

**TITLE: "Armed for Suffering" (Part 5)*The Error of Universalism***

**PASSAGE: 1 Peter 4:6**

**THEME: *The Error of Universalism***

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**{{Read Passage}}**

Many of you know that a few weeks ago I received a phone call from a man who's head of t/preaching dept. at a seminary nearby. He's teaching a course on Expository Preaching & He had heard our program on t/radio and wanted to know if I would share with the class some of t/principles of how to put together and deliver an expository message & how to do that consistently while under t/burdens of small-church ministry.

It was an honor to do so & I think t/45 minutes or so that I had was helpful to most.

Among t/things I talked about was how to preach exegetically and theologically. IOW - a sermon shouldn't simply be a running commentary stripped of theological focus. There are many times that a passage lends itself to addressing a greater biblical-theol. issue.

You can't preach on Ephesians 1 w/o addressing t/topic of election/predestination. You can't preach on Matt. 28:18-20 w/o addressing issues like baptism, evangelism and t/Trinity.

Good preaching takes these things into account. Also t/needs of t/congreg. That's why I took t/time in 1 Peter chapter 1 (1st 2 vv.) to do an 8 part series on t/Trinity. I felt that was needful for t/life of our CH at that time.

### [i] We really see the same sort of thing here in 4:6

There is a theological issue that's been stapled to this particular verse, along w/3:18 - Issue of universalism.

### [ii] What is "Universalism?"

Simply put - U is t/belief that everybody goes to heaven. In t/end, God reconciles all men to himself, regardless of what they did during their earthly life & everyone is saved.

### [iii] We spend an hour last week setting the stage

We could look at it as an extended introduction to what we will cover today. So I'm not going to retread that ground. Suffice it to say, if you weren't here last week, you need to get a copy of t/message. Very imp. it really sets up what we're going to be talking about today.

Last time I mentioned to you that we would be focusing on t/type of universalism that claims to be Christian. It's not, of course, not any more than Mormonism is Christian, but t/claim is there.

### [iv] {{Universalist's Reasoning}}

I thought it might be helpful to give you some of t/reasoning that universalists bring to t/table in their attempt to biblically defend their doctrine.

I've found in reading t/writings of universalists that they appeal to t/same arguments. This is true whether you're reading someone who wrote today or 200 years ago. You see t/same well-worn threads of thought. There are about 7 of them.

1. God wills that all men be saved therefore all men will be saved or God's will is frustrated.

2. Christ died for the whole world therefore every person will be saved
3. In order for all things to be reconciled to Christ, all people will have to be saved.
4. Every knee will bow to Christ which means that every person will bow to him in salvation.
5. God's love means that He could never send men to hell for eternity.
6. Eternity in hell is unfair for temporal sins (IOW - men sin for t/brief season which is there life, how can they be punished for eternity?).
7. A Perfect state of righteousness in heaven cannot exist if hell continues for eternity.

#### [v] Arguments based on:

- \* God's Will (he wills to save all therefore all will be saved);
- \* God's Love (a loving God would never condemn men for eternity);
- \* God's Plan (God can't be all in all and sin cannot be finally defeated if sinners and hell continues to exist forever);
- \* God's Provision - Extent of X's death (a belief that he propitiated everyone's sins w/exception, therefore everyone will be saved);

In addition, universalists appeal to certain passages that use the words "world" and "all" and they contend that those words mean everyone w/o exception. They claim that the words for eternity in the Bible don't mean eternity, they mean an age. Other arguments, but these are central.

#### [vi] As a general statement, universalists see universalism because they are not regenerate

They don't know t/truth about this essential aspect of t/Gospel because God hasn't drawn them to t/truth.

#### [vii] So they operate under a false presupposition

Universalists see "universalism" because they have been conditioned to function under the presupposition that hell is illogical & immoral and a loving God cannot possibly send men to an eternity apart from Him. That presupposition colors how they read the Bible. It's like a pair of magic spectacles that they put on. You and I aren't wearing the spectacles, so we see their arguments & go, "*Huh?*" *How in the world did you come up with that?!*"

Last week we concluded by looking at what I called ==>

## **I. Common Threads Among False Teachers**

Six characteristics of cultists and others who twist God's Word to their own ends.

