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Objections to the Gospel Part 1

It only makes sense to see 3 primary objections come up against the 3 Persons Who make up the One and Only Triune God, so let's deal with them over the next three issues of *The Adopted Life!*

After many years of preaching the Gospel that begins more faithfully with answering the question "Who is Jesus?" I have noticed that there are three objections that I can count on addressing with people who hear it for the first time. You are sure to have thought about these questions yourself and can anticipate them coming at you in your defense of God's Good News.

The three objections are:

1. Isn't this the heresy of Universalism?
2. Isn't this theology encouraging people to sin?
3. What happened to the hell we know and love?

With regard to answering these questions, you are headed for an abstract, long-winded, perhaps scriptural "fight" if you are not first settled on knowing what it means to answer who Jesus is! If we take John 1, Col 1, and Hebrews 1 as basic scriptures on Who Jesus is, we will see that Jesus is the Word. As the Word, Jesus IS God and Jesus is WITH God.

We also note that Jesus created everything AND Jesus sustains everything. It is also important to see that Jesus is at one and the same time 100% God and 100% Man. In other words, Jesus is actually the Son of God as Man. Though Jesus is not a number or equation, this would be the "basic math" of understanding Who Jesus is in relation to the Godhead and Creation.

Before I address the objections with answers, I will briefly define what people think we are saying in their objections, so we are on the same page as we reason with Trinitarian logic. Let's begin with objection number 1:

Isn't this the heresy of Universalism? When people ask about Universalism, their fear is that we are saying people have no free-will and are forced to embrace God, and that even people who oppose and reject God (including the Devil) will absolutely change their minds and fully embrace God.

Here are my basic thoughts and response to the objection of Universalism, being more faithful to Who Jesus is:

In our understanding of Jesus and His relationship with the Father in the Communion of the Spirit, Christians hold fast to the belief that God is One God in Union WITHOUT a loss of Distinction. Christians also do not believe that God creates in opposition to how God is as Father, Son and Spirit. In Jesus we see that the nature of God is union with distinction, and through our connection with Jesus, so are we and all things. Because we are created and sustained by God in Jesus, we are also in permanent union with God in Him. Colossians 1:19 tells us that Jesus is the fullness of God "housed permanently" in flesh.

The word "dwell" in Greek means "to house permanently" For the same reason, we are also

distinct, with a freedom to believe and embrace God or freedom to reject and oppose God. Whenever we uphold a theology that does not hold both of those thoughts together as one whole, we are not being faithful to the Truth revealed in Jesus.

So, we cannot possibly be preaching universalism or something that denies human distinction and our ability to participate in the life of God willingly! We believe and preach through this theology that we are distinct creatures in our union with God, which leaves open our ability to reject and oppose God, potentially forever!!

However, we must also preach, just as strongly, our objective inclusion in the life of God even though that union can be opposed, and this is where people get confused. Since our human life flows from and is included in the Life of God in Jesus, we can use some really easy and down-to-earth illustrations that will help us learn to hold both ideas together as one piece.

Which one of you ever asked your parents if you could be born BEFORE you were born? That's a silly question, isn't it? But it is a helpful question, because we see that the nature of life is to come into being, in a family of Persons, BEFORE we can do or say anything, let alone believe and have faith, right?! Grasping this simple idea can help us understand how being born is an act of grace that brings us into a relationship of persons with unity AND distinction.

The unity could be seen if we went and got a DNA test along with our parents (even though we might not look anything much like our parents and they wanted to deny us because of our "bad looks"☺) The distinction is proven by the fact that we are unique individuals who, in this case, don't even look much like our parents.

Notice that the child is in union with the family in distinction, and even though the family could deny the child in their distinction, and the child could deny the family in its distinction, a DNA test would prove their union as persons in and of the same family. Notice also that the only way that distinction can take place is right smack dab in the middle of union and inclusion in the family!

This is what is going on in the Gospel (Jesus!) We have no choice about being born and included in the Life of God in Jesus, just as we had no choice about being born as a human in our families. We are created and sustained by Jesus and there is no life apart from him! Whatever happens to him happens to everything he created and sustains.

However, our distinction is not violated because we can still oppose and reject or deny Him in our family membership, but it won't mean we are not family, it will only mean, and can only mean, a violation of relationship within the family!

One final thing: even though Christianity does not promote universalism, nor can it be dogmatic about it, it must be admitted that the possibility of universalism does exist as long as we believe that union with distinction is the nature of things, and that all things will exist forever in Christ who reconciled ALL things to God in his fleshly body (Col 1:19-22).

Who knows what can be pulled off with the Triune God who is at the center of all things in His Relationship with all things in Jesus?! Therefore, we do not, as Christians, have to fight so harshly those people who believe in universalism! Sometimes it seems they are the only ones who actually have the Universalist hope! We must oppose the dogmatism of universalism but, on the other hand,

we should possess the same Universalist hope that Universalists have, and be “hopeful Universalists” ourselves. After all, God is:

1 Timothy 2:3-4 “This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (NRSV)

Notice that God’s desire is NOT that all “GET” saved but that all “BE” saved (be who they already are in Jesus), and come to the knowledge of the truth (come to know that which is already true, NOT make it come true!)

I don’t know about you, but I sure hope that we Christians will start participating more in this universalist hope that Jesus shares with us in grace and love in our adopted life, and hold up a God we can’t domesticate rather than a God we have “tamed”!!

~ Tim Brassell