

WORLD RELIGIONS AND OTHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

CLASS 4: UNIVERSAL SALVATION AND ANNIHILATIONISM

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this series is not just to look at all the religions which are out there, but to look at what others believe and how it has infiltrated the church.
- There are many subtle beliefs which have come into the church and have been believed and practiced without regards to their origin or consequence.
- As we look through these various beliefs and systems which are put in place, it would benefit us to notice why they came about, when they came about and what is the overall goal.
- It is by having a better understanding of where people are coming from and where they think they are going that Christians can show them the ultimate truth of Jesus Christ.
- Just like Paul, we can go to the unsaved world, not agreeing with them but acknowledging their desire for religious or spiritual things.
- **Acts 17:22** “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.’”
- From this observation, Paul was able to show them who the true and living God was.
- From the onset, it is vital to understand that one cannot be “reasoned” into heaven.
- It is not upon their agreement with you that they are wrong that their standing before God will change from enemy to friend.
- We know that the only truth which can rescue people from their sin is the truth of the gospel.
- **Here is the schedule for the upcoming lessons:**
 - March 2nd: Introduction and New Thought / Progressive Christianity
 - March 9th: PNG Mission Update
 - March 16th: Deism (God exists but is more of a clockmaker than an involved God)
 - March 23rd: New Age Movement / Eastern Mysticism / Animism
 - **March 30th: Universalism / Annihilationism (all are saved and there is no hell)**
 - April 6th: Moralism / Humanism (as distinct from religion) **Matt Tomlinson teaching*
 - April 13th: Hyper-dispensationalism / ultra-dispensationalism / KJV only
 - April 20th: Resurrection Sunday Celebration–No Class

INTRODUCTION

- These two teachings, universalism and annihilationism, are two thoughts which can come from the same place or ideology.
- Both of these ideologies deny the existence of a real hell where the wicked go without Christ.
- While not all who believe in annihilationism are universalists, none believe in eternal conscience torment or punishment for the unsaved.

WHAT IS UNIVERSALISM OR UNIVERSAL SALVATION?

- *Universalism is the belief that everyone will be saved.* There are many people today who hold to universal salvation and believe that all people eventually end up in heaven. Perhaps it is the thought of men and women living a life of eternal torment in hell that causes some to reject the teaching of Scripture on this issue. For some it is an over-emphasis on the love and compassion of God—and the neglect of the righteousness and justice of God—that leads them to believe God will have mercy on every living soul. But the Scriptures do teach that some people will spend eternity in hell.¹
- Universalism is the teaching that all people will be saved. Some say that it is through the atonement of Jesus that all will ultimately be reconciled to God. Others just say that all will go to heaven sooner or later, whether or not they have trusted in or rejected Jesus as savior during their lifetime. This universal redemption will be realized in the future where God will bring all people to repentance. This repentance can happen while a person lives or after he has died and lived again in the millennium (as some “Christian universalists” claim) or some future state. Additionally, a few universalists even maintain that Satan and all demons will likewise be reconciled to God.²

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FAITH

- **Harbor Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Muskegon, MI**³
 - “Many Beliefs, One Faith”
 - Welcome to the Web Home of Harbor Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Muskegon, Michigan! We are a warm, friendly congregation of Unitarian Universalists where religious differences are not just tolerated, they’re celebrated! We are Unitarian Universalist and Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Humanist, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, atheist and agnostic, believers in God, and more. Come

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/universalism.html>

² <https://carm.org/minor-groups-issues/universalism-3/>

³ <https://harboruu.org/>

experience for yourself the sacred beauty and the immense power of simply loving and respecting all our neighbors as we do ourselves.

- **Our Mission:** Harbor Unitarian Universalist Congregation is a safe haven inspiring people to seek their own spiritual truths through worship and learning in community as we build a better world together.
- **Our Vision:** The people of Harbor Unitarian Universalist Congregation envision a community where connections are strengthened and deepened, where families are supported, and where diversity is celebrated.