- A. Strand # 1: False teachers mimic truth**
- B. Strand #2: False Teachers claim that they have the truth that the church has missed for centuries**
- C. Strand #3: False teachers often have their own corrected version of the Bible or they demand adherence to a particular translation**
- D. Strand #4: False teachers are almost always corrupt in more than one area of their theology**
- E. Strand #5: False teachers deny God's Nature and Sovereignty**
- F. Strand #6: False teachers ultimately pervert the Gospel**

I want to conclude today with ==>

## **II. A Reformational Response to Universalism**

Break it down into three areas: 1) Theological Response; 2) Exegetical Response; 3) Grammatical Response. Obv. these 3 are intertwined like a cord of 3 strands. And like that cord of 3 strands, these three defenses come together in unbreakable truth.

## A. A Theological Response to Universalism

### 1. Universalism denies the doctrine of total depravity

#### a. Bible teaches in no uncertain terms that all men are under a curse of sin

All men are fallen to the core. They are totally depraved - every aspect of man's nature has been corrupted by sin.

#### (1) Listen to how Scripture describes fallen men (who we were before God opened our eyes to truth)

1. Alienated, hostile, engaged in evil deeds (Col. 1:21)
2. Dead in sin, by nature a child of God's wrath (Eph. 2:1 ff.)
3. Under a curse - [the curse of the law] (Gal. 3:10-13)
4. An enemy of God (Rom. 5:10)
5. Darkened in understanding (Eph. 4:18)
6. Unable to please God, hostile to Him (Rom. 8:5-7)
7. Unable to understand the gospel (1 Cor. 2:14)
8. Unable to truly seek God (Rom. 3:11)
9. Blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4)

This isn't a matter of God sitting up in heaven wringing his hands in despair saying, "*Oh, why won't you come to me?! I'll give you all the chances you need. In fact, even after you die I'll give you another chance and then you will freely come to believe in me of your own free will!*"

#### a. The idea that men simply make a choice to believe in God is based on the age-old heresy of Pelagianism (back to time of Augustine)

A little history lesson . . . . (*who was it who said, "Those who don't learn*

from history are destined to repeat it." ?) George Santayana.

Psalmist teaches that "righteousness cannot be done in a land of forgetfulness." We need to understand t/past and history. We have to learn from those who went before us.

"Although tradition goes not rule our interpretation, it does guide it. If upon reading a particular passage , you have come up with an interpretation that haws escaped the notice of every other Christian for 2000 years, or has been championed by universally recognized heretics, chances are pretty good that you had better abandon your interpretation." [R.C. Sproul, The Agony of Deceit, pp. 34-35]

### (1) Let me take you back to the 5th century

During the fifth century, Augustine wrote a short prayer that said, "*Lord give what thou commandest and command what thou wilt.*"

Augustine was affirming our depravity. That we are inherently unable to live out God's righteous commands. The only way we can do that is if God, by His grace, grants us that ability. "*Give what you command, command what you will.*"

The British monk, Pelagius, objected. He said, (like so many today): "*No, God would not command something that man was unable to do.*"

He went further and said that no one was really born in sin. Babies are born tabula rosa. According to Pelagius, every man is created like a new Adam. Pelagius denied original sin and subsequently depravity.

Does man need Gods' grace to believe and please God? Pelagius said no. Augustine said yes, contending that man been ruined by Adam's sin. 412 AD the council of Carthage agreed with Augustine.

They knew that the truth of the Gospel was at stake and so borrowing from the language of Paul in Gal. chapt. 1 they anathematized Pelagius and his followers.

In 412, Zosimus, bishop of Rome, wrote a letter to Carthage saying that they had erred. He supported the views of Pelagius. This was significant in that it opened the door to the semi-pelagianism & works-righteousness of later Roman Catholicism.

Semi-Pelagianism was a mediating position that contended that man cooperates with the grace of God. Man is neither dead, or well, but sick. Pelagius believed that man needs moral guidance. Semi-Pelagianism believes that he is sick and needs a physician.

The fact is (in keeping with Augustinianism and Carthage) man is dead; he needs a resurrection! That is someone that only God is capable of doing.

God's sovereignty in salvation is "The Gospel of Amazing Grace" (as said John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace)

## 2. Universalism denies the doctrine of predestination

Nowhere does t/Bible teach that all men are elect // predestined to salvation. Message is quite to t/opposite. Cover to cover t/Scripture teaches that only a few will be saved. Was t/question that was asked of Jesus. Luke records it for us in chapt. 13 of his Gospel ==>

23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand

outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.'

26 "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.'

So Jesus said things to those who were genuinely his disciples such as: *"Blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear." "Flesh and blood didn't reveal the truth to you, but my Father in heaven."*

Matthew 22:14 - **For many are called, but few are chosen** (ἐκλεκτός). [The gospel goes out to many, but only some respond]

Universalist would want to reword that to say, *"Many are called and all are chosen."*

2 Thessalonians 2:13 **But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.**

#### **a. John 6:37-44**

I can't be any more clear can it? No one can come to Jesus Christ unless God the Father draws him/her to X.

