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ministries®

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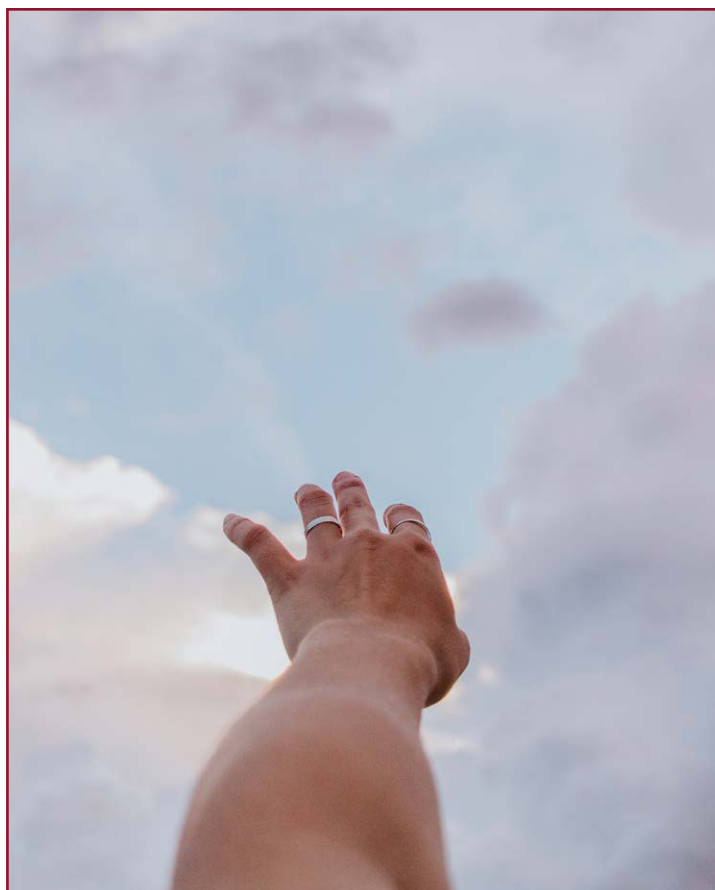


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# Do All Roads Lead to Heaven? A Close Look at Universalism



The father of Universalism in America is Nels Ferre. Born in Sweden, he was the son of a very conservative Baptist preacher. In his autobiography, he mentions how his father gave him a quick authoritarian answer when he questioned limited atonement—that Christ died only for the elect. His father’s short, insufficient answer was “One must not question God.”

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WEEKLY

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PUBLIC SERVANT  
ENDORSEMENT

**Dan Patrick**

*Lt. Governor, Texas*



“Our founders and the people they governed understood they must be led by Godly people who, while imperfect themselves, strived to build a country based on God’s perfection.

Today, in a country where God’s Word is under constant attack, we need mighty oaks to serve in all levels of government: men and women of courage and commitment who will stand for the principles and values our nation was founded upon.

Ralph Drollinger’s book, *Oaks in Office*, clearly lays out who is needed and what is needed to guide our nation to greatness so we can be the light of the world that God intended us to be. Matthew 20:26.”

That reply did not prove satisfactory to Ferre, so he jettisoned the historical view of the Church and founded his own theology that emphasized God’s attribute of love.

He went so far as to question if Jesus ever taught the doctrine of limited atonement. Accordingly, he twisted passages such as God...is the Savior of all men, especially of believers (1 Timothy 4:10) to suit his own beliefs. The umbrella of “God’s love” governed Ferre’s theological writings.

Let’s learn more about this theology. Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

## I. INTRODUCTION

Limited atonement—that Christ died only for the elect—is one of the five points of Calvinism. The Bible states unequivocally that God offers salvation, sincerely, to everyone. But at the same time, Scripture declares limited atonement.

In Ephesians 5:25 the apostle Paul states, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*—“her” being the Church, believers, the elect. The passage does not say He gave Himself up for everyone.<sup>1</sup>

If limited atonement was not the biblical position, then the scriptural analogy of the Church’s being the bride of Christ is unsustainable. This may seem contra-

dictory to the fallen, finite mind of man, but it is not incongruous in the mind and viewpoint of God.

