

My Journey to Universal Reconciliation

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

*M*y own journey of coming to see God's total victory over sin in His universe began some 23 years ago when I first embraced the distinct ministry and message of Paul. It caused me to look at everything new. I began to reevaluate everything that I have ever been taught. *Universal Reconciliation* was one of the things that came across my study path. The subject seemed so confusing to my mind, because of all that I had been taught concerning eternal conscious torment from a child. And of course, when you are busy with "the ministry" like I was at that time, trying to keep "the machine" going steady, there is little time, opportunity and encouragement to think very far "outside the box." So, for about 10 of those years I just kept this whole doctrine on "the back burner." I would "get to it" one day.

It was not until about 13 years ago, when I resigned from the pastorate, that I was really "free" (in many ways!) to seriously study the doctrine. It took me quite a long time to sort through all my baggage and through what the Bible actually taught.

What follows is a shot personal narrative that catalogs the initial Scriptures that captivated my attention toward the truth that God would save all of His creation.

ROMANS 5:18

The first passage that really got my attention was Romans 5:18:

"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

I noticed the same "all men" that judgment came upon, were the *EXACT SAME* "all men" upon whom the free gift came. The first was produced by Adam, the second by Jesus Christ. The result of the first was "condemnation," and the result of the second was "justification."

I CORINTHIANS 15:22

I then saw that this was also the teaching of Paul in I Corinthians 15:22:

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

I saw that the “all” that die in Adam are the *EXACT SAME* “all” who will be made alive in Jesus Christ. I realized the passage did not say what I thought it meant, “*all that are in Christ shall be made alive.*” I saw that it said, “*even so in Christ shall **all** be made alive.*” I found my heart rejoicing! Paul was teaching that God will have the ultimate victory in winning His whole creation back to Himself.

II CORINTHIANS 5:19

Then there was Paul’s contention of *world reconciliation* in II Corinthians 5:19:

*“To wit, that God was in Christ, **reconciling the world** unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation.”*

God was in Christ, “*reconciling the world*” unto Himself. I thought, could the full revelation of God’s work in Christ have been made any clearer than what Paul wrote here? I could see that Paul’s Gospel taught that God’s plan included *all* of His creation. It was not just a potential *everyman gospel*. It is in reality *good news* for everyman.

I was slowly beginning to realize that what Paul was teaching was that the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ was for everyman – not potentially, but effectually.

I was seeing the great truth that Jesus Christ “***taketh away** the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). He did not make the arrangements that the sin of the world could be taken away. Instead, *He does it*. If it is taken away, it is no longer an issue. Paul echoes this truth:

*“To wit, that God was in Christ, **reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation**”*
(II Corinthians 5:19).

I realized that the satisfaction of sin’s debt was secured by Jesus Christ for “*the **whole world.***”

*“And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of **the whole world**”* (I John 2:2).

It was becoming clear to me that “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23) and not hell as I had been taught; that death was a penalty that Christ paid for all. That was Paul’s gospel, “*that Christ **died** for our sins*” (I Corinthians 15:6), so that “*He by the grace of God should taste death for **every man***” (Hebrews 2:9). I had to reflect, did the Lord Jesus Christ actually die for *every man*? Did He actually pay the penalty for *every man*?

If what the Scriptures taught was true (and surely it is!), how could man be held responsible for a debt that has *already been fully paid* on his behalf? Would there not be a duplication of

indebtedness if sinners were required to make a payment for sin that the Lord Jesus Christ had already made? Would there not be double jeopardy, if the sinner were held responsible? If anyone would have to pay for their own sin, then it could not be possible that our Lord actually suffered substitutionally on their account.

It was simple, He either *did* die **for** all, or He *did not* die **for** all. He was either every man's substitute, or not. If He was every man's substitute, then the work of redemption is obviously done and complete. If the debt was paid, and men must make their own payment, we have a double liability. God would be requiring a double payment.

SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

Whose Savior was Christ anyway? Just believers only? or the entire world's? I was seeing clearly now that He was "*the Savior of the world*" (John 4:42) – not the "**potential** Savior of the world" (John 4:42), but was indeed, and in all actuality, "**the Savior of the world**" (John 4:42). He could not be the Savior of the World if He did not actually – in fact – save the world.

I was now realizing that Jesus Christ was in full truth "*the Savior of all men*" (I Timothy 4:10). Paul did not say that He was "**potentially** the Savior of all men," but that "**He is** the Savior of all men." He **Is** in fact their Savior. If words mean anything, He could not be their Savior if He did not save them. Yet Paul taught clearly that He is the "*Savior of all men*" because He **will** save all men.¹

After all, Christ did not die for believers.

"Christ died for **the ungodly**" (Romans 5:6).

"While we were **yet sinners**, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

The Lord Jesus Christ did not die for believers. He died for the ungodly, for sinners. That is indeed an every-man redemptive work!

