

CHAPTER 1

Before Angels Were Created

What Was God Doing Before Anything Was Created?

Think back into the eternal past as far as your mind can reach. If God created the universe, as the Bible repeatedly declares, then there was a time when it did not exist. There was nothing, absolutely nothing - except God. As Bible-believing Christians, we accept this revelation by faith - before anything was created, God existed.

That God existed alone and eternally before He created anything boggles the mind. Eternity extends infinitely back beyond the point when He began to create angels, the universe, this earth. “Yet, during at least a portion of those eternal ages, God was not alone sitting in silent solitude doing nothing. He was active, as we shall see.

Our finite intellects cannot grasp the fact that unlike created things, God is self-existent and eternal. As Bible-believing Christians, we accept by faith the fact that God has always existed and that He will always exist. He is the Uncaused Cause of everything that exists. Beyond that we cannot go, but we can accept by faith what is revealed about Him. Thus, we know by faith that there is no other God in this universe or outside of this universe, for God plainly declares in His Word, “I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God” (Isa. 45:5, NIV).

The Mystery of Godliness

The inspired writings reveal that God exists in three Persons: the Father; the Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit - yet there is but one God. We cannot fathom how this can be - three Persons, each of which is God, yet only one God. This is

another mystery we accept by faith, but, accepted by faith, it sheds light on things which we otherwise could not understand.

During countless eons these three divine Persons, called “the heavenly trio,” “the three powers of the Godhead,” or, more commonly, “the Trinity,” were actively planning the creation of an infinitely vast, infinitely complex universe, in which “we live and move and have our being” - and this, from the minutest subatomic particle to the greatest and most distant galaxy. They were formulating the laws that were to govern matter, mathematics, living things. They were “laying the plan of salvation ... which was ‘kept in silence through times eternal,’ ” - and establishing the terms of “the everlasting covenant” that was to govern rational beings.

Freedom of Choice and the Mystery of Iniquity

It goes without saying that as Creator, God had the absolute right to establish the laws that were to govern the things He was to bring into existence. God exercised this right when He established the laws governing the physical universe-gravity, chemistry, lower life-forms. He could have exercised this same right when He brought angels, the inhabitants of other worlds, and humans into existence, but He didn't. He could have made intelligent beings so they could not disobey His laws. But such obedience would have left no room for them to freely love God.

The Bible declares that God is a God of love, and because He is a God of love, when He created intelligent beings, He wanted to have relationships with these beings based on love freely returned. He did not want these beings to be mere robots or “automatons,” beings who would say, “I love you,” every time He pressed a button, so to speak. Such expressions of love would be meaningless. Worthwhile love must be the result of free choice. What gives value to a child's words, “Mother, I love you,” is the fact that that child could have chosen to say, “Mother, I hate you.” Instead it chose to say, “I love you.”

Freedom of Choice

Within the limits of their individual destiny, God granted to the highest orders of intelligence - angels, inhabitants of other worlds, humans - the power of choice. In effect He has made an agreement with each of them, saying: "I have given you existence and created you in perfect harmony with my laws, but I have also given you the power to choose to disobey these laws. If you choose to obey them, you can live forever. But I am under no obligation to maintain your existence forever, if you rebel against them. Thus, if you choose to disobey my laws, in time you will return to the nonexistence from which I brought you." This appeals to reason as being fair and just. We have no prior claim to immortality.

This is what might be called a contract, a compact, a covenant. This was part of the planning the Godhead did in eternity past, and because this agreement has "existed from all eternity" and was formulated before any free moral agents were created, it "is called the everlasting covenant."

Without freedom of choice free moral agents could not be held accountable for their actions. But if, when God created free moral agents, freedom of choice was real, there would be the risk that some time in the future a free moral agent, created perfect and in complete harmony with God's moral law, would choose to disobey. If this were not true, freedom of choice would be a sham.

It is at this point that another mystery comes into play - "the mystery of iniquity" - the mystery of how a free moral agent, created in perfect harmony with God's moral law, but with the power of choice, would choose to disobey his Creator's moral law, upon which his very existence depended. We simply do not know how this could happen - except that, if freedom of choice is real, it could happen, and did happen - and free moral agents are responsible for the choices they make, not God. Thus, within the sphere of our eternal destiny, our power of choice is absolute. God does not interfere.

God's Foreknowledge Does Not Foreordain

Did omniscient God foresee that one of His angels, Lucifer, would choose to violate the everlasting covenant and disobey His laws - and in this way introduce sin into the universe? To ask the question is to answer it. Of course, He did. But did He foreordain or predestine Lucifer to sin? No, for freedom of choice was and is real. In some way, which our finite minds cannot understand, but which we can accept by faith, God's foreknowledge that Lucifer would fall did not foreordain or predestine him to be the originator of evil. To conclude otherwise would make God the author of sin, and since "God is love" (1 John 4:8), this conclusion must be rejected. The inspired writings are clear and unequivocal on this point, "God did not originate evil."

How sin originated with Lucifer is a mystery. If it could be explained, "it would show that there was some reason for sin. But as there was not the least excuse for it, its origin will ever remain shrouded in mystery." To speculate beyond this point is futile. We either choose to accept this revelation by faith or, like Lucifer, we exercise our power of choice and choose to doubt. Accepted by faith, we can better understand the conflict that is going on between the forces of good and evil - in which we humans are involved.

The Scriptures assure us that God would "have all men to be saved;" that He "is not willing that any should perish." But because He has given us the power of choice, not all men will be saved. Thus, when the Bible says that God predestines, it cannot mean He foreordains that one individual will live in harmony with His laws and exist eternally, and another will disobey His laws and be destroyed. It can only mean that God made provision for all of His free moral agents to live forever, but, because He gave them freedom of choice, they, and they alone, determine what their destiny will be. Thus, if they choose to violate the terms of the "everlasting covenant," God is under no obligation to sustain their existence forever. At most He gives them a limited period of existence, during which they

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demonstrate whether or not they are worthy to live forever, or must return to the nonexistence from which they came. During this probationary period the choices they make determine whether they will live forever or return to nonexistence.

In the case of Satan and his angels, who were shown when the great controversy began what the end result of their choice to disobey God's law would be, God has allowed their limited period of existence to be relatively long. The reason for this is to demonstrate to the universe that the principles of Satan's government, which are based on selfishness, are self-destructive.

In the case of Adam and Eve, who fell as the result of being tempted by Satan - or we, their descendants, who through no choice of our own were born with fallen natures - the situation is different. The human period of existence is relatively short - its purpose being to demonstrate what sinners will do with the salvation God freely offers them through Jesus Christ.

Because Satan and his angels sinned in the presence of God, and, while there remained an opportunity for them to repent, they were shown what the end of their disobedience would be, yet chose to rebel anyway, "there has been no atonement; but for fallen man a full and ample offering has been made to save to the uttermost all who shall come unto God by Him."