

Theory #2

Who is this God? A Deeper Look

Now that we have the basic theory, let's unpack it for its theological implications. What are the wider implications of this theory in relation to who God is and what He's up to? What does it mean for me personally, for the way I think, the way I view myself and the world, and how I conduct myself in it? And how should I relate to this God if this theory is true?

What exactly did God mean when He said: "Terry, this is Me. This is a picture of Me and My situation"? What was God's situation? And why did that situation lead Him to create anything, let alone this amazing planet and its inhabitants?

Perhaps the simplest way to start off this discussion is to ask, "Why did God create in the first place?" Did He have a felt-*need*? Wasn't He sufficient in Himself? After all, He *is* perfect, isn't He?¹ Surely He did not *need* man. Or anyone for that matter. And why, if He knows the future, did He *bother*, knowing all the trouble and sorrow He was "creating" for Himself, and us? Surely it was not just so that He could reap the glory of worship from a bunch of adoring creatures. God is not the Supreme Narcissist in the sky, is He?² There must be more.

PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN OF TIME

Imagine, if you can, a time before time—before God had created anything we know of; that is, before He made the angels and principalities, and before the universe was made. It is conceivable to us that God found Himself in a situation in which He, *as the source and the very essence of love*, was without a love-object outside Himself on which to lavish His affections, His generosity and His kindness. As a

¹ In the realm of deity, perfection implies completeness. Any lack or shortage in God would contradict the definition of "a supreme being," one who cannot be bested. If something is lacking, that means that a being who possessed one bit more of completeness, would be superior. And if that being were not complete, there might be an even *more* complete being, ad infinitum.

² In some religious traditions, this is basically how God is portrayed. He made man so that man could "glorify Him forever." Though it is appropriate and right that man should give glory to the highest Being in the universe, it strikes us somehow as a little gauche for God to put us through all this just for the sake of His own ego, which is how we interpret such assertions, isn't it? It brings God down a peg or two in our estimation, doesn't it, when we think of Him that way. In our view, a more fitting motivation for the creation was God's overflowing capacity for love and His desire to bless someone, preferably someone like Himself with whom He could enjoy intimate fellowship, like-mindedness and unity of purpose.

self-sufficient being, God does not act from personal need. He is complete in Himself. He is not lonely as men get lonely.

But perhaps we could use the word “frustrated” (if that is not too anthropomorphic a term) to describe Him. Hmmm. How could a wholly uncorrupted God experience **frustration**? This is the *human* term we assign to things that do not give us perfect satisfaction; things that are affected by the Fall. Things that make us angry or thwart our will. Could it be that God had *desires*³ that were unfulfilled—because He wanted to bless someone outside Himself? How appropriate that would be for a God who declares that He is love.⁴ And yet there was no one else to love.⁵ It was, then, in this sense, that God could say “it was not good for *Him* to be alone.”⁶

Some people think that “work” is a consequence of the curse meted out after the Fall of man. But the truth is, man was charged with a great deal of responsibility and work *before* the Fall, in ruling the creation and subduing the earth. What changed at the Fall was the introduction of **frustration** into the world of work. Now the natural world would fight against man, thwarting his efforts to maintain order and life. Animals would have to be domesticated or guarded against. Thorns and thistles would choke out the vegetation. No more would this job be an unmitigated pleasure. Now things would go sideways, cost more, take longer, and challenge man’s ability to remain peaceful and joyful. “By the sweat of his brow” would he make his way through life.

If this is true, it seems reasonable that *the entire objective of the creation* was to rectify this situation. God thought to have a companion for Himself—someone He could love, deeply and personally; and who could be the beneficiary of His overflowing kindness. God was not just looking for a worshipper then, but oh, so much more than that. God was interested in expressing His love in its highest and best form, and that is as an other-centered love both sacrificial and filial.⁷ He wanted to give and

³ Desires, by definition, are elective. We distinguish them from needs. Needs are born of deficiency, either in ourselves or in others. Yes we can desire that our needs be met, but our specific needs are still needs and our desires are still desires.

⁴ 1 John 4:16.

