

# The False Allure of Universalism

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | April 18, 2019



Recently, I received an email from a sincere lady who expressed her appreciation for my book *The God-Shaped Brain*, but was concerned that I have failed to embrace the fullness of God's love by not promoting Universalism. She cited 1 Corinthians 13:8, that "love never fails," and advocated the idea that in the end every intelligent being will be saved, because God's love never fails. She further articulated that by allowing some to be lost, I have left the fear of God on the table, rather than promoting a message of love that casts out all fear. She felt that by presenting the idea that some actually do reject God's offer of salvation, I am limiting God's ability to save by our narrow human understanding.

She wrote: "If perfect love casts out fear, then it should truly cast out fear. Your book leaves fear on the table in the irredeemable. It scares me to think of God as one who would destroy people through His love and that He lets sin win over love because of a person's free choice."

I have no doubt that God wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). So, I appreciate all attempts to present God as love, as one who desires only the best for His created beings. God's goal is salvation for all. Why, then, do I not agree with the Universalist view? Because the Universalist view is another theology that has developed in reaction to the false imperial-law model that has infected Christianity.

As we investigate various Christian teachings, from Universalism to Predestination and penal

substitution, we must ask: What law lens are these ideas understood through? Do they see God's law through the human-law lens of imperialism, a universe designed with imposed rules that require external enforcement? In such a view, God is the source of inflicted punishment and the one from whom we need protecting.

It is this distorted, false view of God that Universalism is reacting to. Universalism correctly rejects the lie that God is the source of pain and death, but, not understanding design law, adherents are still stuck in the imperial law worldview and their ability to see the truth remains obscured. If God doesn't inflict death and the law functions like human law, then the false conclusion is drawn that all human beings will eventually be saved. It is a false solution to a false dilemma. We find the reality when we return to design law — understanding that God's laws are the protocols upon which life is based. In this view, death comes from sin itself and a willful refusal to allow God to heal and restore.

Perfect love casts out fear only in those who experience and embrace God's love — thus, the "irredeemable" do remain in fear, because they have rejected the truth about God, which would have set them free, and fail to experience God's transforming love. Their fear is based on their false view of God and their own terminal condition.

The idea that God "would destroy people through His love and He lets sin win over love" is evidence of the imperial-law worldview, thinking that God makes all things happen the way they do. In this thinking, God has complete control. So, since God is love and wants all people to be saved, He will save everyone. Again, the problem is a basic misunderstanding of how reality works — not understanding design law. The unrepentant are not lost because God's love destroys them but because unremedied sin destroys them; that is, "those who sow to the carnal nature *from that nature* reap destruction" (Galatians 6:8).

I applaud those who reject the idea that God is a destroyer, but many people, who realize God doesn't inflict eternal death, fail to understand how God's design law functions and the destructive nature of sin. Therefore, they erroneously conclude that since God isn't the source of inflicted death, there is no destruction from sin. This is just another trap of Satan.

When we sin (deviate from God's design law), we damage our hearts, sear our consciences, warp our characters, and if we persist in it, we eventually destroy the faculties that respond to the Spirit of truth and love. When this happens, no amount of love or truth has any redeeming impact, because such individuals no longer possess the ability to recognize and respond to truth and love. This is the reality of what sin does to people.

The Universalist message denies this reality. It erroneously focuses the reason that the wicked will die on some supposed limitation in God. They suggest that to teach that all are not saved limits God and His ability to heal. This is due to a failure to realize that God cannot create character. God can create sinless beings, but the character must be developed by the freewill choices of the sentient being. While God does possess the power to overwrite the individuality of a person and instill His perfection without their consent, to do so would destroy that person and create a new individual (or a robot) where that person used to be. This action would violate God's own character of love, which never compels, never coerces, and never forces. Love only exists in an atmosphere of freedom. So the Universalist idea, that God's love will one day be so compelling that all will be overwhelmed and become godly, actually presents a God who is not love, but rather a dictator who forces everyone to be like Him. Genuine love, as painful as it is, allows the rejection of love.

Another error in Universalism, that also originates in misperceiving God's law as imposed, is that

forgiveness solves the sin problem. If sin is the breaking of rules and requires punishment, but Jesus paid the punishment and God is love, then wouldn't God forgive everyone? And if God forgives everyone, won't all be saved?

The argument is that there is no limit to God's forgiveness; therefore, all are forgiven and so all will be saved. While it is true that God's forgiveness is limitless and that He forgives everyone, forgiveness does not equal salvation. Again, this error is rooted in believing that God's law functions like human law. For Universalists, if a person is pardoned, he or she is freed from the punishment of the law — and since God forgives everyone, then everyone must be saved. But let's return to design law where we realize that, while we can forgive a person for overdosing with heroin, our forgiveness doesn't prevent the damage that heroin does; the user still dies.