Universalism is the religious belief that all will be saved. Universalists believe there will be universal atonement. To put it another way, in the end Christ’s atonement is not limited, but unlimited. Note this in Millard J. Erickson’s book, *Christian Theology*:

The theory of universal explicit opportunity holds that everyone will have an opportunity to hear the gospel in an overt or explicit fashion. Those who do not actually hear it during their lifetime here upon earth will have an opportunity in the future. There will be a second chance. After death they will be enabled to hear.<sup>2</sup>



Karl Barth, the famous deceased Swiss neoorthodox, Universalist theologian, provides us with further insight into the mind of the Universalist when he states:

The theory of universal pardon maintains that God, being a loving God, will not hold unwaveringly to the conditions He has laid down. While He has threatened eternal condemnation for all those who do not accept Him, He will in the end relent and forgive everyone.

Both Barth and Ferre did not hold to inerrancy per se, which enabled them to play loose with the clear, consistent teaching of Scripture regarding limited atonement.

**By elevating their own wishful thinking above the clear meaning of God's Word, Scripture twisters are able to rationalize their preconceived notions—in this case, as to how God should treat all mankind.**

Rather than allow Scripture to speak for itself and align personal views in compliance with its authoritative teachings, Barth's and Ferre's loose use of Scripture led to them taking license with passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:18 in their attempt to justify their twisted theology. Note the passage in this light:

*Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*

Does this passage serve to justify Universalism? No. When considering this verse in its context, Paul is writing to Christians at the Church of Corinth, and all the preceding passages in chapter 5 clearly indicate that his statement in 5:18 relates expressly to followers of Christ; therefore, the reference to *us* in the passage is a clear reference to those who have bowed the knee to the lordship of Christ. This verse is not a reference to *all* of mankind as Barth and Ferre mislead. Such attempts at interpretation elevate human thought to equal or superior authority to God's Word; man's thinking is allowed to trump the intentions God has revealed in His Word.

As conservative theologian J. I. Packer notes, we should never make Scripture subservient to the demands of human logic because the mind of man is fallen (the noetic effect of sin) and finite. Rather, fallen, tainted human logic must always remain subservient to the demands of Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

Unitarian Universalism is the leading American denomination that espouses this false belief. Their controlling hermeneutic is not the Scriptures alone; rather, they believe that human reason and experience should be the final authority in determining spiritual truth. Such thinking is often found to be acceptable in an increasingly postmodern Church culture. In fact, it is increasingly common to witness "Christians" reading their ideas into Scripture and then, to justify their preconceived thoughts, rip passages out of context.

In a broader sense of application on this point alone, on all matters of faith and practice, do you submit your preconceived ideas, political beliefs, and mani-

VERSE OF THE WEEK



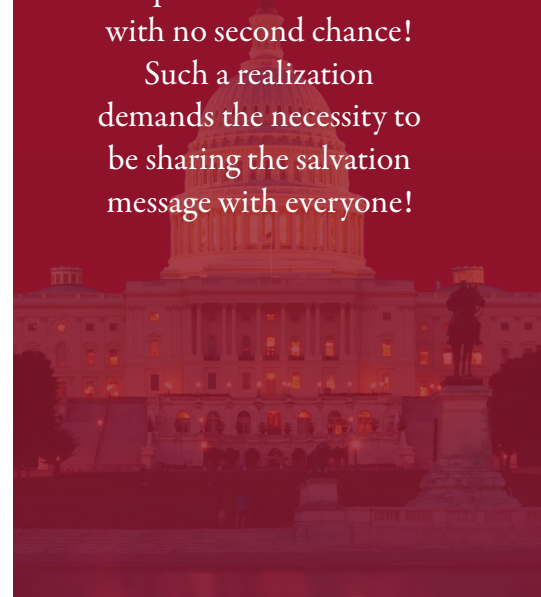
## John 3:16

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*



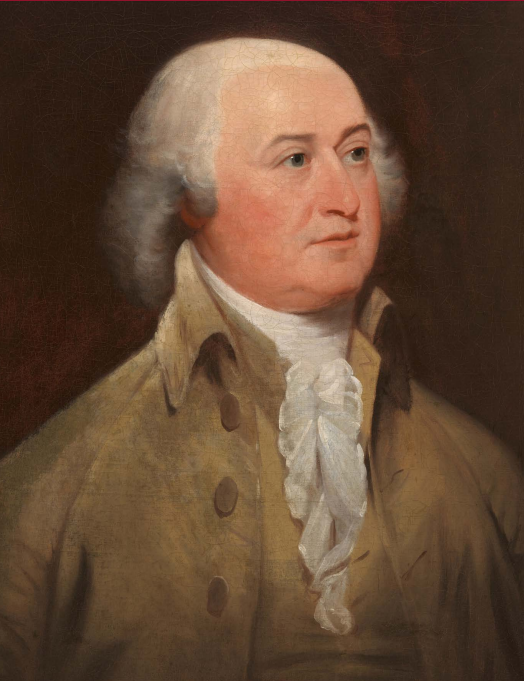
The true believer should be sobered by the reminder that people are going into an eternity separated from God with no second chance!