- **Our Statement of Values: (Adopted 6/4/2023)**

Harbor Unitarian Universalist Congregation (HUUC) is our spiritual home where we practice our values of Acceptance, Compassion, and Social Justice in the wider world. HUUC is a community that:

- Welcomes and respects a diverse set of beliefs and the inherent worth and dignity of all people;
- Fosters love, kindness, and friendship to all;
- Promotes practices to create a more just and healthy world.

- **Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Southwest Michigan in Portage, MI**⁴

- “Many Beliefs, United By Love, Working for Justice”.
- Our vision: TO positively transform ourselves and the world for the well-being of all life.

What are some of their unique theological beliefs?

- As a young child I thought of God as a magical, all-powerful being who was responsible for everything that happened, good or bad. Later in childhood I began to feel I had a cause-and-effect relationship to God, gaining some control over good and bad results by how I prayed, petitioned, and behaved. Then in my teenage years God became personalized for me as the ideal parent, unconditionally accepting and loving. By the time I was in my twenties, God had become an impersonal force or energy in the universe. I still resonate most closely with William Wordsworth's way of describing God in "Tintern Abbey": "A sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, and the round ocean and the living air, and the blue sky, and in the mind of man: a motion and a spirit, that impels all thinking things, all objects of all thought, and rolls through all things."
 - Yet, in my fifties I've also begun to pray to God as a person again, especially in times of great need and great joy. I do that even as I know God intellectually as an impersonal life force. So I live in

⁴ <https://uucommunitychurch.org/>

paradox and ambiguity with God now, often simply feeling overcome with awe as spirit fills me from some source far beyond my own conscious control.⁵

- Each person who comes to the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation brings a personal understanding of Jesus, depending upon one's family and faith traditions. The diversity of these understandings reflects the diversity in the congregation.⁶
 - Unitarian Universalism is a tradition rooted in Christianity, and the Christian teachings have a place in our congregations, where Jesus' teachings of love and compassion, as well as the teachings of the prophets of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other world traditions, are honored. At OUUC we celebrate the traditions of Christmas and Easter, lifting up the profound messages of the birth of hope and renewal that those holidays offer.
 - Many Unitarian Universalists see Jesus as a moral exemplar who personified acceptance, compassion, and inclusion, **although they do not recognize him as a god**. Others hold up Jesus as a prophet and reformer who spoke out against the political and religious leaders of his time for not responding to injustice and challenged them to care for the poor, the disenfranchised, the most vulnerable in their society.
 - All beliefs about Jesus and his teachings are welcome and are often the source of rich and meaningful discussions about the meaning of faith in one's life.

Examination of Biblical Texts

- One common passage that Universalists use is **Romans 5:18-19** "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous."
- Universalism takes this passage out of the immediate and overall context of Romans and attempts to boil it down to fit their narrative. A firm supporter and advocate of universalism, Talbott (2017), asserts that *all men* mean that *all men* will eventually, and without a doubt, be saved. He interprets verse 15 'many died' and 'abounded to many' to mean all human beings, the exceptions being Adam and Christ. It is unfortunate that he also espouses that though hell exists, when one goes there (not because they are not elect, but because they choose to), they will realize their plight and then choose to put their faith in God and go to heaven. Thus, all men are saved, God is simply waiting for them to realize it and act on it.

⁵ <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/higher-power/views>

⁶ [https://www.ouuc.org/about/visitors/our-views-on-god-and-](https://www.ouuc.org/about/visitors/our-views-on-god-and-jesus/#:~:text=Many%20Unitarian%20Universalists%20see%20Jesus,recognize%20him%20as%20a%20god.)

[jesus/#:~:text=Many%20Unitarian%20Universalists%20see%20Jesus,recognize%20him%20as%20a%20god.](https://www.ouuc.org/about/visitors/our-views-on-god-and-jesus/#:~:text=Many%20Unitarian%20Universalists%20see%20Jesus,recognize%20him%20as%20a%20god.)

