

UNIVERSALISM REPORT

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1. List the points relating to the subject on which most of the group agrees.

a. Universalism is sustained by two lines of thinking. For those who adhere to biblical authority, appeal is made to several texts which speak of God's desire for all men to be saved. A second basis of this theory is philosophical, an appeal to the love and justice which rendered unthinkable the idea of hell. The appeal to Scripture is weak on two counts. It uses Scripture relatively, finding the mass of biblical evidence pointing to the lost estate of some (Luke 16:19ff; Matt. 25:31ff; John 3:36; John 6:14; Acts 14:6, etc.). Hermeneutically it fails to take into account the context of those passages which speak of God's desire for all to be saved. In each case the lostness of some is found in the immediate or larger context.

The appeal to the character of God is not usually linked with biblical exposition based on commitment to the authority of Scripture. Therefore we do not find it compelling. However, we do not allow the charge that biblical teaching on the eternal lostness of men is irrational or contrary to God's character in any way. Among many evidences addressing were the following: (i) men are condemned for rejecting the light they have (natural, revelational), not for failing to respond to light they do not have; (ii) punishment would be in line with the amount of light rejected (Luke 12:47a); (iii) the possibility of separation from God is the inevitable result of God's love. He created man in his image with potential to reject his loving fellowship, not as robots programmed for obedience. Forced love is not true love; (iv) those who do respond to God's mercy will receive justice. God will deal justly with all; (v) those who remain disobedient to God cannot be included in the fellowship of the obedient. This would be injustice for the obedient and for the disobedient, loving to neither.

Therefore, we conclude that universalism cannot be supported from Scripture and is heresy.

b. The Scriptures do make a universal offer of salvation to all men. When Jesus Christ took the sins of the world upon himself on the Cross, he made the gift of salvation available to all (I Tim. 4:10; II Pet. 3:9; Rom. 5:18). It is through this salvation and this salvation alone that men can be justified before God and reconciled to God (II Cor. 5:19; Rom. 3:22,26; John 14:6). This does not mean that all men are reconciled to God, but only those who, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, repent and put their faith in Christ.

c. God has ordained that men shall be saved through the proclamation of the Gospel. And, in our understanding of Scripture, they would not be saved if the Gospel is not preached to them. This is a major reason for the Church of Jesus Christ to go preach the Gospel that men might receive him and become responsible members of his church.

d. We cannot accept the new universalism which stresses that God is reconciled to all men because of Christ's sacrifice and, therefore,

saved. Man is regenerated and justified only by faith in Jesus. Without saving faith, man is ignorant of God's righteousness and is separated from God (Romans 3:28; 4:5; 10:4; 10:13; Eph. 2:12). Only through believing in the merits of Christ as Savior can man have eternal life (John 20:31). The Bible teaches that those who neither know God nor obey the Gospel will not experience the glory of God in eternity (I Thess. 1:7-9).

e. We urge those who believe in universalism to re-examine their positions and evidences, change their opinions and join us in the global task of reaching all men everywhere with the Good News of salvation.

f. Although we reject universalism categorically and say fearlessly that we believe in both heaven and hell, we do not hold this view lightly but with deep sorrow and a broken heart. We are aware that it is totally inconsistent to maintain this belief without a deep sense of responsibility to do all in our power to present the Gospel to all men and urge them to believe. We confess before God that evangelicals have been too ready in the past to leave the task of evangelism to the few and not consistently to match faith with deeds. "It is not the will of God that any should perish but that all should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." (II Pet. 3:9). It is urgent that we see that all receive the knowledge of this saving truth.

2. List of major questions being asked relating to this subject.

a. Will everybody be ultimately saved?

b. What about the difficult passages of Scripture that seem to suggest universalism e.g. Philippians 2:10, 11; Romans 5:18; Romans 11:32; I Tim. 4:10; Col. 1:19, 20; Eph. 1:10?

c. What are the implications of universalism to world evangelization — e.g., if all people would ultimately be saved, would we have to preach?

d. What would the nature and form of punishment be? Would it be everlasting, or would it be in the form of annihilation? Can a God of love allow everlasting punishment?

e. What about those who die in infancy?

f. What about those who are mentally retarded?

g. What about those who have never heard or known of Christ in their lifetime?

3. Compile answers to the major questions asked. We feel that some of these questions are covered under section 1 of this report.