I came to realize that I had always been taught to confuse God's current visible work with His finished product. Yet, eventually, my studies led me to the conclusion that it would only be in the ages to come that God would manifest to all creation His full plan and include them in it.

What a joy for me to see that God would not lose the majority of all His creation to sin. He would indeed redeem them all. He would have the final victory over sin!

HELL

Then, of course, there was my consideration of the subject of *hell* itself. Since Paul was God's spokesman for us today, I obviously knew I should consult his teaching when considering this

1. The phrase, "*especially of those that believe*," is a specialty clause. Those of us who trust Christ now, here in this life, have the added benefit of being saved from a life of emptiness, vanity, hopelessness, and despair. We are saved unto Divine life at *this present time* – a **SPECIAL** salvation!

important subject. I was in for a great surprise. I had never stopped to consider that Paul, our Apostle, *never once* even used the word *hell*. He didn't use the word *hell* in any recorded messages from the Book of Acts. He didn't use the word *hell* in *any* of his epistles. Not once!

I thought, How could this possibly be? How could Paul have conducted his entire teaching ministry – one that brought glory to God – and yet never even once had used the word *hell*? Wasn't the traditional, orthodox doctrine of *hell* at the very foundation of our creeds?

How could Paul have been so negligent? How could he have gone through his entire ministry forgetting to use such a crucial word? What was up with that?

Or, was it possible that Paul understood something I didn't?

Then I considered Paul's declaration found in the Book of Acts:

*"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all the counsel of God**"* (Acts 20:26-27).

The plain and simple fact was that Paul was *not* negligent in his teaching ministry. Here was a passage that made that clear. Paul said he was "*pure from the blood of all men,*" because he had declared "*all the counsel of God*" – a counsel which obviously *did not* include *hell* at all. Period!

Wasn't Paul presented as our present pattern (I Timothy 1:15-16)? Didn't Paul tell us to follow him (I Corinthians 4:15-17; 11:1; Philippians 3:17)?

Didn't Paul tell us to "*Hold fast the **form of sound words**, which thou hast **heard of me**, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*" (II Timothy 1:13)?

Did I hear *hell* from Paul? Was it a *Pauline* form of *sound words*?

Had I been duped into accepting a religious tradition contrary to the sound scriptural teachings of our Apostle?

Wouldn't I be *Pauline*, if I like Paul, also excluded *hell* from my teaching?

Or, more pointedly, could I possibly be truly *Pauline* in my teaching, if I continued the use of a theological system that includes the traditional *hell*?

Why would I not just follow my Apostle in teaching a pure grace gospel that had no place for, nor need of a religious *hell*?

How could Paul, the Apostle, *never* use the word *hell* and yet have declared "*all the counsel of God*"? How could he have been "*pure from the blood of all men*" without ever *once* using the word *hell*? I saw that I had been bewildered here because I had been steeped in the traditions of men, and not in the traditions of Paul.

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (II Thessalonians 2:15).

I was to hold Paul’s traditions, *“whether by **word**, or **our epistle.**”* Holding to Paul’s very words and epistles removed *hell* from my teaching.²

THE LAKE OF FIRE

Then there is the *“Lake of Fire,”* defined by the Scriptures as *“the second death.”* How clear this was to me now, that the *“Lake of Fire”* is a *death* – *“the second death.”* Yet I knew something else as well that Paul taught me: that the last enemy that God would destroy is *death*.

“For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (I Corinthians 15:25-26).

The last enemy God will destroy is death. This would definitely include the *“Lake of Fire”* since it is a death – *“the second death.”* The only way to *“destroy”* death is by **resurrection!**

FAITH

Don’t get me wrong: I still believed that God required faith; but I had come to believe that He would bring His entire creation to that place of faith, in His Own good time and way.

The real question was not really whether or not some do not believe; it was simply one of timing. All would eventually be brought to belief by their Creator, although not all in *this* lifetime.

How had I made death the end of God’s grace and mercy? It became clear to me that not all will be saved by pure “faith,” but that it will take “sight” for some to believe.

THOMAS

Two great examples of this readily came to mind. “Doubting Thomas” was one.

“The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25).

To which Jesus Christ responded:

“Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas,

2. See *The Salvation of ALL: Creation’s Final Destination – A Biblical Look at Universal Reconciliation*, Chapter 3, “Paul’s Teachings on Hell,” Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., Bible Student’s Press, 2008.

because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:27-29).

Jesus said that Thomas believed by sight. *“Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed.”* He goes on to say, *“blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”*

Those of us who believe by simple faith are the Firstfruit of God’s full harvest. We will enjoy the First Resurrection; but this does not exclude the rest of creation, who are awaiting our manifestation (*“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God”* – Romans 8:19).

