

Introduction

“In the end and consummation of the Universe all are to be restored into their original harmonious state, and we all shall be made one body and be united once more into a perfect man and the prayer of our Savior shall be fulfilled that all may be one.” - St. Jerome (SCREEN)

- This is the final message in the Holy Hell? series.
- In this series I have covered the time of change we are in and why we have chosen “Deconstruction —> Reconstruction for the '26 theme.
 - I’ve presented two of the three main stream views of the doctrine of hell, ECT and Conditional Immortality (Annihilationism) against the three element motif of God’s Character, the Scope of Redemption and the Text.
- Today’s message will focus on the third main stream view of the doctrine of hell, **remedial universalism** as portrayed in the **quote** by St. Jerome.
 - In short, it is the belief that God’s judgment, including the fire of **hell**, is ultimately **restorative**, not endlessly **retributive**.

Transition

“**Remedial Universalism**, also called purgatorial universalism or universal restoration (apocatastasis), posits that hell is a temporary, corrective place of purification where unrepentant souls undergo intense but ultimately restorative suffering to purge their sins before eventually entering heaven.” (SCREEN)

- One of the challenges we have in thinking about universalism is the **subjective lens** we look at it through.
 - To truly examine any doctrine, one would like to think they could and should look into it purely **objectively**.
 - The truth is that no one can actually do this, not purely objectively.
 - We all have a **lens** that we view such through, the lens created by things we have heard or been taught in the past, prior thoughts, assumptions, and even **biases** that we hold when coming to the topic.
- Even though it’s impossible to stand outside of one’s lens completely for a purely objective view, we should **acknowledge** our lens and make the best attempt toward an objective view that we can.

- This **does not mean** leaving our current beliefs to move toward a different set automatically, if at all, it simply means trying to approach a topic without a predetermined view about it that is already set and unmoveable - that is simply not how to have a **growth mindset** in anything.
- Toward this, regarding remedial universalism, I think we should start with the idea that contrary to what I have previously thought, this is not the **shallow idea** that “everyone goes straight to heaven no matter what.”
- Rather, it is the conviction that even though severe divine judgment will be necessary, God’s **grace** is persistent, and God’s **love** eventually succeeds in healing **all** wills.
- As I’ve done with each, I’ll share it against the evaluative three-element motif.

- **God’s Character**

2 Peter 3:9 ESV (SCREEN)

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

1 Timothy 2:3-4 ESV (SCREEN)

“**3** This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, **4** who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- God’s character—it is clear in these verses, the overall teaching of Scripture, and the life of Jesus, that God **desires** all to be saved.
- Of course the **issue raised** by those who **reject** universalism is the idea that just because God desires it, He does not always get what He wants or He does not get everything He wants.
 - *(It’s worth taking a moment and just letting that set in our minds to begin to ponder what we think about that claim.)*
- It is **not easy** to change how we think but it would help us greatly to **reorder** our thinking processes in approaching theology in some cases.

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- Some Christian teachers—especially within the early Greek-speaking church—instead of viewing the fire of judgment as God **giving up** on sinners, viewed it as God **refusing to give up** on sinners.
- They imagined judgment, not as the **final failing effort** or eternal retribution, but as the **final triumph** of divine love.

Song of Solomon 8:6-7 NLT (SCREEN)

“6 Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame. 7 Many waters cannot quench love, nor can rivers drown it. If a man tried to buy love with all his wealth, his offer would be utterly scorned.”

- The **root idea** is that within God’s character, **death** cannot be more **powerful** than divine **love**.

1 John 4:8 ESV (SCREEN)

“God is love.”

- And **based on that**, no matter what has to happen, it is outside of God’s character (of love) to allow His children to suffer ... **endlessly**.
- Many **incorrectly think** universalism **dismisses** the judgment of God.
 - To those who hold remedial universalist views, they would argue this view holds that God’s judgment is real and painful, but it is ultimately **purifying**.
 - Origen taught God’s fire **purifies** the soul like gold.
 - He wrote that God’s punishments are “**medicinal**.”
 - So in this view, hell absolutely exists but is **remedial, not retributive**, and **temporary**, not **endless** in duration.
- The **big idea** is that if God truly is love, then divine love never stops being loving, even in judgment. (The immutability of God)
 - ECT and Conditional Immortality believe God’s holiness **excludes** whereas Universalists argue God’s holiness **purifies**.