Such a realization demands the necessity to be sharing the salvation message with everyone!





John Adams



“The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were the general principles of Christianity. I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God.”

— John Adams, second President of the United States, signer of the Declaration of Independence, judge, diplomat, one of two signers of the Bill of Rights.

Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington D. C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904), Vol. XIII, 292–294. In a letter from John Adams to Thomas Jefferson on June 28, 1813.

fest actions to the authority of God’s Word, or is God’s Word secondary to the opinions of “Dr. Wellthink”?

### II. UNIVERSALISM DELINEATED

Nels Ferre never claimed to understand how God will actually achieve or accomplish universal salvation because Scripture nowhere teaches that. It is therefore impossible to find passages to support the way in which God would do a “makeover” on everyone. Void of any biblical references of “do-overs,” Ferre taught that individuals must simply accept the fact that it will occur. (I must add, how convenient!)

Void of any specifics as to how God does this, Ferre cites the following passages in his attempt to support his basic premise with Scripture. Let’s take a close look at each of the following passages and seek to understand their context—versus parachuting in on them, as do Universalists—so as to best understand the authorial intent of each who penned them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

#### A. ROMANS 5:18

*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.*

Earlier in Romans, Paul is explicit that salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. 1:16–17, 3:22, 3:28, 4:5, 4:13). Therefore, this passage cannot mean that *all* will be saved. *All* in context is a reference to believers. Likened to Paul’s contrasting use of the word “many” found several verses earlier in Romans 5:15, he is simply incorporat-

ing a Hebrew literary device called “parallelism,” making parallel contrasts with the word *all*. The *contextual* idea then, when reading the whole of the epistle versus parachuting in on one passage, is that Christ’s salvation is available to *all who believe in Christ*.

#### B. HEBREWS 2:9

*But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.*

Again, the context—when you read the whole letter—to *that by the grace of God He [Jesus] might taste death for everyone* carries the implied idea of “who believe on Him.”

It is possible to create and justify any twisted theology by citing a few Bible passages out of context. (Related to other matters, how many times do you hear someone on the floor or in committee twist Scripture to make a preconceived point? This is a common practice in an increasingly biblically illiterate culture.) In the science of Hermeneutics, this practice is known as eisegesis, i.e., reading preconceived notions into a passage. Such practices are common among cult leaders and other Scripture twisters.

**Such practices are akin to taping a lengthy TV or radio interview, only to have the producer extract a segment out of context which serves his or her purposes at your expense.**



One of the most important interpretive principles of Scripture or any other document for that matter is context! Every passage needs to be interpreted by that which surrounds it and not ripped from it.

### C. 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.*

As we have already seen, due to the enormous number of passages in Scripture delineating that not *all* will be saved (cf. Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17; 11:28; John 5:40; 6:37; among many others), this passage cannot mean the opposite. Rather, it teaches that *all* men benefit, even the unsaved, from the work of the Savior, if not in the fullest sense like those who *believe* and are saved. Both the saved and unsaved experience the goodness of God in a present, earthly sense. For instance, God's restraining grace on *all* of mankind keeps sin at bay via His ordained institution of government. God's creational beauty is enjoyed by *all*; falling in love can be enjoyed by *all*, etc. This passage is not suggesting universal salvation, but rather this: God intends His common grace (in contrast to His saving grace) to be enjoyed by *all*. The idea here is that Jesus is still the *Savior of all men*, regardless of whether an individual chooses to agree with that truth, volitionally repent, and turn to Him.

