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Objections to the Gospel Part 3

In this final article on addressing the “Big Three” objections to the Gospel I will be addressing the third big objection to the Good News of the Adoption and Inclusion of all of Creation in Jesus.

That 3rd objection is: **“What happened to the Hell we know and love?”** When people ask this question their fear is that we are completely doing away with and ignoring the “clear” and obvious biblical teaching of the suffering for those who reject and do not accept, trust or believe in Jesus. In their minds someone is definitely going to hell if they have to send them there themselves!

Pardon my humor and sarcasm, but I have to honestly admit as a Gospel preacher that, to date, when I preach, unhedgingly, the Gospel of Creation’s Inclusion in the Life of God in Jesus MANY Christians cry aloud about the subject of “Hell”. But whenever I emphasized the teaching of hell in the past, not one Christian (in my experience) cried out for more of Jesus and grace! You have to admit that sometimes we Christians do sound a little more enthusiastic and certain about the subject of hell than we do about Jesus and heaven, and that is truly SAD!! What does that reveal about our “Good News”?

But, in keeping with the intent of this article, how do we respond to this very passionate and real objection in the Light of Christ? Here are my basic thoughts in that Light!

If you have been reading these issues of *The Adopted Life*, and paying much attention, you probably know what I am going to do, and what I am NOT going to do in approaching this subject. Negatively, I am not going to gather all the scriptures I can find on hell with a word study bible and try to build a doctrine from that. Positively, and again, I am learning that the first thing to do is to recognize that there is only real light on a subject in the Light of the Person of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World! (John 8:12) If I truly want to understand what hell is, then I have to know Who Jesus is. If we begin defining hell too soon, and without that Christ-centered foundation, we are destined for another shady take on this important biblical subject. Please NOTICE that I consider this to be a biblical subject AND important to understand, so hopefully that answers the question as to whether I or anyone else affiliated with this newsletter actually believes in the experience of hell! We definitely DO!!

Let’s get to the root of this subject, and get very practical and concrete! Starting with Jesus, we understand that The Good News is actually the Person of Jesus Christ Himself (Mark 1:1, Matt 1:21-23). In His Person we Christians believe that Jesus is really the Son of God as Man (John 1:49-51), and the One in, and through, and by, and for Whom all things are created and sustained (Colossians 1:15-18). We believe that when He died, all of creation somehow mysteriously died (2 Cor 5:14), and that when He rose, creation rose and ascended into the very life and being of the Triune God in Him (2 Cor 5:15, Eph 2:4-7). As the One in Whom all things are created AND sustained, this is the Reality and fundamental Truth regarding all things in creation! If we don’t think this way, we are not thinking in a Christian way, nor are we thinking properly, biblically speaking. It is in failing to understand and hold on to this permanent connection that creation has with God in Jesus that usually leads to our misunderstandings and misinterpretations about the Gospel and other

doctrines. Because Jesus SUSTAINS and not only created everything, we should NOT, as Christians, be able to picture something happening to Him that does not in fact happen to everything that is connected with Him - which is simply, EVERYTHING!

As an aside, in theological language, this is what is known as “ontology” or the subject of “being” and how we “know” who we are. In simpler language, Creation and Humanity IS what it is in Jesus Christ because we are forever and ontologically connected to Him in the creation and sustenance of our beings!!! This is why Paul makes statements about our being blessed with “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3, 20-21, 2:4-7.) At this point, most Christians are tempted to run headlong into the exclusivity of believers when they read these kinds of scriptures rather than holding on firmly to the fundamental Truth of Christianity that Jesus actually created and maintains EVERYTHING (John 1:1-5, Acts 17:28, Col 1, Heb 1:1-3 etc!!!)

Therefore, in plain language, no matter how much we argue about what hell is, and how separated it supposedly is from God, there is a statement about hell and all things that we must pay attention to in the Person of Jesus!! In Jesus is the Truth about where and what hell and all things REALLY are – something IN and NEAR the Triune God (Psalm 139, Heb 13:6!!) Triune God dwells with us IN our darkness and blindness, and there truly is no getting away from Him!! More encouragingly, the Gospel says that God loves and likes us so much, he not only came into darkness and sinful flesh to get us, but that nothing, not even hell and sin was/is going to keep us from being adopted into His intimate family relationship (2 Cor 5:21)!! Wow! All of our talk about God being only in Heaven and the Devil and evil people only in hell needs to be challenged and re-examined to say the least!! These negatives have NOT prevented God from being near us! In fact, God has actually used our rejection and opposition to Him as the means by which he has united Himself to us in an even stronger way in Jesus Christ! Good Gravy – I want to shout about now (and just let out an audible Woo-Hoo!!!)