⁵ Many, in viewing God as a Trinity, say that He had fellowship among the three separate Persons of the Godhead. We would call this, essentially, narcissism, and since these same people insist that there is only one God, He is merely loving Himself. We take a different view expounded in Appendix E.

⁶ Assuming we are correct that Adam is a picture of God and His situation.

⁷ Some would argue that this is not the highest form of love: brotherly love. But we would suggest that it is far easier to love someone from afar, theoretically, than it is to love someone up close and personal; someone who may not be everything you desire, or may not respond appropriately or behave appropriately in all situations. The old adage “familiarity breeds contempt” springs to mind. We can all claim to love those with whom we have no contact, but day-in and day-out interaction reveals the true quality of our love, and tests it in the fire of affliction. God’s love survives all tests, and certainly His love for those who do not return His affection is of a very high order. His death on the cross is evidence of that love, that it was not

experience a love that was multi-dimensional, mutual and reciprocal, but also familial. He wanted to love someone very like Himself,⁸ not just as teacher or ruler; not just as a benefactor or employer or creator; not even just as intimate friend, companion and peer. But ever so much more: as Husband, Father, or Brother!⁹

God created each creature to reproduce after its own kind, by families, and if Genesis is a picture of God's situation, by doing so He illustrated *His* desire for that same level of intimacy, connection and fellowship for Himself that He gave to the animal and human kingdoms. This could be called the desire for ultimate or intrinsic *identification* with another. Unity, likeness, comfortability, core bondedness.¹⁰ Seeing and being seen; knowing and being known; accepting and being accepted; valuing and being valued, *because we are part of one another*—family—and thus indispensable to one another's happiness and fulfillment.¹¹

abstract, but actual. And yet I am continually amazed at how much He continues to love those who *do* profess to love Him and yet do not live consistently with that profession. To be ignored or doubted or betrayed or abandoned by those who profess your name is more hurtful than to be so treated by those who have clearly rejected you. And yet God goes on loving us, patiently and perfectly.

⁸ We humans tend to gravitate toward those who share our own values, culturally, socially, spiritually. This is normal. These are they with whom we are most comfortable and familiar. And with whom we most identify. Our own tendency to prefer “our own kind” is illustrative of this very trait in God; He wants His own kind around Him as well. For God, this includes those who are made in His image and transformed into His likeness by adoption into His family and sanctification by His Spirit; those who share His values and who live them, but also His identity.

⁹ And tellingly, these are the familial images that God uses to describe His relationship with those who put their trust in Him. For those who bristle at the lack of female terminology, we can only say, try not to allow your injuries and consequent prejudices to reflect on God. That said, we can sympathize with those of you who have been wounded by the men in your life, or by men in general. It makes for a unique relational challenge that God describes Himself this way, but is also perhaps an opportunity for healing in this area of your heart. Try not to succumb to the temptation to recreate God in an image that you can tolerate. Rather, ask Him to deliver you from your wounds in this area, so you can fully appreciate His communication of Himself.

¹⁰ Again, many would say this “need” was met in the very nature of the triune godhead. They would say God the Father had perfect fellowship with the Word and perfect fellowship with the Spirit; that there was mutual love, mutual submission, and mutual intimacy among them from eternity past. Though this is the historic Christian position, at least from the fourth century, we feel that the notion of God as three separate Persons with three separate wills is at odds with the many protestations of God in Scripture regarding His intrinsic oneness. If we assert that there is one God, as true monotheists, but then straddle the fence of polytheism when we say that God is three Persons each loving the other in perfect unity, aren't we trying to have it both ways? We suggest that God expresses Himself in three ways simultaneously for the sake of the redemptive process, but that He is not three separate and co-equal Persons. He did however become a Man with a man's will, separate from but voluntarily obedient to the Father. This is the mystery of godliness. (See our discussion of this subject in Appendix E.)

¹¹ In this sense one could say that God, though perfect, was not entirely fulfilled; and it makes sense, given His *capacity* to love, that He would not feel fulfilled if He could not exercise that capacity to His satisfaction.

