

Chapter Ten

The Literalist and the Universalist

To be honest and somewhat brutal, I really do not take either of these two viewpoints seriously, though **perhaps I'm being a bit unkind. I've got to give credit where credit is due.** So hang in there while I share what I think are the good intentions behind both of these methods of interpretation.

The Literalist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: The Book of Revelation is fully prophetic and is to be taken literally all the way through, even those portions that seem clearly symbolic. It is somewhat similar to the Futurist viewpoint, but attempts to overcome the vagaries of interpretation by taking the plain meaning to its fullest extent. Often denigrated as being hyper-literal by its detractors.

I believe that the Literalist is truly trying to escape from the temptation to be drawn into giving an interpretation and is genuinely averse to allowing the vagaries of the imagination to run wild. And for this they are to be commended. The problem with this approach to any piece of literature, let alone Scripture, is that it completely ignores the reality of metaphoric and symbolic language being a normal, acceptable and essential part of communication. Parables, dreams and visions are repeatedly used throughout the rest of the Bible. Consequently, the Literalist ends up taking the opposite extreme from the Idealist and ends up with yet another interpretation based on literalised symbols. Though the Literalist claims to have a purely literal approach to Revelation, like the Futurist, they bend the rules of their own premise when it comes to the time period that the prophecies are supposed to speak of. Every mention of the word 'shortly' that John of Patmos uses when he writes that the things he is prophesying are about to come soon, is **twisted to mean 'quickly' so that it can be applied to events** in the future. **(Note: Many modern versions of the Bible have used the word 'quickly' to avoid the obvious meaning** that the original Greek word means in its context) Consequently, their viewpoint ends up being very similar to the Futurists but because of their extremely literal interpretive method of exegesis, they are believing all the symbolism found in the seals, trumpets and bowls to be explicitly fulfilled in literal events immediately prior to the end of the age. Yeah, right.

The Universalist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: All of the above views of the Book of Revelation are legitimate. In the Universalist mind-set, there is no contradiction between Idealist, Historicist, Preterist, Futurist, or Literalist. This viewpoint assumes that the Apocalypse has multiple fulfillment of each of its prophecies and can also be taken completely literally whilst still having an allegorical meaning. In this view God has performed a miracle by giving a five in one prophecy. This viewpoint is thought to be the result of a worldly post-modern concept coming into the church expressed in the following phrase: What is true for you is true for you and what is true for me is true for me. In other words, whatever you make of it is okay. Similar to the Idealist viewpoint but all embracing.

The Universalist's desire to bring about unity in the Body of Christ is perhaps the noble motivation behind the basic premise of their viewpoint. By **accepting everyone's point of view they are trying to** avoid the conflict that arises from people holding onto differing opinions. This viewpoint is also known

as eclecticism, the condensed meaning of which is: *a conceptual approach that does not hold rigidly to a single paradigm or set of assumptions.*

To give their viewpoint legitimacy, Universalists have come up with what they call The Law of Multiple Fulfillment which they apply to all prophecy. Personally, I find this concept hard to accept. If there is a law of multiple fulfillment, then Christ could be sacrificed for sin multiple times and or in multiple ways. Whilst there is often a spiritual application to many passages of scripture that goes beyond the plain reading and clearly some prophetic statements that have a dual application, only those that are identified as such by scripture itself are acceptable for doctrinal matters or prophetic understanding.

Critics of this viewpoint contend that the consequence of choosing this line of reasoning is that it ultimately rejects the idea that truth can be attained, that truth is absolute and that truth is not a relative concept. They also point out that we cannot take this approach to Revelation and consistently apply it to the Word of God and still hold to the truth of the Gospel. I really do not think that this is what Paul was exhorting us to when he admonished the church in Corinth to be of one mind. It seems more like a step toward mindlessness. No logical thinking required . . . or accepted, for this is their absolute. No apologies whatsoever, this is utter foolishness and I am totally reluctant to go there.