consigned to death (the goats) at that late point in time would, in itself, strongly refute any universal salvation idea. Notice, the goats do not ultimately come to salvation. (This is not the period of opportunity anyway!) They are NOT assigned the same destiny as those regarded as sheep!

"In verses 25-26, Paul continues: "For he [Christ] *must* reign, *till he has put down put all enemies* under his feet. The *last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.*" Paul here essentially asserts that Christ "must" reign until everyone is saved; till nothing is left to reconcile. It is especially vital that Paul said the very last enemy to be destroyed *is death itself!* As long as any human beings remain "cut off from God" in a deceased and unconscious state, "death" still reigns over those lives. If anyone remains unsaved, "death" has defeated the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for those lives that remain cut off from God and "death" still reigns as an entity to be reckoned with. It is only when "every man" is saved that death ceases to exist and is "destroyed."

To equate conquering the power of death by means of everyone being saved challenges all logic. What makes that equation? To hold to such a position would require that there is no-one who will ever be denied eternal life. Such a view disregards the many clear scriptures that there WILL BE people assigned to the Lake of Fire, that there is an unpardonable sin from which there is and can be no forgiveness, not in the present age nor in the age to come. (See the article/booklet which addresses that question.)

The manner in which death (the final enemy (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 15:26)) is conquered is achieved by means

of the extinction in the Lake of Fire all of the wicked. With that completed, the institutions of death and the grave will themselves be consumed. (Rev. 20:14). After the Final Sentencing event, there will be no physical humans left capable of a physical death. All who remain alive will have been made spirit beings by that point in time. That is when the Kingdom will be turned-over to the Father.

"In verse 27-28, Paul makes it clear that the word "all" means everything that was ever created. Only God the Father himself shall not be under Jesus Christ and his redeeming power. These verses indicate that Christ ultimately delivers to the Father the entire redeemed creation as a complete package. When Paul says Christ "must" reign until "every man" is saved and "all enemies, *including death itself*" is destroyed, Paul does not put a time limit on the White Throne Judgment. It will, apparently, take as long as it takes. In terms of symbolism, the Last Great Day of the Feast of Tabernacles is the same length of time (24-hours) as all other Holy Days. If we see the Feast of Tabernacles as a seven-day event picturing the 7000 year plan of God for mankind (represented also by the seven day week), the 8th Day (the Last Great Day) could also picture another 1000 year period of time as it is the same length of time as the other seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles. As I'm sure this list realizes, now is not the only day of salvation (Paul made that very clear in the scriptures cited above). When Jesus Christ decides it is time to save everyone in the White Throne Judgment, and he has a vast number of other resurrected saints to help him, who will be able to stand against his will?

This too is not what is understood or meant by the illustration. The seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles do not represent 1000 years each, but represent 1000 years all together. The Last Great Day is defined as the remainder of lifetimes allotted to those resurrected in the second resurrection. These do not procreate, and they do not live-on another 1000 years. As they approach the ends of their resurrected lifetimes, the rest of the dead who are still in their graves, the righteous and wicked together (sheep-with-the-goats) will then be raised to stand with them for

Final sentencing. This is that event referred to as "the End" when all who have ever lived are Sentenced to either Life or Death in the Lake of Fire.

It would be appropriate to clarify here that the wicked, who spurned their opportunity for salvation in their first lifetime, are not raised in the second resurrection with those who never had opportunity.

### **Christ's Parables on How Many will be Saved:**

"Christ addresses the subject of how many he intends to save in two parables in Luke 15:3-10. The first pictures mankind as sheep and Christ as the shepherd. This parable shows that Christ is not going to be satisfied with saving only 99% of the sheep, but rather will keep going till all 100% is saved. The parable's language, like I Corinthians 15, leaves the time for doing this open-ended. The shepherd will hunt for that last 1% "until he find[s] it." The second parable repeats the same theme. Christ shows he will not be satisfied with a 90% "saved" ratio, he will go on hunting for what is lost until he has "found" 100%.

This disregards other potent affirmations Christ made to the contrary. What is the Lake of Fire for if there is to be no-one to be consigned to it? Paul describes the condition of those who turn from the heavenly gift once they are blessed to have received it.<sup>2</sup> Seeking out the wayward individual, a member of a limited flock, does not suggest all others are His sheep. Have we not understood the saying, "Many are called but few chosen"? Such an idea would contradict Christ's own pronouncement that those who "would not that He should reign over them" would be absolutely slain in His presence!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 6:4-8. "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*"

<sup>3</sup> Luke 19:27

The real point of this example is to seek out and rescue one of His own sheep, who wandered off. It does not imply that all are His sheep. Such a statement as we read in John 17:2; 17:9; 17:12 and 18:9 would be irrelevant if ALL were His sheep. There is a clear distinction between those the Father gave Him for salvation and those who are not so called. Again, this illustrates the concern for just those who are of His flock, and that not all are such!