And yet, how could He have this sort of familial relationship with another like Himself? He could not **create another God**, could He? Another of the *God-kind*?¹² That would be impossible; unthinkable. God is One! The Bible says: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one!”¹³ And “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me....Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the Lord; and there is no savior besides Me.’”¹⁴

Q: Why not? Why can't God **create another God**? I thought He could do anything.

A: God, by definition and by nature, is not a created Being. He always was. He is eternal. If God created another “God,” that “God” would not be eternal. He would have had a beginning and would thus be part of the space/time continuum, rather than transcend it. A God that has a beginning is no God. He's a created thing, a creature, like a rock or a possum or an angel. Worshipping a created thing is the definition of idolatry. This is what distinguishes paganism from monotheistic religions. Pagans worship created objects (trees, stars, planets, the sun, the moon, statues, human beings), but monotheists worship one God, who always was, and is, and ever will be. (Does this bring into question Christ's deity, since one could argue that He had a “beginning”? See Theory #4 for a discussion of this subject.)

God is Spirit, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient,¹⁵ and He dwells in unapproachable light. He is utterly unique. The *sumum bonum*.¹⁶ His presence is so pure, so intensely righteous that it burns away anything unclean that comes too near. How then could any *created* being ever enter into His presence and not die? Indeed. But God had to find a way if He was to have fellowship with one of His creatures without causing their demise. And find it He did.

¹² Some people view “God” as a type of being rather than a person. For example, if god-ness were a pie, it could be cut in multiple pieces, all of which would qualify as “god.” They assert that the Hebrew term for “one” God can be a collective noun referring to one group, one assemblage, one team, etc. In fact, the Hebrew term for one, “echad,” is simply the cardinal number 1. It does not denote multiplicity or unity or anything beyond its numerical significance.

¹³ Deuteronomy 6:4

¹⁴ Isaiah 44:6 and 43:10b, 11. This scripture is one reason, and perhaps the biggest reason that Jews have such trouble with the Christian Messiah and particularly the Trinity. See more on this subject in Theory 4 and Appendix D.

¹⁵ All powerful, all present, and all knowing.

¹⁶ The highest good.

A NEW RACE

Though He could not make another God, He *could* reveal Himself in a new way (without changing His inherent nature¹⁷), as the vanguard of a new race or “kind” of which He would eventually become a literal part. He could design a form in which He would be willing to dwell and then create others in that same form. We think He appeared in this form to Adam and Eve in the Garden, allowing them to fellowship with their Maker, the one true God, without being overcome. By transforming Himself (via the virgin birth) in due course, so as to be *like* a creature He might fashion and yet still be God, He accomplishes two purposes: He does not violate deity¹⁸ *and* He gains the companionate race He desires. Aha! Could it be that the creation story itself in Genesis is not only a graphic illustration of the situation in which God found Himself, but also a picture of His solution?

Looking backward through eternity past, then, we can imagine that God first set about devising a plan to achieve His objective. An incontrovertible plan. One which would result ultimately in the procurement of this ideal companion for Himself. A companion who not only would be *like* Him, but who would *willingly* surrender all to Him for eternity, to both love and be loved, unreservedly and unflinchingly forever. One who might even prefer to die rather than deny or reject Him.

This plan, so well crafted as to be foolproof, entailed a great expenditure on God’s part, not the least of which was His sacrifice in becoming a permanent part of His own creation. Yes, the omnipresent God condescended to dwell in a localized physical form¹⁹ for the set purpose that we might be able to relate to Him; to *embrace* Him. Literally.

That decision changed Him forever. Incarnated in Jesus, God will always have a perceptible, tangible (though now glorified) human body. Jesus is the permanent and perfect **theophany** (God-showing),

¹⁷ God tells us, “I change not!” (Malachi 3:6) And that is true. He remains righteous, holy, and perfect in nature, in character and in deed. But He does appear in various forms (burning bush, pillar of cloud, pillar of fire, angel of the Lord) throughout human history, and that apparently does not constitute “changing” in God’s mind.

¹⁸ By creating a *poly*-theism, a pagan concept.

¹⁹ Without abandoning His omnipresent nature.

the **Shekinah** glory manifested in flesh. But He is much more than a manifestation. He actually partook of our nature, just as He allows us, at salvation, to partake of His.²⁰

Q: What does **Shekinah** mean?