The aforementioned passages do not contradict but, as we have seen, can be easily rectified with the remainder of Scripture. Millard Erickson, in his *Christian Theology*, speaks to the importance of synthesizing seemingly contra-

dictory biblical texts with the whole of Scripture:

If we are to do systematic theology, however, we must also consider those texts that suggest an opposite conclusion, and then attempt to reconcile the apparently contradictory material. There are many texts that seem to contradict Universalism.<sup>4</sup>

### III. UNIVERSALISM DENOUNCED

The following are some of the biblical texts that directly refute Universalism. They speak for themselves and need no explanation; their proclamations are clear.

#### A. MATTHEW 25:46

*“These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

#### B. JOHN 3:16

*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”*

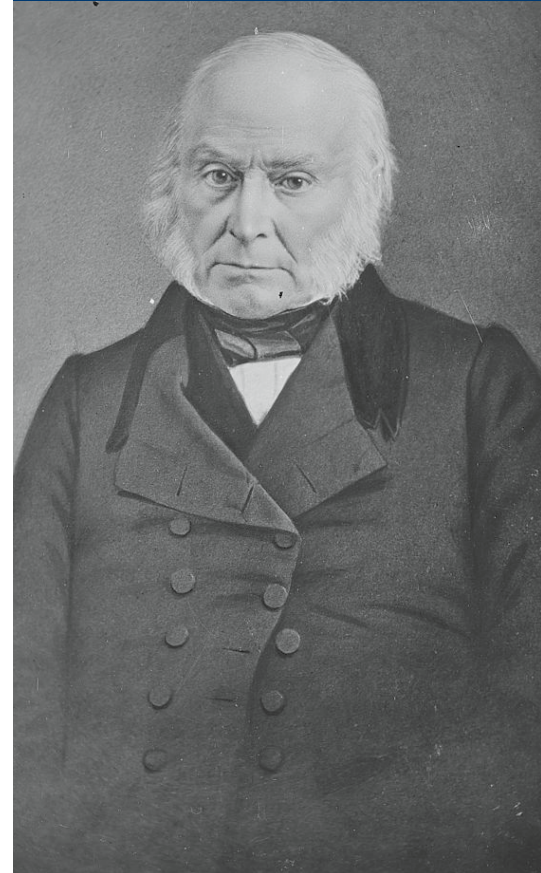
#### C. JOHN 5:28-29

*“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”*

#### D. ROMANS 9:22

*What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much*

John Quincy Adams



*“In the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior. The Declaration of Independence laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity.”*

— John Quincy Adams, 6th U.S. President, diplomat, Secretary of State, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative.

John Quincy Adams, *An Oration Delivered Before the Inhabitants of the Town of Newburyport at Their Request on the Sixty-First Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1837* (Newburyport: Charles Whipple, 1837), 5-6.



John Jay



“Unto Him who is the author and giver of all good, I render sincere and humble thanks for His manifold and unmerited blessings, and especially for our redemption and salvation by His beloved Son.... Blessed be His holy name.”

— John Jay, president of Congress, diplomat, author of *The Federalist Papers*, original chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, governor of New York.

William Jay, *The Life of John Jay* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833), Vol. I, 519–520, from his Last Will & Testament.



*patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?*

Numerous other passages could be cited to deflate the Universalist hermeneutic. As a matter of fact:

**There are many more passages proclaiming that some will be eternally separated from God than there are passages that might seem to suggest all will be saved.**

Remember, passages that seemingly suggest a universal salvation are being taken out of context. Scripture does not contradict itself.

The way the Universalist deals with these passages is to describe them as depicting a hypothetical versus an actual situation. This hermeneutical technique, however, leaves much to be desired because the context of each of the aforementioned passages simply does not lend to suggesting a hypothetical situation.

Furthermore, the Universalist position is greatly harmed by those passages that state some people will actually be lost. Several of those follow.

#### IV. UNIVERSALISM DISMISSED

##### A. MATTHEW 8:12

*“But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

##### B. MATTHEW 25:41–46

*“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; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

##### C. JOHN 5:28–29

*“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”*

These and other passages clearly dismiss the theological idea of a universal atonement, that all will one way or another still end up saved in God’s good graces. A good summary way to view the teaching of the Scripture and the error of Universalism is this quote from a non-apostate theologian:

Not everyone will be saved. This is not the conclusion we state with satisfaction, but it is most faithful to the entirety of the biblical witness. It should spur evangelistic effort.



