

“Don’t Jump to Conclusions!”

How often I find myself thinking this, when people accuse me of losing my faith.

I am a “Biblical Universalist!” But when many people hear of my belief in “universalism” they think I have been led astray, and no longer believe the Bible is inspired. They lump me together with all “universalists,” some of whom have no Biblical basis for their beliefs.

But I am a “Biblical Universalist!” When it comes to the Bible, I am more conservative than most people within traditional churches today. I believe that the Bible is the pure Word of God, every word of it inspired and perfect. But some people hear only the word “universalism” and stop listening.

Some think I place all the emphasis on God’s love, forgetting that He also requires justice. Not so! God does not ignore sin, but neither is He unable to “cure” the sin problem! Some of His creation take longer than others, just as parents will find that some children are more “stubborn” than others. No, God does not turn His back on sin, but thru the ages He works with great purpose to bring all mankind to the point where every knee bows.

Some think I do not believe there is a “hell.” I don’t like to use the word “hell” because it is man-made, and filled with pagan philosophical fictions. But certainly there is a lake of fire, a second death, for those that are unbelievers (Revelation 21:7-8). What exactly the experience will be like we cannot be sure, but we do know it means a second death, a forfeiture of life in the age to come, and it is most certainly a very unpleasant experience. Yes, I do believe the lake of fire is real ... but it is not permanent! And it is not for the purpose of tormenting and punishing forever and ever ... it is to accomplish God’s purpose of purging and correcting for whatever period of time God determines is appropriate and necessary.

God is love, yet God demands righteousness, and this righteousness is found in Christ Jesus. Some will believe in this lifetime. They find their way thru faith. “Happy are those who are not perceiving and believe.” (John 20:29) But others will not find their way until after the experience of death ... and some perhaps not until they experience the lake of fire (second death). But they will find their way, because the good shepherd will not be satisfied until all of His creation is safely within the fold. Like Thomas these stubborn ones will not believe based on faith, but like Thomas they will believe when they see (John 20:26-29).

But don’t jump to conclusions about me! I believe only what God reveals in His Word; for all else is subject to error. Those who claim to be prophets today may sometimes speak truth, but other times not, and their word cannot therefore be trusted. Nor can churches, preachers, teachers or professors be trusted. They disagree amongst themselves, and they cannot all be right. Nature reveals things about God, but only to a very limited extent, leaving much to speculation.

Only the Word of God is a specific revelation from God ... things He chooses to reveal about Himself to us. Without His Word we could only speculate. With His Word we have those things He has chosen to reveal. *And it is upon this Word that I base my beliefs.*

Don't jump to conclusions when you hear the word "universalism." Listen to what I have to say, study, and think. I once accepted that the mainstream Church was correct on every point; but denominations even differ amongst themselves, and some must be wrong in some teachings. Seek the pure Word of God.

A Word About "Orthodoxy"

If we are accused of straying from "orthodoxy" we must remember that "orthodoxy" does not mean truth as opposed to falsehood ... it is simply the majority opinion. If the creeds and articles of religion of the mainstream Christian denominations are correct on all points, then "orthodoxy" can guard against error. But if these creeds and articles of religion have incorporated error, then to remain staunchly in the "orthodox" camp will mean perpetuating error forever, with no hope of finding the truth.

"Orthodoxy" is simply the majority opinion that has been handed down to us. Perhaps it was most greatly shaped in the 5th century by Augustine. Prior to Augustine there was great diversity of opinion within the church. Many in the very early church, and most probably the majority, believed that God would ultimately save all. Even Augustine conceded that there were very many who believed this to be the case.

But was Augustine correct on all points when he determined "orthodoxy" versus "heresy?" Augustine was a man. Those of the early church were men and women ... they were not infallible! Many individual points within "orthodoxy" may be correct, but perhaps not all points.

If we accept truths only because they have been passed down to us within the "orthodox" stream, we are not placing our faith in God or even in His Word ... we are placing great faith in the "traditions of men" ... the very thing Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing. We must be like the Bereans (Acts 17:10-12). They did not refuse to hear Paul out, nor did they accept what Paul had to say without checking his teachings against Scripture.

We must not be unwilling to listen to Bible teachers, whether orthodox or un-orthodox. But our standard must be the Word of God, and not the teachings or traditions of men.

A Word About the Bible

I have indicated my belief that the Bible is the pure Word of God. I am referring to the Bible in the original manuscripts. The Greek and Hebrew manuscripts we have today are very close to the originals, but our modern-day English translations are sometimes erroneous, and contain much "interpretation" on the part of the translator. A comparison between translations will reveal discrepancies. After much study I highly recommend the Concordant Version as being the best literal word-for-word English translation available ... and the Keyword Concordance in the back of the Concordant Literal New Testament allows the reader to search each original Greek or Hebrew word, without knowing Greek or Hebrew, to "check" the accuracy of the English translation. Contact www.concordant.org for information on this translation.

- Bob Evely -