

# Universalism Examined And Universalism Disavowed

## UNIVERSALISM EXAMINED & UNIVERSALISM DISAVOWED

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(Otis Q. Sellers (1901-1992) worked The Word of Truth Ministry, and these two articles are from a series he named Seed & Bread.

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□□□□ 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. **IMAGE: Otis Q. Sellers.**

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 ideas, 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, the word *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.

## 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.

The ***Word of Truth Ministry*** has continued after Mr. Sellers' death, and you may check their website at [www.seedandbread.org](http://www.seedandbread.org) which contains a lot of fine Bible Teaching, even audio files etcetera.