## V. UNIVERSALISM'S "DO-OVER"

**If God grants a "do-over" at the end of everyone's life, then it follows that Christ died needlessly, and there is no reason to repent and believe today.**

Furthermore, and applicable to our everyday lives is just the opposite! The true believer should be sobered by what Universalism reminds us of when compared to Scripture—that people are going into an eternity separated from God with no second chance! Such a realization demands the necessity to be sharing the salvation message with everyone! Romans 10:14 underscores this:

*How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?*

This is the fitting demand of limited atonement: you and I do not know whom God has called to salvation, so as His ambassadors (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20) we are highly motivated. We see the theological need to spread the Good News of the gospel to *all* of mankind so that the elect (Ephesians 1:4–6) will hear and respond.

If we are not universalists due to our conviction of Scripture, it follows that we must be fervent in our evangelism because of our conviction of Scripture.

The two are theologically logical! It follows that Universalists would have no compunction or motivation for evange-

lism since they believe *all* will be saved in the end anyway. That is why the Unitarian Universalist denomination, like other theological liberal denominations, is in rapid numerical decline. They have no theological impetus to motivate conversion growth!

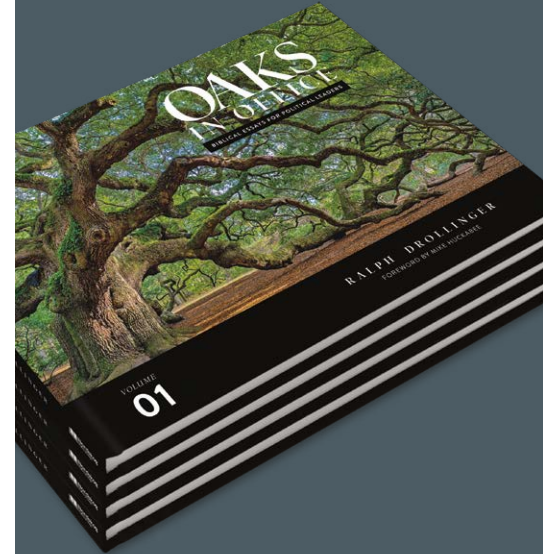
## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion and contrast, the theological conservative, the late Francis Schaeffer used to say in reference to a lukewarm commitment to saving souls, "Do we really believe people are going to hell apart from Christ?" Such convictions are the underpinning to sharing your faith with others whom you meet and are in relationship with within the capital community.

The biblical teaching of limited atonement is congruous with the ambassadorship of the believer post-salvation and his call to be a witness for Christ (cf. Acts 1:8). If Universalism were ultimately true, then why would God call every believer elsewhere in His Word to be an ambassador of reconciliation and a witness for Him? Universalism makes no sense when squared with the remainder of Scripture.

One might ask how Universalism affects Washington, D.C. Does this study relate to the world's most powerful city? Indeed, it most certainly does.

Since World War II, undoubtedly the most influential spiritual influence on the Hill has been the group, The Fellowship, and their ownership and leadership of the National Prayer Breakfast. The core leadership of The Fellowship and the National Prayer Breakfast, in fact, hold to a belief in Universalism.



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If you had ever pressed Doug Coe, the now deceased framer and leader of The Fellowship, you would have found him to be a proponent of Universalism, which teaches that all roads lead to heaven.

This understanding serves to illustrate why, historically, the National Prayer Breakfast which for years had been organized by The Fellowship, has featured so many guests and speakers who are not Christians and who possess no convictions regarding Jesus Christ's being the only way to God. Choosing such a wide array of speakers may serve political expedience, but such is patently heretical. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

A study of the aforementioned passages in this Bible study thoroughly discounts Universalism. It follows that true followers of Jesus Christ will outwardly reject Universalism and have nothing to do with organizations that propagate such heresy and falsehoods to the masses.

Keep in mind that God chastised the ancient nation of Israel when they served other gods. Will He not do the same today to nations that, in their symbolic national prayer breakfasts, do the same thing?

1. If Jesus gave Himself up for everyone, then the intended, specific bride analogy of the passage breaks down. If Christ's atonement were unlimited, that is to say Christ died for everyone, then it would follow, by comparison to the marriage relationship, that a husband need not love his wife in ways more exclusive and sacrificial than those directed to any other woman. Summarily, the similitude of Ephesians 5:25 in no way works if Christ's atonement is for everyone, unlimited.
2. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1986).
3. J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Westmont, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2012).
4. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1986).

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