Could also look at John 6:65 **For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.** [Note response 6:66 - as a result of this many of his disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. A lot of ppl. didn't like it then just as many don't now]

## b. Ephesians 1:3-6

Note that ἐκλεγεω is an aorist middle which indicates God's independent or unconditional choice. Could be translated: "to pick for oneself."

Acts 13:48 >>> **And when the Gentiles heard this** (that t/gospel wasn't only for t/Jews), **they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.**

## c. Romans 9:6-24

Paul is wrestling with the problem of Israel as God's chosen nation that had rejected her Messiah. If salvation was from the Jews and for the Jews why did they reject Jesus as their Messiah? Is God done with Israel? Has God or His Word in some way failed? No - (11:26).

Note the two groups in vv. 23-24 . . .

Even our faith is a gift (Eph. 2:9); God grants repentance that leads to life (2 Tim. 2:25).

The fact that it's none of man means it's all of grace. As I've said many times B4, these doctrines of grace stand sentry over t/Gospel.

I've never seen a cultist or a heretic who is oriented to sovereign grace. They're all free-will theists. Includes RC. Reason for that - When you lift up man's free-will you allow him to participate in his own righteousness. Grace is trumped by human merit. Strip that away, you strip away works.

All systems of works righteousness dissolve like t/wicked witch under a bucket of water before God's sovereign grace.

That's what distinguishes Christianity from religion. All other systems are men choosing their religion. Pure Xnty is God choosing men.

## *A. A Theological Response to Universalism*

*1. Universalism denies the doctrine of total depravity*

*2. Universalism denies the doctrine of predestination*

*3. Universalism denies the doctrine of perseverance*

Bible is replete with warnings that those who are genuine Christians will demonstrate t/genuineness of their conversion by persevering in t/faith.

### *a. Something we've seen throughout 1 Peter*

#### *(1) Back to chapter one*

We referred to Verses 3-9 as ==>

### *I. The Elements of the Sovereign Joy of Our Salvation (3-9)*

*A. It was Prompted by God's Great Mercy (3a)*

*B. It is Accomplished Through Our New Birth (3b)*

*C. It is Preserved by God's Power (5a)*

*D. It will be Evidenced by Persevering Faith (6-9)*

All of these things happen in time. They're contingent upon this life. Those whom God has chosen he causes to be born again (v. 3). Those whom he causes to be born again he guards until that day.

#### *(a) Perseverance is both a gift AND a responsibility*

I will persevere in t/faith by virtue of God's preserving me. Still my perseverance. But it's still God's grace that fuels it.

If I don't persevere. If I become an apostate. I give evidence that I was

never regenerate.

That's Judas. Of whom Jesus said in John 13:18 ==>

“I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.’

## (2) We see perseverance in chapter 2 (vv. 7-8)

We see two groups, those that are saved, those that are appointed to certain doom.

It's like Jude who writes of certain persons, false teachers, who were long ago marked out by God for condemnation.

I don't know how you can be appt. to certain doom and marked out for condemnation if your really elect all along & you're going to be saved in t/end.

The elect are marked out for salvation, not condemnation!

## (3) Later one we'll see in 1 Peter, 4:17-18 {read}

(perseverance).

### b. If everyone is going to be saved in the end, why persevere?

Why heed t/warnings? In fact, most anyone who gives an honest reading of t/Bible is going to come to the conclusion that there's a judgement and that only those who believe will inherit eternal life.

Would clear warnings to the contrary not imply that God is being deceptive? *"You must repent and believe and you must continue in the*

*faith or you will perish."* ("Well, I say that now, but this isn't really t/case").

Why t/warnings? Like those we find in t/book of Hebrews?

3:12 Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.

3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end;

6:4-6 4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

10:26-27 26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

12:14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

How does universalism fit into Rev. 14?

8 . . . "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great [Rome], she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality." 9 . . . "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night . . . 12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the

commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

Colossians 1:22-23 ...He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith...

#### 4. Universalism denies the doctrine of hell

##### a. Turns hell into Roman Catholic purgatory

Hell is remedial. It's purpose, as one universalist writes, is to "purge." That's Romanism. Purgatory and purge have the same Latin root.

Hell is redefined. One writer makes the claim that ==>

"There is no Hebrew or Greek word in all the Scriptures that has the meaning of our English word 'hell.'"

