

The Conscience of Guilt, the Conscience of Innocence, and a Flaw in Universal Redemption without Faith by Ward Fenley

As the title suggests, this topic of the conscience relates to the current controversy among believers in fulfilled eschatology. First, it must be noted that there is a vast difference between traditional universalism and universal redemption. To clarify, universalism in its traditional sense is the belief that all ways lead to God, or heaven. Believers in universal redemption do not believe this. They teach that the blood of Christ was efficacious for all humanity, with no exceptions. That actual concept does not directly diminish the power of the cross. For, if Christ did indeed die for all humanity, then Christ's work did not fail if all humanity is redeemed. But there are some inherent problems. The three main views among believers in fulfilled eschatology are:

- 1) Christ died for all those who have believed or will believe and thus all those who believe have eternal life
- 2) Christ died for all humanity but only those who believe will have eternal life
- 3) Christ died for all humanity and all are in the kingdom regardless of whether they have believed.

I will focus on proving the latter false by taking a careful look at the conscience. Regarding the awareness of the conscience, it is crucial that we acknowledge what remembrance actually is. Judgment for sin was never just an issue of mere imputation or origin. One may argue "through one man sin entered the world and death by sin." But we must not discount the vast number of Scriptural sources which explicitly declare that in order for God to actually be angry at sin, the conscience must be aware:

"the law worketh wrath"

"sin is not imputed when there is no law"

"I had not known (been made aware) sin except the law had said, 'thou shalt not covet' "

"Some shall awake to everlasting shame" –Shame is an experience of the conscience:

Hebrews 10:1-2 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshipers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

We must not underemphasize what the writer of Hebrews is trying to communicate: The goal of redemption was to eradicate sin for the consciences of those for whom the sacrifice was made: "the worshipers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." The author supremely rams this home with the next two verses:

Hebrews 10:3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins

every year.

Hebrews 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

The purpose of sacrifices was to make them remember their sins and consequently their guilt, so that they would be driven to Christ. "The law was our taskmaster to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

This remembrance (or lack thereof) was prophesied:

Jeremiah 3:16-17 And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. 17 At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.

Notice that the ark would no longer come to mind. The ark represents the law of commandments and ordinances which were contrary to them (that is, made them aware of their sin). They would no longer remember it. No longer remembering it, they would no longer walk after the imagination of their evil heart. The evil heart was a guilty conscience. And through guilty consciences the self-righteous sought God by their own means. The law produced guilt, and guilt is what led to "vain imaginations" (Romans 1:21) of the self-righteous. They vainly imagined they could become righteous by keeping the law; they even believed themselves to be so. The self-righteous person's attempt to self-justify is motivated by guilt. If guilt is removed there is no motive to self-justify. And when the guilt is removed in Christ, as it only truly can be, it will never lead to pride (certainly not self-righteousness) because the one who has had his guilt removed in Christ, through faith, knows he has been shown mercy. And he will prove that by being merciful. He who has been forgiven much, loves much. This is why self-righteousness is contradictory to the kingdom. The self-righteous are still guilty.

Romans 7:7-11 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. 8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. 9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 10 And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

Sin slew Paul, or made him guilty. "I was alive without the law once." That is, he was not guilty in his conscience. Sin came and Paul was slain (made guilty). But again, the Scriptures predicted a time of no more remembrance:

Isaiah 65:17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

2 Corinthians 5:17 If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are

passed away, behold, all things are become new.

The passing away of the old things was not just the removal of the temple and law. The removal of the temple and law were the outward signs that the consciences of those purged by the blood of Christ were innocent:

Hebrews 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

And with even more clarity:

Hebrews 9:8-9 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all is not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle is yet standing: 9 Which is a figure for the present time in which are offered both gifts and sacrifices, that cannot make him that does the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

The implication being: The once for all eternal sacrifice of Christ has made the conscience perfect. How? Through faith in His blood. It is knowing that we have, by the grace of God, relied solely on the efficacy of the blood of Christ for the removal of guilt that we have a pure and perfect conscience.

