

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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UNIVERSALISM DISAVOWED

The word "disavowed" can mean "to deny any knowledge of," or it can mean "to deny any approval of or connection with." My readers will know that I do not use this word in the first meaning given above, as I claim to have a fair knowledge of all forms of universalism, whether it be called universal salvation, universal restoration, or universal reconciliation. In the more than sixty years that I have been publicly teaching the Bible, I believe I have come upon every form and theory of universalism that exists in the theological and secular world.

In the past fifty years I have given special attention to the universalistic teachings of the late A. E. Knoch, teachings which he and his followers denominate as "Universal Reconciliation." I carried on a correspondence with him during his sojourn in Germany just before the second world war. I have known many in our own country who followed his teaching, being a constant burden to many of these who could never understand why I could not and did not accept their line of teaching.

As I plan to write several studies on different aspects of universalism it seems best that in order to clear the air, for me to make a full disavowal of all universalistic teachings and tendencies. All previous attempts to connect me with universalistic teachings have been false and completely devoid of any truth.

In this study I will set forth three major Biblical reasons for disavowing universalism; which at the same time will be set forth as reasons why all who believe the Bible to be the word of God should take the same stand.

My first reason for disavowing and rejecting all forms of universalism is based upon a simple statement made by Paul in Philippians 3: 19 concerning certain false teachers, whom he describes as "the enemies of the cross of Christ," and says of them, **"Whose end is destruction."**

It is simple logic to conclude that if "**the end**" of even one man is destruction, the end of all men cannot be salvation.

Objections to this conclusion are anticipated. Some will say that the Greek word for "end" does not mean "ultimate destiny," and with this I agree, but it does mean "end," a fact that is clearly established by its usage. They would have us believe that the word "end" here signifies only a dire parenthesis in the experiences of these men, and that destruction is not their end. It is said that this passage deals with the service of the saints in Philippi and merely discloses that their works shall be destroyed. They tell us that the word "destruction" here means "lost," and the threat is that these will lose the wages which should be theirs for their service. This is an "interpretation in desperation," a desperate attempt to rescue their jerry-built doctrine of universalism from the one passage that denies it without qualifications.

While it is true that **telos** may be used in different ways depending upon its context, yet the moment it is given a context its meaning is fixed by the concept to which it has been related. Consider this in Heb. 6:8 where it is said of "thorns and briars" that their "**end (telos) is to be burned.**" If this does not mean the finality of these bushes, then what does it mean? Consider also the two occurrences of *telos* in Rev. 21:6 and 22:13, where we find our Lord saying: **I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.**"

My second reason for disavowing all forms of universalism is based upon the nature of the divine punishment that certain transgressors will receive as set forth in Isaiah 66:24 and Mark 9:44,46,48. The declaration, "**For their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh,**" sets forth an unchanging situation and reputation into which they came as a result of their own transgressions, which makes them an object of abhorrence to all mankind. Notice that the Word speaks of "their fire" and "their worm" (singular and personal).

The metaphorical meanings of "fire" and "worm" in these passages must be learned from Scripture. Psalm 97:3 reveals that when "**the LORD reigneth,**" which is after "**Yaweh has become King**" (as Rotherham translates it) that, "**A fire goeth before Him and burneth up His enemies round about.**" This is evidently highly figurative language. The fire is the divine verdict of guilt which precedes the destruction of His adversaries. Any verdict of guilt that results in destruction will never be quenched, or reversed, or altered.

"Their worm" is not some crawling insect. No worm is immortal. A man's "worm" is the reputation which he brings upon himself because of his transgressions. Messiah, in a prophetic utterance said of Himself: "**But I am worm and no man; a reproach of men and despised of the people.**" (Psalm 22:6). This was the reputation He brought upon Himself when He who knew no sin was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

He used the word "worm" in speaking of the unjust punishment that was inflicted upon Him. Crucifixion was by the Romans not used simply to put a man to death but to malign, vilify, and defame. For three days and three nights our Lord was under the calumny of being an executed malefactor. This was, in all probability so written in Roman and Jewish civil records concerning Him. But this worm died. God raised Him from the dead and has highly exalted Him.

But of those cast into gehenna, their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched. No stronger words could possibly have been used to express the unchanging character of the verdict that was pronounced adverse to them, or erase the perpetual blot that their transgressions laid upon them. They will not be saved, restored or reconciled. They have been destroyed. God, the only being that is capable of truly forgetting anything, will blot them from His memory. There will be no appeals, no reversals, no mistakes of judgment. The Judge of all the earth will have done right.

My third reason for disavowing universalism is found in the words of our Lord concerning Judas Iscariot. The Biblical report concerning this man is: "He was a thief." Stealing was his habitual way of living. It was his primary interest, and it is for this habitual iniquity that he will be adversely judged. A reputation as a thief is the "worm" that the Bible lays upon him, and this worm will never die as long as the Bible stands. See John 12:6.

Concerning Judas, the Lord Jesus said: "**The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed: It had been good for that man if he had not been born**" (Matt. 26:24).

Our Lord would never have said this if there were any truth in the doctrine of universal salvation. If it were true that all would sooner or later be saved, restored, or reconciled it would never have been said that "it would have been good for that man if he had not been born." A. E. Knoch admits the truth of this. In the notes of his *Concordant Version* he says: "If it were well for Judas if he had not been born, then there can be no justification of all mankind (Rom. 5: 18) or reconciliation of all creation (Col. 1 :20). If he is ultimately justified and reconciled it is well that he has been born."

The reader will see from these two versions that they differ very little from the KJV with the exception that Knoch capitalizes "Him," making it refer the Lord Jesus rather than Judas. This forces the passage to say that it would have been good for Christ if Judas had not been born. To capitalize the pronoun in this passage makes it wholly a matter of interpretation, not of translation.

To interpret this passage as declaring that it would have been good, ideal, or well for the Lord Jesus if Judas had never been born is to make it repugnant to some of the plainest truth to be found in the Bible. Let those who hold this theory tell us just how or in what way it would have been different or better for Christ if Judas had not existed.

In order to accept such an idea it will be also necessary to accept the idea that Jesus was at the mercy of Judas, and that at the time our Lord was betrayed He stood on the brink of great success which was upset by the perfidy of one man. To accept this idea one would have to think that the Lord Jesus could not interfere with Judas' plans and make this dastardly betrayal impossible.

Some are inclined to imagine that the Lord and His disciples were constantly hiding from the Romans and the Temple police; and that if their secret hideout had not been told by Judas He would not have been arrested, tried, and put to death. The New Testament records deny all such ideas. Not one thing would have been different for the Lord Jesus if Judas had never existed.

When He was arrested and Peter sought to defend Him, He ordered Peter to put away his sword, saying: "**Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels**" (Matt. 26:53).

At the same time He said to those who arrested Him: "**Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves to take Me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on Me.**" (Matt. 26:55).

These words are sufficient to show that the betrayal of Judas had little to do with the Lord's apprehension and arrest. The thirty pieces of silver bought no information that was not freely available. It bought a betrayer. It would have been better for Judas if he had never been born.

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