A: The term Shekinah, an English transliteration of a Hebrew word, means that which dwells or “tabernacles” and is implied throughout the Bible whenever it speaks of God’s nearness, either in a person, an object, or with reference to His glory. It is often used as a worshipful way of speaking of God’s *visible* glory; for example, the cloud that hovered over the tent of meeting in the wilderness. In the same way as these earlier manifestations, Jesus brought the Shekinah glory to earth. In John 1:14 it says, “And the Word became flesh and *dwelt* (literally “tabernacled” as in the tent of meeting) among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Jesus was that “Word” manifested in flesh.

Jesus is not just a manifestation of God as were other Old Testament appearances, but neither is He a “creation” of God (which would actually make Him His own Creator).²¹ He is not an apparition either. He is the express *image* (representation) of the invisible God, a crystallization of divinity, if you will.²² But it’s the way He crystallized His deity that is so astounding. The Word became flesh by the same miraculous process God gave to Adam: that of begetting or reproduction embedded in the creation account (another way in which Genesis 1 and 2 illustrate God’s own story). God passed on His deity, gave it expression, in the same way that we pass on our humanness, our self-expression, to our sons. Adam was not given the power to create, but he was endowed with the power to procreate. And God limited Himself to this same form of reproduction for His own entrance into the human race.

Just as God could not *create* another “little God” without violating deity, we cannot *create*²³ little humans without violating humanity. We can *invent* lots of things, and form new things out of the raw material available to us, but we’ll never learn how to *create* a human. (Clone one, maybe, but create, no.) However, God has provided and has allowed us to participate in another process—that of begetting. What a concept! God invented reproduction. And then...He participated in it!

²⁰ Hebrews 6:3 says those who believe have been made “partakers of the Holy Spirit” and “when we see Him we shall be like Him.”

²¹ John 1:3 says, “All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

²² Hebrews 1:3

²³ To create means to make something out of nothing.

Amazing. No wonder the angels were astounded when they realized what God was up to.²⁴ They could never have imagined it. God, the creative One, has *begotten* a Son; one and only one Son. His name is Jesus.

Scripture tells us, “a virgin will bear a son and His name will be called Emmanuel, ‘God with us.’” (Isaiah 7:14) And Luke 1:35 says, “And the angel answered and said to her (Mary), ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.’”²⁵ His heir. To that Son, deity wedded to humanity, He has bequeathed all His possessions, His authority, His attributes, and His nature.²⁶ *God-nature*. And now He wants to pass that on to us, as joint-heirs, the Bible says, through faith. The Bible calls it being “born again.” That is the process whereby we partake of God’s nature by becoming united with Him, as sons and daughters, through faith and repentance, thus imbibing the divine Spirit. The Holy Spirit. We become literal vessels of God; carriers of His divinity, just as He has become a partaker of our humanity. Astounding.

Q: What is a *theophany*?

A: Whenever God appears to men, in any form, it is called a **theophany**. We say that Jesus is the ultimate theophany because He is the permanent form in which God chose to manifest Himself, as our future Bridegroom. In the incarnation, God is permanently ensconced in flesh, in humanity, in a way that He was not during any other theophany. The incarnation was not an “appearance.” It was an actual partaking of our world and our nature, just as He will allow us to partake of *His* world and His nature in the hereafter. Jesus *has* a body the same way you and I have a body (though His is now glorified). And He presumably always will.

However, this does not mean He *is* His body, any more than you are your body or I am my body. The body is a vehicle, a tent, a shell. Anyone who has seen a dead person knows this instinctively. About 10 years ago, I found my father’s body a week after he died. My first thought was, “Well, there’s his body.” I knew that body wasn’t him, anymore than a piece of steak is a cow. It’s a complex conglomeration of atoms to be sure, but without the breath of life, that’s all it is.