Transition

- In message 3, I covered the issues from the motif element, **the Text**.
 - These regarded the essence of hell based on the Greek words translated as “hell,” and the challenges of the Greek word denoting duration—that is translated in English as eternal—when it clearly can mean a long span of time as opposed to unending, so I won’t address these again here. (*Check out the video and notes*)
- So beyond the meaning of the **essence** and **duration** texts, the main thing left to consider is the view that many scriptures can be interpreted to suggest the **inevitability** of restoration to God—that all things at some point—eventually—are **reconciled** to God.
 - This is the Scope of Redemption based on the text.

• The Scope of Redemption

Colossians 1:19-20 ESV (SCREEN)

“**19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether on **earth** or in **heaven**, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

1 John 2:1-2 ESV (SCREEN)

“**1** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the **whole world**.”

1 Corinthians 13:8 ESV (SCREEN)

“Love never ends.”

Acts 3:19-21 NASB (SCREEN)

“**19** Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; **20** and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, **21** whom heaven must receive until the period of **restoration of all things**, about which God spoke by the mouths of His holy prophets from ancient times.”

- Universalists believe the **cosmic** nature of redemption requires that every creature—eventually—to be reconciled to God.

1 Corinthians 15:22-28 ESV (SCREEN)

“**22** For as in Adam **all die**, so also in Christ shall **all be made alive**. **23** But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. **24** Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. **25** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. **26** The last enemy to be destroyed is death. **27** For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. **28** When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, **that God may be all in all.**”

- Based on **verse 28**, “that God may be all in all,” Gregory of Nyssa saw **judgment** as part of God’s **unfailing plan** to restore humanity.
- He argued that God’s love will eventually “destroy evil” in every heart, the only way God could be “all in all.”

Philippians 2:9-11 ESV (SCREEN)

“**9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus **every knee** should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

- This verse is **often quoted** in a way that suggests somewhat of a “God’s foot on the throat, forceful, broken will, dominated—defeated confession.”
- The universalist argues it does not actually say that, and that the correct interpretation means even those who reject Jesus, eventually **behold** His love in a way that **opens their hearts** to receive and acknowledge Him, not as “the Lord” but like us, as “their Lord.”

- **Confession** comes **immediately** for those who choose Jesus now and **through** the purifying fires of hell for those who reject Jesus in this life.
- It is worth pondering that the confession made from belief would be more “to the glory of God the Father” than the forced dishonest confession of a defeated foe.

Conclusion

- As a final thought in how to view all three main views of hell, we should ask ourselves this question:

“What is the purpose of God’s Judgment?” (SCREEN)

- Does God judge to condemn?
- To punish and pay back?
 - Or to heal and restore?
- Biblical imagery about judgment has to be interpreted:
 - Fire burns away chaff, but also purifies gold.
 - The surgeon’s knife cuts, but heals.
 - The Refiner’s fire destroys dross, but purifies the metal.
- To conclude this series, I’ll end as I have each week and that is although the doctrine of hell is very important, it is not the main thing or goal for Christians.
 - I have **intentionally not told you** which view you should believe.
 - I have encouraged you to do the work, study and pray.
 - I have tried to convey that the more important thing for Christians is to **love Jesus and love others** in a way that is based on His love, sacrifice, and acceptance, **not on a fear based view** of an angry God.
- So this I know and leave with you:
 - God is good.
 - God is just.
 - God’s judgments are trustworthy.
 - God’s purposes for His creation are ultimately glorious. (SCREEN)
- Because in the end, the Christian hope is not in a doctrine—but in a Person, **Jesus Christ**.

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References:

Origen

(Paraphrased from On First Principles 1.6.1–4, 2.10.4.)

Gregory of Nyssa

(Drawing from On the Soul and the Resurrection and The Great Catechism.)