PAUL

Paul, the Apostle was another great example. Paul did not believe by simple faith. Rather, it took the “Damascus Road experience” to bring him to Christ. Both Thomas and Saul met the resurrected Christ! Oh, the extent that God will go through to reach man! He was much less limited than I was in His evangelism! He could and would pull out all the stops.

Paul says that his salvation is a pattern for those who should believe *“hereafter,”* i.e., after the close of this present dispensation. This salvation shows forth all the longsuffering of God toward the salvation of all men.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (I Timothy 1:15-17).

None in the Dispensation of Grace is saved after this “pattern” of Paul. However, *“them which should hereafter believe on Him”* will see *“a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun.”* They will come into the presence of the resurrected Son of God, and will with Paul call Him Lord. ³

“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” (Philippians 2:10).

This confession that Jesus Christ is Lord can only be the work of the Holy Spirit!

“... No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (I Corinthians 12:3).

3. See *The Salvation of ALL: Creation’s Final Destination – A Biblical Look at Universal Reconciliation*, Chapter 9, “Paul The Pattern of Salvation for the Unbeliever;” Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., Bible Student’s Press, 2008.

Just reflecting on these two examples of Thomas and Paul, how can God directly intervene in the faith of some individuals, by giving them sight experience for their faith, while denying this to the multitudes? Is this fair and just, coming from a God who is no respecter of men? Or are we missing a key ingredient in our understanding of God, His love and His will?

I came to believe that I had misunderstood divine judgment in the Bible. I had seen it as an end, instead of a means to an end.

God is surely a God of judgment. This cannot be denied; but that is not the essence of *WHO* He is.

“*God is love*” (I John 4:8, 16).

“*Charity [love] never faileth*” (I Corinthians 13:8).

Love is not just one of His attributes: it *is* Him, and it never fails. More succinctly, *God never fails!* Therefore, God’s judgment is ever subject to His love. He punishes mankind, just as a father does his children, because He loves them. Yet His punishment will be effective in bringing His creation to Himself. Divine judgment is never an end in itself, but a means to an end – and a glorious end at that!

The majority of mankind today is lost and blind; but those of us who have *first* trusted Christ (the First-trusters, Ephesians 1:12) are a part of the Firstfruits of Christ (Romans 8:23). We are but the beginning. God will reap the rest of His creation, and be “*all in all*.”³

LOVE AND PATIENCE

I greatly appreciate the love, concern, thoughtfulness, and patience that have been afforded me by some members of Christ’s Body during my *LONG* transition to the *salvation of all*. Even though some have not understood, I do want each of you to know that I love you. I have not been mad, unhappy or disgruntled along this journey. I just had to be true to the Lord, and to myself, as to what I have personally come to see from my own study of the Scriptures.

FOR THOSE WHO CONCUR

I would like to add a brief word to those of you who may find yourselves in harmony with these truths. We must all remember that “*knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth*” (I Corinthians 8:1). Let us dare not use anything that we may learn and hold dear as a tool of division between us and other believers. May we always remember that contentious debate has its place – it belongs to the realm of the flesh – to our former identity in Adam (*c.f.* Romans 1:29; II Corinthians 12:20). We should never use any issue *against* fellow members of Christ’s Body. God the Father has received all in Christ (Romans 14:3). Can we truly do any less?

“*Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ has also received us to the glory of God*”
(Romans 15:7).

FOR THOSE WHO DON'T CONCUR

For those of you who have not yet caught a real glimpse of the *salvation of all*, I want you to know that I love you, regardless if you *never* agree with the conclusions of this book. We are eternally brothers!

None of what I have shared is in any way intended to pass judgment on “*another man’s servant*” (Romans 14:4). Many dear and precious saints, who are effective and valuable servants for our Lord, have not embraced this teaching; yet I do not value them any less for this. I do not intend to pass my judgment or condemnation upon them.

Let every man follow the Lord out of the sincerity of his own heart, being fully persuaded in his own mind, as he enjoys the *great adventure of faith*.

“*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*” (Romans 14:5).

I will close with the following wonderful verses. I hope these brief thoughts will prove to be encouraging to others in their own studies.

“*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**” (I Corinthians 15:28).*

“*That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together **in one all things in Christ**, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Ephesians 1:10).*

“*And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him **to reconcile all things unto Himself**; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Colossians 1:20).*

(A more detailed study of the is subject can be found in the book, *The Salvation of ALL: Creation’s Final Destination – A Biblical Look at Universal Reconciliation*, Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., Bible Student’s Press, 2008.)

Taken from the *Bible Student’s Notebook*[™], a weekly Bible study publication available in two formats (electronic and printed)

www.BibleStudentsNotebook.com

Study Shelf, PO Box 265, Windber, PA 15963
1-800-784-6010 / www.StudyShelf.com

B I B L E S T U D E N T ’ S P R E S S [™]
W i n d b e r , P e n n s y l v a n i a