### **Explaining the "Unpardonable Sin":**

"The passage in Matthew 12:31-32 states that there is a sin which "shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." This sounds pretty strong in favor of the "annihilation" argument until the underlying Greek wording is examined. The Greek word translated "world" is not "kosmos," but rather "aion," which means an "age, dispensation or indefinite period of time" according to my copy of *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. In Ephesians 2:7, 3:5, 3:21 and Colossians 1:26, Paul uses the same Greek word "aion" and in these instances the KJV translators rendered it in its literal sense as the word "age" or "ages." Paul confirms that there is a series of "ages" in the past and a series of "ages" in the future. We derive our English word "Eon" from the Greek word "Aion" to describe a long period of time which has an indefinite length. In Matthew 12:31-32, let's re-read that passage in its literal sense: There is a sin which "shall not be forgiven him, neither in this *age*, neither in the *age* to come." Notice this curse of a sin being "unforgivable" **does not last for "all future ages."** It is limited to only one (singular) additional age after our current one. <sup>4</sup> This fits perfectly with prophecies about the White Throne Judgment. Whoever commits the sin of Matthew 12:31 will be "unforgiven" (cut off from God) for the remainder of this "age" and the "age" after this current age. In other words this curse is time-limited. It lasts the rest of our current age and during the next age, which is the Millennial rule of Jesus Christ--a 1000 year period of time. The curse of Matthew 12:31-32 *expires at the end of*

<sup>4</sup> This is exactly opposite of the scripture. It disallows any chance of forgiveness for this particular sin. It shows that the same offense can be committed in the age to come as well as the present age, and is unforgiveable in either age.

*the millennium*, just in time for the resurrection of "all the dead" in the White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:5), during which Jesus Christ has stated he intends to save "all men" and "100%" of mankind.

This would make Christ's specific statement ineffective. It isn't a matter of forgiveness only in some later age, it is a matter of never being afforded forgiveness, as is stated. What would have been the point of such a warning, if those being warned, and who were not being converted at that time, would be forgiven in the final age of human experience, the second resurrection era? This line of reasoning assigns people who spurned their opportunity for salvation to a second chance, which isn't to be extended to them. Only those who were not afforded opportunity will experience the second resurrection in the Great White Throne Era. Those that Paul wrote about, who fall away, spurning their salvation in this age (or in the millennial age for that matter) are not afforded a restoration to physical life in the second resurrection! Those remain in their graves awaiting the resurrection to sentencing at the very end. Their anticipation, as Paul is clear about, is to experience a fiery indignation which is to devour them. (Hebrews 10:27) There is NOT a reversible situation with those who ultimately spurned salvation.

"In the Bible, we sometimes see the phrase "eternal damnation" or "eternal fire" (i.e. Mark 3:29 and many other New Testament locations). The word "eternal" in these usages comes from the Greek word "aion" again. These passages should be translated "*age-lasting* damnation" which gives them the same meaning as Matthew 12:31-32---a time-limited period of damnation, not an endless one.

Are you comprehending this? This pronouncement effectively cancels the idea of condemnation altogether. What does 'temporary damnation' mean to people who are and have been dead in their graves for most of time? This attempts to suggest they are NOT dead, awaiting judgment, as so many biblical teachings reveal. Not the least of which is in Hebrews 10:26-39. If there is no further sacrifice for sin, as Paul insists, then on the basis of what could their sin be forgiven?

What is perdition anyway? (v. 39) What IS the “second death” which will be the destiny of many people? Do we understand the scene and message of Revelation 14:17-20? There’s an article available that explains this scene, which graphically describes the Final Sentencing event.<sup>5</sup>

### **Consequences of Sin:**

“Does this mean sinners and rebels are free to sin as much as they want because “God will save them anyway in the future?” No way! God says we will all “reap what we sow.” The more a person sins in this lifetime, the more punishment they will receive in the White Throne Judgment (WTJ). God does not believe in “tube socks justice” (i.e. “one size fits all”). The Bible repeatedly teaches that there will be variable punishments for sinners in the WTJ. <sup>6</sup>Matthew 12:41-42 indicates some groups of people will have worse punishment than even the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah. Luke 12:47-48 shows that sinners will receive “stripes” (punishment) according to each person's level of knowledge in what they did in this life. Those who sinned knowingly and willingly will receive a large punishment. Those who sinned without evil intent will have a minimal punishment. Also, God's application of punishment in the WTJ can be ameliorated by the love one shows in this age toward others. Many people who will not be in the First Resurrection have done things which are noble, good and liberating to others. God says “love covers a multitude of sins” (I Peter 4:8), so those who have shown much love to others in this life may end up with hardly any “punishment” at all. On the other hand, those who sin much will have a brutal time of it in the WTJ.

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<sup>5</sup> Revelation 14 presents the Harvests of the World. Verses 1 thru 5 picture the first resurrection, the first harvest of humanity. Verses 6 thru 13 explain the opening of the Gospel message to all remaining humanity at the onset of the Millennial Age. Verses 14 thru 16 skips ahead to the Final Sentencing event, showing the White Cloud harvest, involving the reaping for God’s Family all those converted after the Second Coming, while the remaining four verses of the chapter picture the unconverted paying the penalty for their own sins by the shedding of blood (their own) and being burned-up, which is executed by the two angels assigned to this task.

