



Conducted by
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“In Matthew 18:17 we read, ‘but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.’ What is a heathen, and are there heathens today?”

The insidious march of universalism — the belief that ultimately all men will be saved — is rapidly gaining ground throughout the world. This dangerous doctrine, which seriously minimises the effect of sin in the world, holds that the most depraved people who have ever lived or will live will ultimately share heaven with Peter, Paul and all the other saints who have ever lived. The only way in which we can counteract the onslaught of universalism is by accepting that the Bible is the fully inspired Word of God and that it is the sole and adequate authority in all spiritual matters. If we do not cling to the impregnable rock of Holy Writ we shall find ourselves on the shifting sands of human philosophy and speculation. Therefore, it is to the Word of God, as always that we must look for our answers to these very important questions.

Why is Universalism so wrong?

The universalist would teach that God’s radical love will pursue every man until every man is redeemed. But if this is the case, where is there room for the individual to exercise his free-will? If love isn’t voluntary then it is not love at all. It is part of the intrinsic dignity of man to say ‘no’ even to God, if he so chooses, but he must then bear the consequences of that.

Furthermore, universalism denies the authority of the Word. It makes the mistake of exercising human judgement on revealed truths which by their nature are independent of it. In other words, it purports to ascribe to God different actions to those which He has explicitly stated in His Word. For this there is no excuse. Throughout the Bible there is a consistent contrast drawn between good and evil, the saved and the lost.

Universalism also minimises the gravity of sin. If the atheist will reach the same end in the life to come as the saint will, then why the teaching concerning the wages of sin? This doctrine teaches men to treat sin and its effects lightly.

Finally, the preachers of universalism would teach that Christ has already redeemed the world, and that one day He will gather the whole world to Himself; in the meantime, some will live in rebellion but in the end all will be well. Some will not even hear the gospel, but in the end they will reap the benefits in heaven along with all others.

Who are the heathen?

When ‘the heathen’ are mentioned, there immediately springs to mind those people who live in the fastnesses of mountains and jungles who do not enjoy the benefits of our so-called Christian civilisation. This is not consistent with what scripture teaches.

Nowhere does the Word connote that the heathen is someone of low social class or dubious moral conduct. Heathendom is looked upon as that condition of men and women whose worship is directed not towards God but Satan. It is the condition of 'the lost,' and you will remember that the express purpose of Jesus coming into the world was to "seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10).

In the New Testament the word 'Ethnos' is variously translated as 'Gentiles,' 'nations,' 'heathen.' It represents a multitude of people of the same nature or genus, a nation or a people; so it was used by Paul relative to the Gentiles. Speaking about the Jews Paul said, "Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles (ethnos), for to provoke them to jealousy." (Rom. 11:11). Since the Greek language was the common means of communication in the Roman Empire, Greek and Gentile became more or less interchangeable terms.

Paul was sent to the Gentiles to turn them from the power of Satan to God. He said concerning their worship, "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God, and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils" (1 Cor. 10:20). This, of course, was written to the church in Corinth. In his Ephesian letter, Paul refers to those who were "the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). So it appears that the point at issue is not social status or degree of civilisation, but of a fundamental relationship with God. It is true to say that in the most advanced societies there will be found the 'heathen,' because disobedience to God's Word implies some degree of knowledge of it, and the disobedience constitutes a rejection of the truth as God has revealed it. The 'heathen' are the 'lost.'

What does it mean to be lost?

The Lord stated that His fundamental purpose in coming into the world was "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). You will notice that in this statement there is nothing which would make us differentiate between those who hear the truth and reject it, and those who never had a chance to hear the truth; Paul said, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that *are* lost," not those who are *in danger* of being lost. So we conclude that *all* are lost, and consequently *all* need to be saved; the Word surely states this.

The truth is that man has hopelessly lost his way, and there is no way he can find it apart from Christ; Jesus said to Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Nobody incurs the displeasure of God save those who choose to do so, because God's desire is that no one should perish in sin.

What the Church has to do is to evangelise the world. There are those who hold the view that in some way best known to God the unevangelised will have a special dispensation from God; whether this is true or not is a question which, perhaps, we are not competent to judge. We can only reiterate that the Bible condemns *all* under sin and consequently unrighteous before God; indeed, the Bible seems to teach that even though the heathen do not hear the gospel, they are in some way answerable to God for their actions, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law . . . For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves" (Rom. 2:12-15).

In conclusion, then, I think we can say with some certainty that the 'heathen' are the 'lost,' and if this is so then we must also conclude that there are countless millions of heathens today in all cultures and societies, no matter how advanced or

retarded. If people are lost then they need to be saved, and the only person who can save them is Jesus, the Christ. He gave the command to His disciples, "Go ye into *all* the world, and preach the gospel to *every* creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16). Perhaps the motivation to preach the gospel should not be just to please God, but because we have a duty to 'heathens' to give them *a chance to hear it* and be saved.