

Confessions of a Universalist

Carlton Pearson defends his belief that Hindus and Buddhists will go to heaven.

Bishop Carlton Pearson says for years he has been preaching a “more appealing and attractive message of God’s unconditional love for all.”

But after he lost a bid for mayor of Tulsa, Oklahoma, last year and a Charisma article called attention to his “new” doctrinal stance, Pearson came under widespread public scrutiny regarding his teaching of universal reconciliation or “gospel of inclusion,” which promotes the idea that confession in Jesus as Savior is not a requirement to go to heaven.

The pastor of Tulsa’s Higher Dimensions Family Church has said he will stand by his commitment to preach universal reconciliation, despite a mass exodus of his congregation, a large drop in numbers at his annual Azusa summer conference and outright rejection by high-profile leaders. Pearson agreed to answer questions from Charisma about his controversial doctrine.

How did you come to adopt your new view of salvation?

I was influenced into this thinking in much the same way as Paul in Galatians 1:11-20 described his indoctrination into a more inclusive gospel that reached outside normal Jewish circles.

Do you teach that Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims will go to heaven? What do you believe about other religions?

Second Corinthians 5:16 implies that the gospel is not biased and doesn’t judge people and/or God’s love for them based on

religious or cultural outward appearances. Acts 17:26-29 indicates that we are all children of God and that He is not far from any of us.

What do you teach about hell?

I believe some will go to hell (see Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31), but since the gates of hell will not prevail (see Matt. 16:18), the only people who will spend eternity there are those whom Jesus failed to redeem-those whom His blood was too weak to reach and wash (see 1 John 2:1-2; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 1 Cor. 5:5).

Many of your Christian mentors, such as Oral Roberts, have distanced themselves from you, saying that you are in error. Do you believe they are in error?

Those who have distanced themselves from me are as sincerely convinced of their opinions as I am of mine. I love and respect them all, especially Oral Roberts, my father in ministry.

You have also made some statements about homosexuals that would be considered radical in the evangelical-charismatic mainstream. Do you believe that practicing homosexuals will go to heaven?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a demand for righteousness; it is a declaration of it. Homosexual sins or sinners are no more sinful than heterosexual sins or sinners.

There are two Greek words for sin that help me understand how practicing sinners can still go to heaven. One is hamartia ("offense"). John 1:29 refers to Jesus as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin (harmartia) of the world" (NKJV). Another one is hamartano ("to miss the mark") as used in 1 John 2:1-2,

"If anyone sins [hamartano], we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous [One]." John goes on to say, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins [hamartia]-and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world" (v. 2, NIV).

Second Corinthians 5:19 says, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." Because of Calvary, God does not count men's sins against them; why do we?

What impact has your teaching on universalism had on your ministry?

In the broadest sense of my reality, my teachings on Inclusion have grown my church to thousands even if most of them are outside its walls. For the first time in my 30 years of preaching, Jews, Hindus, Muslims and even atheists are listening to my message and considering it relevant and appealing to their hearts. The audience for the message of Inclusion is huge. It is global and crosses all ethnic, cultural and religious barriers. It is indeed, as we were taught at Oral Roberts University, "going into every man's world."

What is the biggest misconception about your teaching on universalism?

Some interpret our inclusion of other religions in the redemptive work of the cross as a suggestion that there are other ways to God than the way of the cross or of Christ. Nothing's further from the truth.

I teach that Jesus is everybody's way to life and God, as Adam was everybody's way to sin and death. Nobody gets to vote on

such realities. They are automatic (see Rom. 5:12-14).

Any other comments on universalism?

According to Isaiah 53:5, Jesus paid the full price for our peace with God. If, in fact, He paid the full price for the full purchase, why would He settle for less? He did not finance His repurchasing (redeeming) of the world to God; He paid it in the cash and currency of His own life and blood.

If you purchased 1,000 acres of land and paid for it in full, would you be satisfied to get the deed for only 10 acres? He paid it all, He owns it all. We don't have a vote on it. It was done before the foundation of the world (see Rev. 13:8).

What has the Lord showed you regarding the controversy over your teaching of universalism?

Nothing is new under the sun. Not only is what I am preaching not new, but the controversy around it is also common to all new views or presentations of Truth. The difference between a heretic and a prophet is often time.

This interview was conducted by Charisma associate editor Eric Tiansay.