- Talbott (2017a) goes on to assert that the good news which Paul talks about would not be good news if it meant some would be ultimately in hell. His understanding is more philosophical than theological. He asserts that God must show the same love towards everyone, or no one is going to be happy. Therefore, if one person must suffer in hell, then God must either lie to people in heaven about those in hell, or give the inhabitants of heaven stone hearts, as not to feel anything about those in hell. He postulates these are the only two options for God and because neither of these options can fit with what true blessedness is, God must ultimately save all people.
- Paul’s point in Romans 5:18 is not that everyone will be saved, speaking of the whole world. In the immediate context of the passage, Paul does not have the world, as in all people, in mind. He actually is talking about Christ being offered to all men, not just the Jews or Gentiles (Rapinchuck 1999:433). Furthermore, as Moo (1994:1117) rightly concludes, one of the purposes in writing the letter (though certainly not the main focus), was to reconcile any fractures which happened in the Roman church. Because the Jews were expelled from Rome around 49 A.D. (they returned before Paul wrote Romans), the Gentiles most likely made up the majority of the church when Paul wrote the letter. Therefore, when we take into consideration to whom Paul is writing, we can rightly conclude he was asserting there be unity among the church (Rom. 15:7-9).
- Another common verse used is **1 Timothy 4:10** “For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.”
- Universalists interpret the phrase that God is “the Savior of all people” to mean that all will be saved. This is contrary to all sound doctrine and, in fact, has always been viewed as heresy by the Church. The proponents of this idea emphasize the love of God as God’s chief and most important attribute, to the exclusion of all others, such as His holiness and His justice.⁷
- Arminians would normally interpret the verse to say that God wants to save everyone but His desire is many times thwarted by the obstinate free will of man. Note though that the passage does not say He wants to save, but that He actually saves: He is actually the Savior (in some sense at least) of all people, not merely a potential Savior. Another wrong view is that God is able to save all people, but though all can be saved, only believers actually are. Again, this is not what the text says.⁸
- The Reformed or Orthodox view is that while God is the Savior of all men in one sense, He especially saves those who believe...in another sense.
 - ... as we study the terms “salvation” and “Savior” in the Bible we find many nuances – many different ways God saves. The most important aspect of salvation is to be “saved” from the wrath of

⁷ <https://www.monergism.com/what-about-1-timothy-410>

⁸ Ibid.

God (Romans 5:6-9), but salvation also includes the idea of rescue from enemy attack (Psalm 18:3); preservation (Matt 8:25); physical healing (Matt 9:22; James 5:15) etc. God “saved” not only Paul but everyone else on board ship with him in Acts 27:22, 31, 44. There are numerous ways that “salvation” takes place...⁹

- This is the doctrine of common grace, as opposed to saving grace. God’s grace is salvific in those whom He has chosen or elected for salvation.
- His “saving grace” is and will ever be upon them. It is only because of God’s grace that any person can be saved from their sins.
- But is God’s goodness limited only to those who experience His saving grace? The Bible would teach that God’s grace is upon everyone, whether they want it or not.
- But His saving grace is only for those whom He has chosen and those for whom Christ died.
- **God’s common grace means that all men, His friends and foes, are able to live at all.**
 - **Acts 17:28** “...for in Him we live and move and exist...”
 - **Matthew 5:44-45** “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”
 - **Romans 2:4** “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”
- There are many other verses which talk about God’s grace toward those who are against Him.
- Regarding **1 Timothy 4:10**, “It seems best to understand this verse to be teaching that God is really the Savior of all men, who actually does save them—but only in the temporal sense, while believers He saves in the eternal sense. In both cases, He is their Savior and there is a saving that He does on their behalf. In this life, all men experience to some degree the protecting, delivering, sustaining power of God. Believers will experience that to the fullest degree for time and for all eternity.”¹⁰

ANNIHILATIONISM¹¹

- *Annihilationism is the belief that unbelievers will not experience an eternity of suffering in hell but will instead be “extinguished” or annihilated after death.* Annihilationism is an attractive belief to many because of the awfulness of the idea of people spending eternity in hell. While there are some passages that seem to support annihilationism, a comprehensive look at what the Bible says about the destiny of the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 168.

