Theory in Theology

What kind of theory is permissible in theology? We have excluded theories like the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the dual nature of Christ because they do not have an explicit origin in the text of scripture. But theories that arise out of the text of scripture are quite different. Theologians have, from time to time, theorized about whether the death of the Lord provides salvation even for angels. Good grounds in the scripture exist for believing this. Consider the following.

The text of scripture clearly shows that Satan entered Judas and incited him to betray the Lord into the hands of sinful men (Luke 22:3-6). So, Satan himself was directly involved in putting the Lord to death. Indeed, so were Jews. And indeed, so was a Gentile named Pontius Pilate. All groups had a hand in the Lord's unjust execution. It follows that each of these groups is included under the umbrella of the grace of God Almighty. By His stunning plan, our God has provided salvation for the Jews, for the Gentiles, and for the angels as well. Nobody from any of these groups, including Satan, was aware of the Lord's full identity as the preexistent and divine Son (Luke 23:34). Our God, and the Lord, hid this from everybody. The Lord was incognito. This is vital in the stunning plan of God because this is the basis for the application of the Lord's substitutionary atonement for sin. The Lord's substitutionary death applies to Jews, Gentiles, and even angels because they were all involved in putting the Lord to death, without knowing what they were really doing. It is God Almighty who decides who is spared by the Lord's death. We are not implying that Satan himself is saved by the Lord's death. Scripture states that he will be punished forever (Revelation 20:10). But angels as a group have been provided salvation by the Lord's death because an angel named Satan was involved in killing the Lord. God decides who are those angels. He chooses them just as He chooses human beings for salvation, both Jews and Gentiles. We have the testimony of scripture that the first person who believed in the Lord after his death was the Roman centurion who presided over his execution (Luke 23:47). The Gentile physician, Luke, noted this.

This entire construct is a permissible theory because it is based on the explicit text of scripture and is consistent with the whole body of theological knowledge that we have, which is also based on the text of scripture. We are free to think this way and the nature of this theorizing is entirely different from the speculative theories of the Trinity and the Lord's dual nature. Valid theories are possible. Ephesians 1:10, and the surrounding context, points to the salvation of human beings and angels under one head, who is Christ. An emphasis is found in the surrounding context on the gracious election of God Almighty. The theory of the salvation of the angels is rooted in scripture. We are most surely not on speculative grounds in this theory. Instead, our hearts stand in wonder and amazement at the glorious grace of our God, and the wondrous act of obedience which our Lord executed on behalf of beings in heaven and on earth.

All kinds of questions arise in people's minds, for example didn't the angels know the full identity of the Lord when they announced his arrival to the shepherds in Bethlehem? We make all kinds of assumptions as readers of the scripture, but the stunning drama of the unfolding story of Jesus Christ to humans and to angels is now seen more clearly. The angels who announced the coming of the Lord did not know his full identity any more than anybody else did. Nobody knew. It was a secret for the sake of the salvation of human beings and the angels. The angels only knew that he is the Messiah (Luke 2:11; "Christ" is a title meaning "the anointed one" or "the Messiah").

We can see through this theory of the salvation of the angels how the Lord's incognito was a vital part of the plan of God in the salvation of all groups, including angels. Satan thought that he was putting the Messiah to death. He understood the person of the Messiah like human beings of

the time did. The Messiah was the great Davidic descendant who would save Israel. But in the stunning plan of God, we can now see that not only Jews would be saved by him, but Gentiles also and, yes, even angels would be saved by him. His full identity was hidden from everyone, angels included, so that his substitutionary death would provide the basis for the salvation of all groups. The devil was tricked by the ultimate trick like he tricked Eve in the Garden. The tables were turned on him by God Almighty and by the obedience of the Lord in going through with the crucifixion. We should contemplate the majestic plan of our God. We should open our mouths in praise for the perfection of His plan, and for the Lord's execution of that plan at such great cost. We can see the Lord's servant nature, so we understand why Paul tells us in the Christ Hymn to adopt the Lord's attitude (Philippians 2:5).

We can also see how the doctrine of the Lord's complete transformation from his preexistent divine state to the baby of a humble woman named Mary fits into the perfect plan of our God. The straightforward interpretation of the Christ Hymn is seen to be the truth about the nature of the Lord. Our eyes are opened to the immeasurable glory of the Lord when we realize that he was completely transformed from his eternal divine state into a baby. The devil could not possibly conceive of this. So, our God just outsmarted him. It was easy for our God. He scoffs at the devil's intelligence just as he scoffs at the power of the kings of the earth (Psalm 2). The devil's deception of Eve in the Garden aroused our God's anger, and He had a plan to turn the tables on the deceiver. So, whose intelligence and power are worthy of our worship? Now we catch a glimpse of how intelligent and powerful our God is. Of course, what we see is an infinitesimally small fraction of our God's glory. We have no idea of the reality.

To this point in our study, we have shown that the apostolic understandings of God and Christ became polluted by the time of the Chalcedonian and Athanasian creeds. Other writings, namely those of Hilary and Augustine, give us additional information about the timeframe for the corruption of the NT doctrine of God. We have shown that the Athanasian Creed itself clearly refers to the now long-lost understanding of the kenosis of the preexistent Christ Jesus as a complete emptying of His divine nature to become a human being. The Athanasian Creed disapproved of this understanding, but it is evident that the understanding was present in the minds of some at that time. The reckless authors of the Athanasian Creed refused to listen to these voices. Only by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and by the grace of our God and of our Lord, have the Western churches been able to be spiritually constructive. We have also shown that an important creed that predates the Athanasian Creed by more than a century, namely the Nicene Creed, did in fact faithfully preserve the apostolic teaching about God and Christ. That creed was roughly contemporaneous with the polluted doctrine of Hilary, so the exact history of the corruption of the NT doctrine of God is murky and obviously complicated. Historians might want to see if they can investigate the matter in detail. I am not really interested in attempting that. The purpose of this study is different. We have ample evidence from different sources that we are on track with our new doctrinal paradigm, which of course is old. Our primary and decisive source is scripture. From here, we move into a study of spiritual practices and disciplines based on our corrected doctrines of God and Christ.

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