

THE MORAL AGENCY OF ANGELS

The Moral Government of God over Heavenly Beings

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I have lately been thinking about the extent or vastness of God's moral government. For a long time my thinking never exceeded the boundaries of mankind. But recently I've realized how God's moral government extends over heavenly creatures as well.

The angels are a perfect example. In my understanding, they are not robots, machines, or puppets. They are actually free moral agents. This is evident by the fact that:

- Lucifer himself is described as being a free will creature, "I will" (Isaiah 14:13-14)
- Lucifer was accountable and judged for His sin in the Garden (Genesis 3:14-15)
- Some angels have rebelled against God (Isaiah 14:12-14; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:4; Revelation 12:9)
- Angels will be accountable on Judgment Day (1 Corinthians 6:3; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6)
- Some angels will be cast into hell (Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelations 19:20; Revelation 20:10)

God did not want Heaven to be full of robots, machines, or puppets. God wanted Heaven to be filled with real life, to be filled with free will beings, who voluntarily choose to serve Him. And no doubt, since some angels have rebelled, those angels who still serve God do so willingly of their own choice. Angels do not have to serve God. Many choose to serve God, some choose to rebel against God.

This understanding, of the vastness of God's moral government, is important when contemplating the atonement made for mankind. "God so love the world..." If God was going to forgive mankind before all the hosts of Heaven, blood shed needed to be offered for their sin. The blood atonement of Christ needed to substitute the eternal punishment of sinners in order to justify God in setting aside their punishment, to justify God before the hosts of Heaven in pardoning mankind. That way the law does not fall into contempt, the universe does not believe that God could care less about His own law, or come under the impression that you can sin with impunity.

So atonement was necessary, as a substitute for our punishment, to declare to the entire universe of moral beings, that God values His law and will enforce it. If God forgave without atonement, the impression would have been made that either the punishment was wrong or that God didn't care about His law. Remission without blood shed would completely destroy God's moral government. The atonement, made on behalf

of men's sins, justifies God before the whole universe in pardoning our sin, justifying Him in granting the remission of sins.

So the atonement of Christ, on behalf of the sins of men, was necessary to sustain the moral government of God over all moral agents. To the angels, it shows that God values His law and will enforce it. And to mankind, it provides a subduing influence of love to break their hearts and bring them to repentance. It declares to all men, and angels, that God hates sin and values His law, that violating His law is a terrible thing, which God will not tolerate.

REMARKS:

1. The Moral Agency of Angels

Another possible argument for the moral agency of angels, and thus their voluntary moral characters, is that the Bible has described angels who reproduced with mankind (Genesis 6:2) producing a race of Giants (Genesis 6:4). Yet the Bible says that the angels in Heaven neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25).

This does not necessarily mean that their angelic bodies can reproduce, though I suppose it may be possible. But remember that angels are capable of taking human form (Genesis 8:1-2). And when some angels did take human form, men wanted to "know" them carnally (Genesis 19:4-8).

This could be used to argue that the abstinence of angels is completely voluntary, being a free will choice, thus again helping us to understand the moral character of angels. It also shows that when the Bible talks about "holy angels", this is in no ways a term or expression absent of real meaning. Those angels who choose to serve God genuinely are holy. And those angels who choose to rebel against God are genuinely evil.

2. The Reprobation of Fallen Angels

Why is there no atonement made for the rebellious angels? Is God unloving or unmerciful towards angelic beings? The Bible is silent on this issue, but I have a perspective which I think is reasonable.

Fallen angels have sinned against so much knowledge, having rebelled against so much light, that their case is naturally hopeless, their restoration is impossible. The wills of fallen angels are past recovery, they are eternally reprobate because of the hardness of their own hearts. There is nothing God could possibly do for them to restore them to favor.

The amount of light they were exposed to could be why there was no state of probation for angels, why they were in a state of retribution immediately and why they were reprobated instantly. No amount of increased light or knowledge could possibly

change their wills. No further revelations of God could possibly be revealed which could subdue their rebellion hearts. Their knowledge is immense and therefore their wills are completely settled.

Therefore it might not be an issue of God's unwillingness, as if God were unwilling to make atonement for them and pardon their rebellion. It might be an issue of their own unwillingness and hardness of heart, that their case is naturally hopeless. So it may not be that God will not restore them, but that God cannot restore them.

Any view that we have of the matter must not make us sympathy with rebellious angels over against God, but should make us see the goodness of God and the awfulness of the fallen angels. A proper view of the matter must make us glorify God and His character, while seeing the justice of the condemnation of the sinful angels. If any perspective makes us sympathize with the wicked angels, while questioning the goodness of God's character, it is not and cannot be a proper perspective.