

We Really Can Have it Both Ways

I expect that you have all heard the story of **Goldilocks** and the three bears, where Goldilocks entered the bears' house, and ate the **porridge**. The porridge in the first bowl was too hot; in the second it was too cold; the third bowl of porridge was just right, and she ate it all up. After eating, she was tired, she tried out their **beds**. The first was too hard; the second was too soft; and the third was just right.

Today, I'm going to tell you about **three theologians**. The theology of the first one is too **hard**; the second is too **soft**; and the third one is **just right**.

The first theologian is **John Calvin**. He was a preacher, teacher and theologian. He lived from 1509 to 1564, and spent the bulk of his adult life in **Geneva**, Switzerland. Calvin believed in **double predestination**. In other words, he believed that God decides that some people are going to go to heaven and others are going to go to hell, that the elect are destined for heaven, and the damned are destined for hell, and there is nothing that anybody can do to change that.

With the Calvinist understanding, there is no question of who determines who is damned and who is saved. It is God. The **only question** is **when** God determined who is damned and who is saved.

That brings us to **two words**. Those words are **supralapsarianism** and **infralapsarianism**. Those words seem so innocent. They are even kind of **fun** to say; supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. Those words would seem kind of **cool**. That is, they would seem kind of cool, if they weren't so **demonic**. You see, those words refer to **when God decided** to damn certain people for eternity.

The **most extreme** of the two words, or concepts, is **supralapsarianism**. Supralapsarianism means that God decided to damn certain people to be tortured in hell forever even **before creating** people. To put it another way, God created people having decided ahead of time which ones would be fried in hell for ever. That is **demonic**! It is pure **evil**!

Think of the implications of that. If any of **us tortured** anyone by burning them with fire for an extended period of time, we would be put in **prison** or

a mental hospital. So **how** can any **sane** person believe that it is all right for God to **create** people, having **already decided** to fry many of them forever?

Infralapsarianism is almost as bad a supralapsarianism. With infralapsarianism, **rather** than deciding to **fry** many people even **before** creating them, it is contended that God **created** the world, then allowed people to fall into **sin**, and **then decided** to send many of them to hell to suffer excruciating pain forever. With this understanding, God at least had the **decency** to create people before deciding which ones to damn forever. But that's **not** much of an **improvement** is it?

With **Calvinism**, whether you believe in supralapsarianism or infralapsarianism, it is obvious that **God** is in **charge**. It is not only possible, but it is mandatory, to believe that God is **all powerful**. But, with Calvinism, it is **impossible** to believe that God is **all loving**. So with Calvinism, you **can't** have it **both ways**. You can't believe that God is both all powerful and all loving.

So Calvin's theology is **too hard**, it is too **harsh** in its understanding of God.

That brings us to our **second** theologian; Jacobus **Arminius**. He was a Dutch pastor and theologian, who lived from 1560 to 1609. So he was born four years before John Calvin died. He actually **started** out in the **Calvinist** camp as a young man. Then he changed his mind. He **rebelled** against the monster god of Calvinism, the tyrant who was perceived to **throw people** into hell, **kicking** and screaming against their will, to torture them forever, and never again listen to their pleas for mercy.

So Arminius **rejected Calvinism** and its monster god. **Rather** than believing that **God decides** who goes to heaven and who goes to hell, he concluded instead that **people**, of their own **free will**, determine whether or not they go to heaven or hell. To put this another way, people have the power to **either cooperate** with God's Spirit, to accept salvation and be saved, or they can use their power of free will to **resist** God's grace and perish.

So Arminianism seems to get **God off** the **hook**. According to this way of looking at things, if certain people end up suffering in hell forever, it's not

God's fault. It's because God has **given** people the wonderful **gift** of free will. And it's **not God's fault** if some people use their free will to reject God, to reject salvation. So, it's people's own fault if they end up in hell. That being the case, they have merely **gotten** what they **deserve**.

The **problem** with Arminianism, however, is that it goes from **one extreme** to **another**. While **rejecting** the **demonic** god of Calvinism, he **replaced** that god with a **weak and stupid** god. **Rather** than a tyrant who **throws** people into hell, Arminius' god **stands helplessly** by while people, of their own free will, damn themselves for eternity. In effect, this makes God **weaker than people**, who are perceived to have the power to resist God's love and grace forever.

As it says in **1Timothy 2:4**, "God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." But the problem with Arminianism is that God is perceived to **not** have the ability to save everyone. It's as if God says, "**Duh!** I sure would like to save everybody, but I just can't figure out how to do it."

I assume that you are **aware** that, while Calvinism still speaks to some people, **Arminianism** is what is taught in **most churches** today.

So **Arminianism** presents to us a **loving** God, a God who very much **wants** to **save everyone**, but who **doesn't** have the **power** to save everyone.

So, **with Arminianism**, as with Calvinism, we **can't** have it **both ways**, where God can be considered to be both all loving and all powerful. With **Calvinism**, as I said, God is perceived as being **all powerful**, but certainly **not all loving**. In contrast, with **Arminianism**, God is perceived as being **all loving** but certainly **not all powerful**.

That brings us to our **third** theologian; **John Murray**. He was born in England in 1741, and died in Boston in 1815. Through the influence of the Methodists, especially **James Relly**, he came to believe in universal salvation. He believed that God **loves** us all **unconditionally**, and that God, not only wants to save everyone, but has the **ability** to save everyone.

He believed that **some** people would experience **hell** for a **while** following death, but that God would never give up on anyone, and would continue to

reach out to the lost, working for their conversion and transformation until **everyone** would eventually be **saved**.

Murray came over to the American **colonies in 1770**. He worked closely with the Quakers and the Baptists in spreading the message of universal salvation throughout the colonies. It was under Murray's leadership that the Universalist **Church** in America was **formed**.

John Murray is a **hero** of mine. While many people have been involved over the years in spreading the teaching of universalism, he **did more than most** in spreading that wonderful message. One way to express **why** Murray is a **hero** of mine is because the teaching of universal salvation, which he spread, makes it possible to believe that God is **both all loving** and all **powerful**.

So, it seems to me that, like **Goldilocks**, some of us have probably **tasted Calvinism** and found it to be too **hot**, and tasted **Arminianism** and found it to be too **cold**, and then we tasted **universalism** and found it to be **just right**. And not only have we found it to be just right, we have **eaten it up**, reading everything we can find on the subject.

Or perhaps we **could say** that we, like Goldilocks, **tried out Calvinism** and experienced it to be too **hard**, too **harsh** in its understanding of God. And then we tried out **Arminianism**, only to find it to be too **soft**, that it teaches of a God that is **weak** and **ineffective**. And then we **went on** to check out the teaching of **universal** salvation, the teaching that promotes an **all loving** and an all **powerful** God, and we found that to be **just right**.

So it really is **possible** to have it **both ways**. It is possible to believe that God is both all loving and all powerful. And what makes that possible is the **teaching** of **universalism**.

Thanks be to God. Amen.