On the other hand, Jesus was truly human, not just God in a man suit. Jesus’ human body was subject to all the vicissitudes of life in the flesh, even if He was not fallen. He still had all the normal appetites that flesh is heir to, and had to wrestle with them just as we do. Appetites are by nature self-serving and they have to be brought under the control of the spirit or they will automatically lead to overindulgence and sin. This is what Paul meant when he said, “In my flesh dwells no good thing.” Jesus mastered His flesh. His was a true tabernacle, a holy tent, wherein God dwells and meets with His people.

²⁴ 1 Peter 1:11-13

²⁵ Psalm 2:7 says “I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee.”

²⁶ In a sense this is figurative. God became our Savior and He Himself has always possessed all divine authority, attributes and nature. But the Son will inherit the Kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world.

This concept of the divine sonship of man is generally conceived of as a New Testament idea, but the Bible alludes to this in the Old Testament, too, in Psalm 82 (God is speaking to Israel): “I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are the *sons of the Most High*.’” Jesus quotes this verse in John 10:34-35. It is further supported in other places where the Bible speaks of Jesus as the first of many sons, the first-born of all creation, and of Him “bringing many sons to glory.”²⁷ He is the first member of a new family; God’s family.²⁸ It’s as if God has developed a new race, a hybrid race so-to-speak, and invites us to become part of it by faith. When we believe, we partake of God’s divine essence or Spirit, and yet we remain still human. God did the reverse, partaking of our human essence, and yet remaining divine. Amazing.

Why was this necessary? Why go to all this trouble? Wasn’t there a simpler way for God to get what He wanted?

The short answer is no, or God would have used it, just as, had there been another (less painful) way to redeem us other than through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, He would have used that.²⁹

As we said, God, as a Spirit, is invisible and dwells in unapproachable light. The intensity, the pure energy of His Being would, in a sense, fry our circuits. The Bible states pretty clearly that man could not survive exposure to God’s full glory. “No man can see My face (speaking figuratively since God is a Spirit) and live.” (Exodus 33:20) Now for a God who wants to hang out with His creation, that’s a communication problem. So God had to do something if He wanted to bridge that gap; if He wanted true **fellowship** with someone. Not just companionship—but more than that—likeness; oneness.

²⁷ Jesus is the first-born among many brethren (Romans 8:29) and the first-born of all creation (Col.1:15).

²⁸ There is a huge element of mystery here, theologically speaking. Is Jesus the eternal Son of God [this is the orthodox view], or did He suddenly appear at a specific moment in history (“Today I have begotten Thee.” Hebrews 1:5)? Or is He simply the eternal God manifesting Himself in flesh, as in a suit of clothes? The Bible says “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Who was this Word? We are left to put together bits and pieces of the divine puzzle. This we know: God is one and there will be no God after Him; the Word was in the beginning with God and *was* God; and, created beings are no gods. We suggest that “the Word” was the manifest presence of God, His visible expression from eternity past, and that that manifest or visible presence was ultimately translated into human form at the incarnation. But this was not just an apparition. God found a way to permanently join Himself to His own creation by begetting a divine offspring, one who shares our original, unfallen human nature. (This is possible because He had no human father, through which the fallen nature is passed to us). But in some inexplicable way, that divine offspring was also fully God, and according to Isaiah 9:6, actually *is* the “Eternal Father.” As Paul said, “...great is the mystery of godliness: God manifested in the flesh....” (1 Timothy 3:16).

²⁹ God did not delight in His Son’s suffering. It pained Him terribly. As a Father, He experienced the same kind of grief that we do when our children suffer, are abused, or die prematurely. The difference is, He loved us enough to go through this suffering “with” (or in) His Son, for our eternal benefit. And He did this while we were still abject sinners, totally rejecting or ignoring Him.

Though it seemed an insurmountable problem, He found a solution. What better way to forever bridge that inherent communication gap than to change *Himself*,³⁰ to become *like* those He wished to befriend? It is, perhaps, in this sense that we were made “in His image.” An image He designed for *Himself* to dwell in, forever.