Jesus forgave those who crucified Him, but the evidence shows that many were not changed by that forgiveness. They remained selfish, they remained His enemies, and their hearts still hated truth and love. Thus, if God would take them to heaven anyway, it would be a place of torture to them, as selfishness does not rejoice in love and deceit does not rejoice in truth and honesty. Those who, by their choices, have rejected love and truth and developed selfish characters will not find God's unveiled infinite love and truth enjoyable — they will flee from that place, begging to have the mountains crush them to hide them from His life-giving glory. (See Revelation 6:16.)

Another argument used by Universalists is that free-choice doesn't apply, because we didn't choose to be born sinners, and since we didn't choose to be born sinners, we don't choose to be saved. Instead, God chose to save us in Jesus, regardless of what we choose.

While it is true that we did not choose to be born sinners, have no ability to provide the solution for our own salvation, and God did choose through Christ to provide the solution for human salvation, it is not true that God's choice to provide the solution is accepted by all who need it. We must choose to participate in what God has provided through Christ.

Consider that an HIV-infected man and HIV-infected woman have a child born infected with HIV. While the child did nothing to be born with this condition, the child still has a condition, which, if left unremedied, results in their death. We are born in sin, conceived in iniquity (Psalm 51:5). We have a terminal condition that we didn't choose, but that condition still needs healing; the Bible describes this as us being "dead in trespass and sin" (Ephesians 2:1).

While the HIV-infected child is not guilty for being born that way, he still needs a remedy, if he wants to live. Let's say that when that child is old enough to comprehend the ramifications, he is then offered a free remedy. If the child refuses the remedy, won't his ultimate death have been his decision?

This is our situation with God. He has chosen to provide the Remedy through Christ, but we must still choose to accept it. Why? Because only by our choice to participate with God for our individual healing is our unique identity and individuality retained during the process of being perfected through the work of the Holy Spirit within. God saved the species human in Christ via the humanity Christ assumed, and simultaneously procured the remedy for all who will partake of it. God's work in Christ did not require our free-will consent or choice; it was God's choice. But our individual healing requires that we choose to partake of what Christ has achieved. Sadly, many will not do so.

The final problem with the Universalist view is that it denies huge portions of Scripture that describe that all will not be saved, even though what God has provided in Christ is sufficient to save all. Texts

like these must be, in one way or another, rejected by the Universalist:

- Matthew 25:31-46: Jesus describes the separation of the sheep from the goats, those who love like God loves, versus those who remain selfish. Jesus' words for the selfish in the end are these: "Then **they will go away to eternal punishment**, but the righteous to eternal life."
- In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus describes the person who shows up without having their character renewed to Christ-likeness (the free wedding garment) with these words: "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and **cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen**" (Matthew 22:13, 14).
- In the parable of the talents, Jesus describes the one who refused to invest what God had given him: "And **cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth**" (Matthew 25:30)
- Malachi, describing the events at and after the second coming, wrote, "'But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. **Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,**' says the LORD Almighty (4:2, 3). If all are saved and none are lost, then who are these wicked that get turned to ash in the end?

But perhaps the most insidious danger of Universalism is its ability to lull people into a false security, a complacency that could cheat many from eternal life. If Universalism is true, and one day in the future God's love is fully revealed that all who have never realized it are suddenly overwhelmed by His goodness and love that they open their hearts and are healed — well then, what difference does it make how I live now? I will be saved then. I can keep smoking, drinking, visiting porn sights, running crime syndicates; when God is ready to get rid of sin in my life, He will simply reveal His overwhelming love to me and I will be saved. Until then, I will do it my way.

No, Universalism is not the gospel; it is yet another trap of Satan — his classic game of getting us to believe wrong positions (God's law is judicial and God must inflict death versus Universalism) to argue against each other all the time, while both groups are actually advancing Satan's distortions about God.

Universalism is certainly right when it says that God is love, that God forgives all beings, that God's provisions in Christ are sufficient to save all people, and that love eradicates all sin from God's universe. But Universalism errs in the same basic way that most Christian theologies err — it is founded on imposed-law constructs and fails to understand how God's design laws actually work: that love requires freedom and the willful participation in God's provisions for individual salvation, that sin actually damages the faculties necessary to recognize and respond to love and truth, and that some individuals persist in resisting love and truth to such a point that they will eventually destroy their ability to recognize love and truth. God doesn't stand as an executioner to the sinner, but, with profound sadness, gives them the freedom to choose to completely separate themselves from Him, their only source of life.

I invite you to embrace the God of love, the God whose universe operates on design laws and who gives you real freedom to choose. I encourage you to carefully think through all the issues and when such imperial, imposed-law theologies are presented—to reject them through the light of God's built-in

design parameters for life.