¹¹ Much of this content taken from <https://www.mbcmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Class-1-The-Doctrine-of-Hell-Part-1.pdf>

wicked reveals that punishment in hell is eternal. A belief in annihilationism results from a misunderstanding of the consequences of sin, the justice of God, and/or the nature of hell.¹²

History of the doctrine of annihilationism.¹³

- Advocated by Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Clark Pinnock, and even some evangelicals like John Stott.
- **Reformation Era:** During the **Reformation**, some radical Protestant groups began to question the traditional view of hell. Figures like **Michael Servetus** and the **Socinians** (a rationalist Unitarian movement) began to teach forms of **conditional immortality**—the belief that only the saved are granted eternal life, and the wicked simply cease to exist after judgment. This view gained traction among some **Anabaptist** and **Unitarian** groups.
- **19th and 20th Centuries:** Annihilationism saw renewed interest in the **19th century** with the rise of movements such as **Seventh-day Adventism** and **Christadelphianism**, both of which rejected the traditional doctrine of hell and taught **conditional immortality** or **soul sleep** (the belief that the soul is unconscious after death until the resurrection). Prominent advocates like **Edward White** and **John Stott** (a 20th-century evangelical theologian who leaned toward annihilationism later in life) contributed to modern discussions on this issue.
- **In the 20th century, Jehovah's Witnesses** also became known for their belief in annihilationism, teaching that only the 144,000 faithful will reign with Christ, while the rest of humanity either enjoys life on a restored Earth or is annihilated after judgment.
- **Contemporary Annihilationism:** *Today, annihilationism is most commonly found within Adventist, Christadelphian, and Jehovah’s Witness circles, but it has also gained some attention among certain evangelical theologians who find the idea of eternal conscious torment difficult to reconcile with God’s love and justice. However, it remains a minority view in broader evangelicalism and is still rejected by the majority of Reformed and Catholic theologians.*
- “Emotionally, I find the concept [of eternal conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain. But our emotions are a fluctuating, unreliable guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it . . . my question must be — and is — not what does my heart tell me, but what does God’s word say?” **John Stott**

¹² <https://www.gotquestions.org/annihilationism.html>

¹³ List taken and modified from <https://www.monergism.com/annihilationism>

Those who hold to annihilationism cite several lines of evidence:

- Some believe that God is too loving and kind to inflict everlasting misery on His creatures
- Instead of ECT, they believe the Bible teaches that the wicked people’s judgment brings about the termination of their existence.
- This serves as an attempt to soften the awful thought of eternal torment of the wicked
- Terms like “destruction” (**Matt 10:28**) and “perishing” (**John 3:16**) used in Scripture describe the extinction of a being
- They believe the main purpose of fire is not to inflict physical pain, but to destroy.
- The terms “eternal” and “everlasting” do not mean endless, but often mean “in the age to come”
 - **Revelation 14:10** refers to the moment of judgment, rather than to everlasting conscious torment (i.e. the smoke, not the torment, ascends forever)
 - **Revelation 20:10** refers to the devil and his allies, not humans
- However, the Greek words “eternal” and “everlasting” do teach endless punishment
 - They are the only words in the Greek language which can express endlessness
 - They mean “everlasting” in other places (**John 14:17; Matt 19:29**)
- Annihilation is not a punishment at all but something that could be quite desirable to the wicked
- Rich man in **Luke 16** experienced the flame of torment – probably same torment in eternal state
- **Revelation 20:10** says that beast and false prophet are still tormented in lake of fire after 1000 years
- The everlasting punishment of the wicked is not inconsistent with God’s nature or justice, but is rather a revelation of that justice
- The word for “destroy” does not mean annihilation but rather “loss” or “ruin” (**Matt 9:17**)
- Man is immortal by nature, not by salvation (no such thing as conditional immortality)
- The rest of Scripture supports eternal punishment (**Matt 13:42; 25:41, 46; Rev 14:11**)

CONCLUSION

- The person who talks most about hell in Scripture is none other than Jesus himself. Indeed, except for **James 3:6**, the only person even to use the word hell in scripture is Jesus.¹⁴
 - 1 Peter 2:4 uses a different word for hell, *ταρταρόω* instead of *γέεννα*.
 - Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9, 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47-48; Luke 12:4-5
- **Mark 9:43** “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...”

¹⁴ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/hell-as-endless-punishment/>