It only makes sense then, that God, in planning this enormously complicated task of securing an eternal companion for Himself, would choose to create man in a form, a magnificent form, that He would Himself enjoy dwelling in for eternity. I suspect that the pre-incarnate Word³¹ “appeared” to Adam in the garden as *this* Man—a magnificent specimen, a glorified Being full of light, but recognizably human. And that is why He could speak of making Adam in His image,³² and why Scripture could speak of Him “walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”³³ It is even likely that Adam himself (and Eve) bore the glory of God to some degree; that they were clothed with light. Once they sinned however, the spark of God’s Spirit left them, taking immortality with it, and leaving them feeling naked and exposed because for the first time their flesh was not shrouded in brilliant light. Our future glorification will return us to that pre-Fall state, where we will shine like the stars of heaven as Scripture says.³⁴

³⁰ God tells us, “I, the Lord, change not” in Malachi 3:6. This is true. The incarnation does not mean that God changed, any more than His appearance in the burning bush means He changed His nature or essence. However, He did *take on* a human nature at a point in time. This didn’t change His God-nature, but it allowed Him to fellowship with His creation. On another note, if He said to the Jews, “Did I not say ye are gods?” then perhaps one could say that He created humans in His image in such a way that He could call them *gods*, and thus not contradict His claim to unchangeableness when He took on their likeness in human flesh.

³¹ John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Said differently, “the Word was God manifest.”

³² We are made in God’s image in that we are thinking, feeling, deciding beings, but we are also in His image given that He designed the human body for His own habitation at the incarnation. When Scripture says “Let Us make man in Our image,” perhaps this is a reference to the Word (the visible God) speaking to the invisible Spirit of God, making the point that man is a reflection of both the invisible Spirit and the visible God-manifest, in flesh.

³³ We would argue that this “theophany” of God in the Garden does not validate “eternal Son” theology. Jesus is the “Word” (the manifest God) incarnated, but the Son was not incarnated in eternity past, and then re-incarnated in Mary’s womb. God did not have a “Son” from eternity, otherwise Sonship means nothing in this context. Nor does the verse which says, “Thou art My Son. Today I have *begotten* Thee.” (Ps.2:7 and Heb.1:5. Sonship requires begetting; (the term offspring denotes “springing from something previous”) and thus requires a beginning. But the “Word” was/is eternal and it is in this sense that the Son, as “the Word made flesh” (see John 1), can be said to be eternal. The “manifest God” became manifested as a Man. And this is our biggest clue that Jesus is actually God Himself, not a demi-god, half-human/half-god creation. He is fully God and fully Man. In a sense, it’s like Jesus is a device that allows God to commune with us face to face. In another sense, He is like the beginning of a new race of beings with both divine and human natures.

³⁴ Daniel 12:3 and Phil. 2:15

The term “fellow” originally meant a partner, or one who shared a joint undertaking. Today it’s used to indicate someone who is like us, of the same rank or class, a peer, or a compatriot, as in a fellow traveler, one who accompanies us or is alongside us. But **fellowship**, at least as it’s used in the Church, is a little more than that. It implies brotherhood, shared faith, mutual intimacy, trust—and shared experiences involving the heart, particularly worship. It’s deeper than friendship. It goes beyond shared hobbies and activities. It’s rich, sacred, and it transcends the ordinary. It is satisfying to the soul. And it implies oneness. As Ephesians 4:4-6 says: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

So what would this plan look like, this plan to create a *suitable* eternal companion?

It’s fairly simple, at least conceptually, for God to create a potential companion, but not so simple to create a “suitable” one. One who could be trusted to endure for eternity without rebelling, losing interest, or causing Him embarrassment. How could this Creator control not just the creative process, but the ultimate outcome of His plan as well and secure His intent forever, *without* encroaching on the God-like attribute of free will and autonomy with which His companion would be endowed? If God’s companion is to be “like” Him, she must have the same kinds of attributes, including a free will (implying choices), a mind, emotions, a personality, a soul. God could not compromise on this point (i.e., limit free will) to gain His goal (a permanent companion), because doing so would undermine His ultimate objective: a free creature freely loving Him. So how can He guarantee He will not be rejected again?

Enter Theory #3, and phase two of the plan. Phase one is illustrated in Genesis 1-2. Phase two starts in Genesis 3, and takes the rest of the Bible to complete. It’s a story of love lost, and love regained. Fellowship lost and fellowship regained.