

From the June 4, 2008 Issue

So, What's the Deal with Universalism?

I have a confession to make. I'm a hopeful universalist at heart. I want everyone to "be there." I think I'm in good company, because God hopes for that too (1 Tim. 2:4). Furthermore, Ephesians tells us that he created a plan to accomplish that very thing...that everyone would "be there."

So, before you pull out that mallet and begin whacking at all the universalism moles raising their heads...I hope you first begin by seeing a yellow caution light in your mind. Move slowly with that mallet, young man.

Let's begin by answering three questions:

1. Who is God? God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who exist in inseparable communion without loss of distinction.
2. Who are we? We are man, woman, and child who exist in God in inseparable communion without loss of distinction, in Jesus.
3. What is universalism? In the Light of Who Jesus is, Universalism is the idea that everyone will eventually say "yes" to God's inclusion, and live in their union with God the Trinity as God desires.

However, based on our first two answers above, we have to conclude that isn't necessarily true. Being distinct to say "yes" also leaves open the possibility of being distinct to say "no".

Another way of expressing the idea of Universalism is to say that all of humanity will be or already is saved. This is where we need to pause and consider our answers once again, albeit with more thought. Specifically, the "without loss of distinction" part, in view of the fact that our union with God is in the Eternal Son of God Who created and sustains all things.

In God's love for all mankind he created us to be unique with the capacity to either love him back or deny his love. He didn't create automatons preprogrammed to automatically reciprocate his love. He created us in His image. He created sons and daughters with a capacity to see and accept His love. In our distinction we can also see and reject His love.

Because our union with God is in Jesus Christ, our Sustainer, our response doesn't change our existence of eternal inseparable communion with the Triune God. It does, however, change our experience of that existence and communion.

The Apostle Paul said in Galatians that we can experience a life of love, joy, peace...in essence, the pleasures of Jesus' relationship with his Father in heaven. He also said we can experience a life of sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery...in essence the pain and hell that ultimately results from opposing our union with Jesus.

So, behind the idea of universalism is the truth that everything is in inseparable communion with God through Jesus Christ (it cannot otherwise be), but it is not a union that is without distinction. It's not a matter of whether humanity will exist forever with God or not. God already made that choice for us in Jesus. He has chosen to love and include all of us forever. The deal with

universalism is whether all of humanity will eventually come to accept (to believe and “be life”) His love, and experience his pleasure forever. Fortunately, we have an eternity to figure that one out.

So put down that mallet young man, and the unnecessary division it creates, and let’s get on with sharing His inclusive love forever. I’ll see you “there.”

~ *Craig Kuhlman*