Adam was alive (without conscience of guilt toward God, but not immortal—God alone has inherent immortality (1 Timothy 6:16)—(still naked, just as Paul described the first century church as in need of being further clothed, looking for the completion of that clothing in order to obtain immortality:

2 Corinthians 5:4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life).

The law came ("of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat"), Adam ate and became aware of his guilt. He realized an already existing condition (he was naked before God but now was aware of it, thus producing wrath in God. This is what law does--the law worketh wrath, through making the conscience aware of transgression). He hid from God (the light: Men love darkness--self-righteousness--rather than the light and they run from the light lest their deeds should be exposed. (In other words, guilt produces fear of admission of failure, hence a natural inclination toward creating a facade of innocence of outward morality rather than a very real and purified conscience toward God). God kept Adam from becoming immortal by putting flaming swords in front of the tree of life (Christ) so that he would not become like God, knowing good and evil and having immortality. Eventually, God would grant us the privilege of both:

2 Timothy 1:10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

Immortality is not just having the naked lack of awareness of sin Adam had. Immortality is having the clothed awareness of innocence through the blood of

Christ. Hebrews is the explication of redemption and resurrection. "You who were dead (guilty) in transgressions and sins has He made alive (innocent through forgiveness) and made you sit together in heavenly places with Him." (Ephesians 2:5-6). It's not enough to dwell in heavenly places (that is, have a conscience). "Heavenly places" simply refers to the conscience. There must be a distinction made between dwelling in heavenly places versus dwelling in heavenly places in Christ. In Ephesians 6, rulers of the darkness of the evil age were said to be dwelling in heavenly places. This is still true today, as those rulers represent those who accuse God's people. Regardless, they were (are) not with Christ. In other words, they were darkened in their consciences. They were walking in the darkness and not in the light. To walk in darkness is to be guilty. To walk in the light is to be innocent. This contrast between darkness and light is always visible throughout Scripture. "And you that one time were alienated and enemies (guilty)...has He reconciled (made your conscience innocent) in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy (guiltless), unblameable (without charge), and unreprouvable (without need for the rebuke of continual sacrifice to remind the sinner of sin), in His sight." This is where we must understand what is meant by a conscience which is innocent. We don't always feel it. But we know that is how God sees us. It is about His view of us through Christ. It is the knowledge of that fact which the Scripture refers to as faith.

Luke 1:77 To give knowledge (conscience) of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

Through forgiveness the people of God have the knowledge of salvation. That is, they have the knowledge of their innocence before God, this in stark contrast to their horrifying past:

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge (conscience) of sin.

A soul which has heard the Gospel exists in either the knowledge of sin or the knowledge of salvation. That is, it exists in guilt or innocence. Knowledge or awareness is the issue. There is no presence with God when there is a remembrance of sins. The self-righteous cannot be in the presence of God because they are always violating their own standards or a revived standard of Mosaic law (Romans 14). Presence with God is always accompanied by an awareness of innocence--always. This is why the view of the universal redemption of all men with or without faith cannot be true without all humanity actually having the knowledge (or conscience) of salvation. The knowledge of salvation results from forgiveness of sin. It is about the awareness of innocence. Immortality is about the knowledge of God having made us holy. One cannot be relying upon self-righteousness (thus not relying on Christ) and be in His presence. To have it contrary is to despise the holiness of God. This is not to say that the believer in universalism is consciously despising God's holiness. There are many theologies which have severe implications which are not necessarily recognized by the adherent. That is why I am not attacking the believer in universal redemption. I think we all have many genuine motives, and I definitely see the passion of those who believe in universal redemption, and it (the passion) is noble, but sadly not based on an understanding of the conscience. The issue of the conscience is probably the strongest argument against universal redemption.

God's perspective of the conscience is monumentally important while dissecting this issue of faith, because faith is inseparably linked to an innocent conscience or a perfect conscience. Faith is about awareness. Conscience is about awareness, whether guilty or innocent. I cannot emphasize this enough: Presence with God = innocence of conscience = life. Separation from God = guilt of conscience = death. If either of those is twisted, suddenly inconsistencies begin popping up like rabbits. We have to be careful to look around the corner of what may come before hastily embracing a doctrine.