

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 EXAMINED

The word UNIVERSALISM in this title is not an epithet. No stigma or disparaging sense is attached to it in these studies. It is a simple and honest designation given to any doctrine which holds that all men will eventually be restored to the favor of God. By the use of this term no attempt will be made to lump into one category all the various doctrines which teach the ultimate restoration of all men to God. There are many forms of universalism, each one using a different system of reasoning to prove the ultimate salvation of all men.

As an independent teacher of the Bible, which I fully believe to be the verbally inspired Word of God, and a writer on Biblical subjects for many years, I feel I have come upon and had direct dealings with individuals holding every form of doctrine covered by the term universalism. And while I can say that I have never agreed with any of these, I have never been guilty of becoming angry with them, abusing them, or hurling epithets at them. No person who has ever approached me with their ideas of universalism can say that I failed to treat him or her in a courteous and Christian manner. This same spirit will prevail throughout these articles, even though some very plain speaking will be done on this subject.

In order to keep my own thinking straight in regard to the many theories that have come to my attention, it has been necessary for me to separate those who hold these theories into four or five groups. The first group we will look at is a denomination called *The Universalists*.

This is not a name that I have given them. There is a definite group of people in the United States called *The Universalist Church of America*. Many of my readers will remember the imposing edifices of this denomination in Grand Rapids, Michigan and Rockford, Illinois. My contacts with the members of this group and an examination of their literature revealed that the early leaders and their followers had never made any

real attempt to discover what the Bible taught about the nature and duration of future punishment, but had simply turned en masse from the horrible doctrine of eternal conscious torment to the more comfortable belief of the universal salvation of all men. In doing this they adopted a view called "the universal fatherhood of God:" and very low views of the saving work of the Lord Jesus. They held without apology that Jesus Christ was nothing more than a good and great man.

They based their belief in universal salvation upon the fact of God's love for all men, and upon their own ideas of His universal fatherhood. "A God of love will never permit any of His creatures to be lost:" was always their confident assertion. "We can depend upon the Father to take care of all His children" was another cliché they repeated over and over. What the Bible had to say about the future destiny of certain men made no impression upon them. They believed that the Bible *contained* a revelation from God, and they felt at liberty to ignore any part that did not agree with their concept. I accused them of believing that all men will be saved because they had decided that this is the way it should be.

Another group of considerable size that crossed my path were designated as *Universal Restorationists*. They made much of Acts 3:21 which they used as the epigrammatic argument for their view. They believed in future punishment, but held that it was remedial in nature, and that consignment to the lake of fire was for purification. They believed the Bible to be God's Word, but they failed to see that "the restoration of all things:" spoken of in Acts 3:21 is limited to "what God has spoken" in the Old Testament. No statement of "universal restoration" can be found from Genesis to Malachi. The transgressors mentioned in Isaiah 66:24 are never to be brought out of the state of destruction that has engulfed them. "Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched:" is the divine statement as to the permanency of their state. The destruction of the wicked is the testimony of the Old Testament.

A third group of universalists might well be designated as *Racial Salvationists*. These reject the idea that Satan and all other fallen creatures will be restored to God, but they hold firmly to the idea of the ultimate salvation of every member of the human race. They make much of Romans 5:18 and I Corinthians 15:22, passages which will be carefully examined in later studies, *Deus valente*.

There is a fourth group of universalists *who* are commonly designated as *Universal Reconciliationists*, a name by which they often characterize themselves. This group goes the very limit in believing in the complete restoration to God of Satan, demons, fallen angels, and every member of the human race. The late A.E. Knoch, translator of *The Concordant Version* and long-time editor of the magazine *Unsearchable Riches* was the able and zealous advocate of this form of universalism. **In** fact, he is the originator of this form of universalism, even though in its final analysis it is nothing

more than a new development of the ancient teaching of Origen, the earliest advocate of universal restoration of all to God. Woven into Mr. Knoch's system are many ancient philosophies in regard to the nature of the universe, the nature of good and evil, and fatalism. These ancient idea]), in a refined and developed form, he vigorously supported by his own understanding of the Word of God.

In presenting his view of *Universal Reconciliation* Mr. Knoch always had the advantage of having his own version of the New Testament to back it up. Many of his followers give to his version all the authority which should be given only to the inspired original. They are quite sure that it is the final word in regard to the true rendering of the New Testament. They are greatly encouraged in their feeling of its infallibility by the claims that he made for it. He insisted that his methods placed the work of translation on such a permanent and scientific basis that "the probability of error is reduced a hundred fold." An advertisement of this version proclaims:

"Varying versions and differing doctrines now compel every true lover of God and His holy Word to search the Scriptures in the original. Hitherto this could be done only by Greek scholars. Now it is easy for all who know English. A safe simple system enables everyone to go past the opinions and traditions of men right back to the inspired writings. Why untangle discordant versions by means of laborious helps and constant corrections, when the mere use of a concordant version will give far greater results with much less effort? This is what students of the Scriptures have always needed, a method of transferring God's thoughts into English, down to the most minute particulars, uniformly, consistently, by a system conforming to the fundamental laws of language. Other translations are filtered through human minds that do not even claim to comprehend what they translate. The *Concordant* is the only version which recognizes and bridges human fallibility, and translates beyond the compilers knowledge. Others never could escape the bias of man or men who did the work. This version is bound to be better than the best human interpretation:"

Having made use of the *Concordant Version* for more than fifty years, I feel that most of the claims made in the above quotation are somewhat exaggerated. There never was a time when searching the Scriptures in the original could be done only by Greek scholars. No one else has yet found an unquestionable method for transferring God's thoughts from Greek into English down to the most minute particulars. The *Concordant Version* does not bridge human fallibility.

Many of Mr. Knoch's followers accept without question his claims for his version. If these claims were true, it would seem that a version could be produced that would contain no errors and need very little revision. However, if a comparison is made between the 1930 edition of *The Concordant Version* and the 1944 edition it will be found that hundreds of important changes have been made. Why so many changes should be necessary in a version that claims to have bridged "human fallibility" is a puzzle to me.

I would be the last man in the world to criticize a translator or expositor for making changes, no matter how radical, when things are seen in a clearer light. However, when one puts forth a translation of the New Testament, and claims that it has been produced by some scientific method that makes errors almost impossible, he leaves very little room for change or corrections.

It is not my purpose to enter into an examination of the *Concordant Version*. Nevertheless, I do want to say that after long and careful examination, I do not think that it is the very zenith of accurate translation. I consider it to be nothing more than just another version of the New Testament, very good in some places, very weak in other places, and utterly impossible in some passages. Its improvement over other versions is seen in the consistency with which it translates the same word in every occurrence. For example, *psuche* is always translated "soul:" never "heart:" "life:" or "mind:" as in the King *James Version*.

Mr. Knoch was accused by many of slanting his translation in order to give support to his teaching of universal reconciliation. He vigorously denied this, but it seems there may be some ground for this accusation when a comparison is made between the 1930 edition and the 1944 edition. In the earlier edition the word "universe" is found four times in Colossians 1:16 to 20. In the later edition, probably due to the severe criticism this received, the word "universe" was changed to "all:" The early version reveals his bias. And it provided his followers with an argument that they use over and over again. The later version wipes out this argument.

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