<sup>6</sup> This supposed “variable punishment” applies to those who are saved, but who may have offenses on their record. It does not apply to those condemned to death.

Here we encounter a fundamental conundrum and contradiction of biblical theology. Scripture clearly assigns death as the consequence (wages) of sin. This author suggests a ‘slap-on-the-wrist’ in varying severity during the White Throne Judgment is the ultimate penalty for sin and the rejection of Christ’s sacrifice. Incidentally, the WTJ is not a punishment period. It is an opportunity period only for those who died without having had a real opportunity. It will be a time, without Satan’s influence, when the unevangelized will be brought to a full knowledge of the Truth. Such opportunity will not preclude a successful outcome in every case. Take for example those who side with Satan at the end of the millennium and join his army. (Rev. 20:7-10)

With those realizations, we should be able to see the fundamental error of this thinking.

“One such person is the “rich man” in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man” (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man obviously knew about the laws of God as he and all his brethren knew about the books of “Moses and the prophets” (verse 29). This rich man had much biblical knowledge, but he cared nothing about the poor and needy (personified by “Lazarus”) in this life. In the next life, the rich man is “afar off” from where Abraham and the beggar are living (verse 23), and the rich man is in torment. But note the “flame” (or “fire”) that torments the rich man does not burn up the rich man's eyes, tongue or anything else. “Fire” is used as a symbol for the trials and tests that Christians go through now (I Peter 4:12, Rev. 3:18). <sup>7</sup> The rich man is going “through the fire” of reaping what he sowed in this life and he is tormented by it!

There are many misconceptions about the story of the Rich man. It illustrates the state of the dead, and rehearses the event of the resurrection, with different people being seen in different situations. The man’s torment is more mental than physical, as is evident by his concern for his brothers. He doesn’t anticipate or ask for a better future, but

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<sup>7</sup> Fire is shown having a purifying effect on individuals undergoing refinement, but a consuming effect on those worthy of death. To assign one reference to another is distorted reasoning. Did God create Gehenna fire for nothing?

that is a story of consequence not addressed in this particular narrative. Request the article on this subject.

"For some hardened sinners who come up in the WTJ, it may take a very long time of fiery trials to induce repentance by them. Such sinners would likely prefer to simply be instantly consumed in a Gehenna Fire as that would be virtually painless. However, those who have inflicted much suffering on others cannot escape the judgment that they must "reap what they sowed" in this life. They can't escape it by dying easily and quickly. Those who have tortured others will themselves be tortured in the WTJ. Those who have swindled and cheated others in the WTJ may be sold into slavery to others to work off their debts in the WTJ. Anything is possible. Remember the warning in Hebrews 10:31. (Steve Collins)

### **Purgatory Nothing!**

What we're seeing here is a picture reminiscent of a "purgatory-like" environment: Coerced conversions! Physical punishment does not provide any means of remediating sin. I can't confirm how much of this treatise is drawn from Catholic sources, referred to in an opening paragraph, but there seems to be a certain component. Apparently, the awareness of the millennium, the second resurrection and the Great White Throne judgment period is newly folded into the subject as it might relate to Catholic explanations. Nor does it factor-in the true dynamics of repentance, which Catholic Theology also doesn't fully represent.

Serving out ones' punishment term only serves a form of payback through suffering of varying degree. It doesn't equate with conversion, which is the necessary achievement for being awarded eternal life in the Family of God.

Would we remotely accept the idea that a person must experience a certain amount of suffering, in this life, in proportion to their offenses, in order for them to be considered a candidate for conversion and ultimate salvation? If not, then why would the idea achieve any traction as though it was how things would work in the post-millennial age?

### **A Seriously Flawed Premise**

The entire premise of Universal Salvation is faulty in that it disregards the actual mechanisms of repentance and conversion. It sidesteps how the penalty for sin is actually paid and the commitment accepting that gift requires. It dismisses the many scriptures that describe the punishment that will be meted out upon the disobedient, rebellious and incorrigibly wicked. As shown above, most scriptures that deal with the consequences of sin and just punishment for sin, are turned around and given an expiration date. Effectively, condemnation is only temporary under this author's explanations.

As we can see from the many references to the destruction of the unconverted wicked in the Lake of Fire, involving great numbers of individuals, such a premise as this should be incredible. Just for example, the massive numbers to experience Gods' Wrath as we read in Revelation 14:20 should counter these ideas.

### **Basic Reconsiderations**

Let's review a few scriptures that there remains space for to conclude this topic:

*"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Dan. 12:2)*

*"For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." (Luke 19:26-27)*

*"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Rev. 21:7-8)*

While there is to be a near-universal opportunity for salvation, there will not be a universal result. There will be individuals who are ultimately failures in their quest along with a few who despise their Creator to the end!