I'm not really sure what that statement means, but I do know what Scripture teaches.

A cursory reading of t/Gospels and the teaching of Jesus leads one to t/inevitable conclusion that hell not only exists, but is a place of eternal judgement.

MAT 7:22-23 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; \depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness\.'

MAT 10:28 "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and

body in hell.

MAT 13:40-43 40 "Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 "Then \the righteous will shine forth as the sun\ in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

MAT 13:47-50 47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering {fish} of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good {fish} into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

51 "Have you understood all these things?" They \*said to Him, "Yes."

MAT 25 31 "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 "And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 46 "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

MAR 8:35-36 "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but

whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? MAR 9:43 "And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire,

LUK 12:8-10 8 "And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God; 9 but he who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. 10 "And everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him.

You also have t/story of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16 ==>

19 "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. 20 "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the {crumbs} which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and \*saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.' 25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and {that} none may cross over from there to us.'

JOH 8:21 He said therefore again to them, "I go away, and you shall seek Me, and shall die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come."

After citing some of these same passages, the 19th century theologian WGT Shedd writes:

"Let the reader now ask himself the question : Do these representations, and this phraseology, make the impression that the future punishment of sin is to be remedial, and temporary? Are they adapted to make this impression? Were they intended to make this impression ? Is it possible to believe that the Holy and Divine Person who uttered these fearful and unqualified warnings, eighteen hundred years ago, respecting the destiny of wicked men and devils, knew that a time is coming when there will be no wicked men and devils in the universe of God, and no place of retributive torment? Did Jesus of Nazareth hold an esoteric doctrine of hell: a different view of the final state of the wicked, from that which the common and natural understanding of his language would convey to his hearers, and has conveyed to the great majority of his readers in all time? Did he know that in the far-off future, a day will come when those tremendous scenes which he described - the gathering of all mankind, the separation of the evil from the good, the curse pronounced upon the former and the blessing upon the latter - will be looked back upon by all mankind as . . . a dream . . . ?"

How do universalists respond to these passages? Not very well. They play word-games saying that the words hell don't mean hell and that the words eternal don't mean eternal. Their arguments are unconvincing, as we'll see a little later.

BTW - everyone of those passages I cited from t/Gospels had something in common. They were all words spoken by whom? JC.

Again, if I might cite Shedd==>

"Jesus Christ is the Person who is responsible for the doctrine of Eternal Perdition. He is the Being with whom all opponents of this theological tenet are in conflict. Neither the Christian church, nor the Christian ministry are the authors of it.

The Christian ministry never would have invented the dogma; neither would they have preached it in all the Christian centuries, like Jeremiah, with shrinking and in tears, except at the command of that same Lord God who said to the weeping prophet, 'Whatsoever I command thee, thou shall speak,' Jer. 1:7." [891]

In fact, one of t/greatest arguments for t/traditional view of hell is that this traditional view is what both Jewish schools, that of Shammai and Hillel, taught in t/first century. Think about that. The Jews of Jesus' day, t/Saducees notwithstanding, believed in an eternal hell.

Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim writes that "These schools represent the theological teaching in the time of Christ and his apostles, showing that the doctrine of endless punishment was held in the days of our Lord . . . ." [cited in Shedd, The Doctrine of Endless Punishment, 14]

X never refuted t/doctrine of endless punishment which he would have if it didn't exist. Rather, he spoke of it in keeping with their understanding.

#### ***A. A Theological Response to Universalism***

##### **5. Universalism denies the Gospel itself**

The whole idea of substitution, JC took my place, my sin was imputed to him, crumbles under universalism.

Most universalists believe that suffering for sin is corrective. IOW - In hell, you suffer for a time so that you will be turned to X for eternity.

That's remedial. That's educational or corrective.

Punishment for sin isn't about being corrected. Like a prisoner who steals a car and does 6 months. Punishment for sin is retributive. It's God's wrath against violations of His eternal nature.

Sin that can be corrected or forgiven thru suffering does not require t/death of JC in order to be satisfied.

As one theologian writes ==>

"If the sinner himself is not obliged by justice to suffer in order to satisfy the law he has violated, then, certainly no one needs suffer for him for this purpose." [Shedd, 885]

#### *A. A Theological Response to Universalism*

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*4. Universalism denies the doctrine of hell*

*5. Universalism denies the Gospel itself*

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I really hate to do it, but we're going to have to wrap this up next time.

Then we will conclude by looking at an exegetical and grammatical response to universalism. And we'll also wrap up 4:6.

Romans 8:1 **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**