Let’s now clarify and summarize our thoughts as they pertain to the question of our 3rd objection.

Let’s start with a vivid mental picture. What would you call being forced to live in marriage with the person you hated most – forever???

You are exactly right – Hell!!!! What would you call being “tortured” by your “worst enemy”, and being unable to get away or die???

Right again – Hell!! I think I see the lights coming on!

Because the Gospel shows us that creation and humanity are so permanently united in and with Triune God in Jesus Christ, there HAS to be a way of describing our DISTINCT ability to reject and oppose our union!! Remember, we are not “robots”, but made in the image of God and distinct in our union with Him. Our union with God in Christ creates the necessity of speaking about the experience and absolute pain and “gnashing of teeth” that follows our violation of that Reality!! The union is good and real and, therefore, so MUST be the negative and unreal experience of trying to poison the union!!!

Many of you have experienced this kind of thing with your teenage or adopted children, or in your teenage years and adoption! You are truly, relationally, and even legally a member of the family, but when mom and dad tick you off, the last thing you want to do is be near and intimate with them!

And when they try to talk, hug and love on you while you are angry at them, it makes you want to run into your room (usually inside the house) and slam the door in their face, while you “gnash your teeth” behind the door!!

Nothing has REALLY changed in your DNA or legal papers, but something sure has changed in the quality of the relationship, hasn't it?! Something sure has changed in the closeness you once experienced, and there is a growing “distance” in this violation of union and relationship, right?! But it also must be admitted that all the distance in the world, even your running all the way ‘round the world doesn't change your being your parents child! In fact, the ONLY reason you would both be able to experience the wrath, anger, pain, loneliness, darkness and distance to follow is because you are so in union that you are always on each others minds!! You would have to work endlessly hard to push the inevitable pain of this violation of family out of your mind (and you could get callous and adapt) but think of the type of personhood you would have to experience to try and hide that much relational poison INSIDE your gut!!! Yikes! You can begin to see the horrors of hell and the biblical warning to “Repent, and believe the Good News” (Mark 1:15!!!)

This is NOT hard to understand, is it? Of course it isn't! We all see it played out all of the time, and it is as tragic and frightening now, as ever it will be, if we keep choosing to engage in the “impossible possibility” as theologian Karl Barth calls it! The violent and unnatural twisting of my arm creates pain because it IS in union with my body, not because it isn't!! If I didn't have any arms attached to my person, it wouldn't hurt me if you twisted them! If you weren't in union with God in Jesus, there wouldn't be a chance in hell of your experiencing it!!!

As I conclude this article, let me make one final point. A lot of our questions on the subject of hell boil down to “where is hell going to be?”, “are you saying I will be living face-to face with people who oppose God and have to deal with their negativity all the time?”, etc. I am purposefully NOT answering such questions because they are left unanswerable in the Person of Jesus and the bible to a great degree. The bible seems to affirm a “distance” as it were between people who live in harmony with their union and people who do not live in harmony with their union with God in Jesus, but this is easy to relate to as noted in the story of the angry teenager above. The teenager (and self-righteous brother in the story of The Sprinting Father – Luke 15:11-32) simply don't want to be at the “family party” when they are angry, and they lock themselves in their room or run away, or stay out in the yard. The bible indicates that, regardless, God won't let the violators ruin the party (Matt 22:1-14!), just as you won't let the angry son or daughter IN YOUR FAMILY go kill your other children in their angst if you can at all help it (though your love and DNA remain the same and your aim isn't to now kill the violating child and see them permanently dead!!!)

Finally, the truth of the Gospel is NOT that we are all outside of God trying to get in. The staggering Truth of the Gospel is that we are all inside of the Triune God in Jesus and, insanelly (at the provocation and urging of the Evil one), trying to get out!!! This, impossible, “trying to get out” of our union, wittingly and unwittingly, creates the most profound kind of pain, and terms like “endless burning trash”, “darkness”, “gnashing of teeth”, “worms that don't die” and being “bound” are sobering and not too exaggerant ways of describing the horrible experience we call in one word – “Hell”!!!

You can avoid the experience of hell like the plague, right now, by trusting that in Jesus you have already been delivered from it and, in Him, been raised up into the Life He shares with the Father in the Spirit - BECAUSE IN HIM YOU ALREADY AND TRULY HAVE!!! It is impossible for you to be where Jesus is not, so repent (have a radical mind change) and believe the Good News!!!

~ Tim Brassell