

## Universal Salvation : (Excerpt from Salvation in Hell p 103-107)

*Definition:* The notion that a merciful God will eventually break down and forgive everyone, including Satan.

This idea requires the salvation of the dead, in fact most people will have to be reconciled to God this way because very few have any idea how this can be done in life. I don't either. Historically, it is the belief in the justice of God (theodicy) that has empowered thoughts regarding salvation for the dead as a logical necessity of universal salvation.

*Apocatastasis* – returning to stasis, is a theory based on 1 Corinthians 15:28 “And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all”. This posits a general return to stasis and original order of the universe as it was but this is not scriptural. It would make the death and resurrection of Jesus irrelevant if everything was just going to fix itself in the end. The time of restitution of all things<sup>i</sup> is after judgement not after a blanket pardon.

Origen espoused this concept in the early Church along with Gregory of Nyssa and others. It was eventually rejected because it threatened the relevance of the Church on earth. Why bother to live a moral life on earth if you will be forgiven and get the same reward as moral people after you die? There is little reason for people to make their choice for or against Jesus while they live if they will eventually be forced to receive Him anyway. This line of thought frees them from the restrictions of the Law which would otherwise constrain them in life. It is a concept that is against the Church (the necessity of preaching) and against the Law of God.

Origen posited universal salvation (even for Satan) based upon the mercy of God but God is love and love requires a freely made choice with the possibility of rejection. Mercy is not greater than love. He also suggested a limited punishment of the wicked (rejecters of the gospel) based on merciful justice. “They will not get out until they have paid the last penny”<sup>ii</sup> is the text on which he based this thesis. This text deals with human wisdom and justice not God's. Also, as St Augustine pointed out, if punishment is limited then the blessings of Heaven must be limited also. Blessing that is not eternal is no blessing at all. Punishment (which is the reciprocal of blessing, exclusion from God's presence), goodness and glory must share that same characteristic of ‘eternity’.

Romans 11:32 is often quoted as a Biblical reference for universal salvation. “For God has concluded them all (the Jews) in unbelief (in Jesus), that He might have mercy on all (Jews at the last and non-Jews now).”

Such an interpretation is not consistent with justice. The non-Jews, now so favoured in the interim, do not have the guarantee of their salvation, only the right to have that offer presented to them. Likewise, the Jews, once the blindness is lifted “shall all be saved”.<sup>iii</sup> This does not imply that every Jew will be *forced* to accept Jesus (as universal salvation would require). That would be an abrogation of their free-will. All Israel will be free to have the gospel presented to them without any hindrances to their acceptance of it.

The offer of salvation in Hell, the Lord is now revealing, does not operate by removing free choice, rather it upholds and completes the freedom of choice and will. This offer is only made to those who have never been presented the gospel. Those who choose not to decide about the gospel they have heard and even those who have decided to avoid hearing the gospel so as not to be required to follow the dictates of Law, have already made a decision and are not qualified to hear the offer again.

This is not a petty withholding of privilege by God. Scripture tells us that it is a natural process of the human nature and heart. Once having heard, or deciding not to hear the gospel so they won't have to obey it, their heart becomes ‘hardened by unbelief’.<sup>iv</sup> To choose not to choose is a choice. The longer this choice is in place the firmer a hold it generates in our hearts, hardening them to the truth of the gospel. We are who we are now, even after death. Death does not make us different, tender hearted towards God. God is just and a respecter of our free will. He will not force us to change our hard hearts in Hell. Such souls do not qualify for salvation anymore because they have decided. They have chosen their god.

Universal salvation is unjust. It allows no place for justice and equity. Evil goes unpunished and good is unrecognised. Justice is God's nature. He cannot receive evil without becoming evil Himself. Evil must be dealt with in the short-term (life), terminating in repentance and salvation, or eternally, terminating in absolute separation from God and seclusion of such

souls in a sphere of their own (the Lake of Fire) where the consequences/fruit of evil can be allowed unrestricted action upon those souls who have chosen it. Wickedness burns as fire.<sup>v</sup> The fire in the Lake of Fire is the milieu in which these souls have chosen to spend their existence (which is eternal). It is not punishment by God. It is what they have chosen. Milton has Satan give reason for his choice of such a fate in his book *Paradise Lost*. “ Better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven.” We have difficulty imagining such a choice but it is possible.

Universal salvation denies the sovereignty of the human will. If we do not have the right to reject God’s offer of love and salvation then we do not have (in reality) the right/power/authority to accept it. There can be no love without free choice. There can be no choice without free will. God’s will can be for all to come to the knowledge of salvation without everyone being saved, for the sake of maintaining their free will. This is the suffering of God. He allows us to reject Him and His love. All Israel can be saved without every Jew being forced to forego their will/right to choose. The Jew first and then the gentile. Salvation is built into the Jewish psyche therefore the likelihood of acceptance is increased.

“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of truth”.<sup>vi</sup>

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.<sup>vii</sup>

These two scriptures have been taken as a warrant for the forced ‘salvation’ of reluctant souls but that is not a necessary interpretation of the intent of these passages. Free-will does not have to be trampled on if God is willing to suffer/allow His will to be thwarted.

Satan was able to convince 1/3 of the angelic host to follow him out of God’s presence. This was done in the full comprehension of God’s glory and goodness, though not necessarily in full comprehension of what sin and its consequences were. Likewise, humans will have the right/ability to reject that same goodness with full comprehension of it. Every knee (will) shall be forced to realize the truth of God’s goodness, love and justice. They shall be forced to confess, not under duress but because of truth, that Jesus is Lord. Pride will allow them to reject that goodness and truth even in full comprehension of it. This seems contrary to all reason and sanity, maybe it is, but love allows it for the sake of love and justice.

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<sup>i</sup> Acts 3:21

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 5:26

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 11:26

<sup>iv</sup> Hebrews 3: 12-15, 12:15-17

<sup>v</sup> Isaiah 9:18

<sup>vi</sup> 1 Timothy 2:3-4

<sup>vii</sup> Philippians 2: 9-11