

Theology and Counseling: Angelology

Our culture sometimes misrepresents angels. Some songs, movies, television and books tell us that good people who die become angels, some say that angels help all people, some show angels who do not speak truth from the Word or the gospel; recently some have even shown angels as willing to leave heaven for human physical love or to save someone from hell.

What does the Bible say about angels? What important truths can we surmise from a study of these beings?

The following summary of the theology of angels is taken from, "Lectures in Systematic Theology," by Henry Thiessen, revised by Vernon Doerksen, published by Eerdmans in 1992.

The Nature of Angels

- A. They are not glorified human beings (Mt. 22.30, Heb. 2.7)
- B. They are ministering spirits (Eph. 6.12, Heb. 1.14)
- C. They neither marry nor die (Lk. 20.34-36)
- D. They know more than men but are not omniscient (2 Sam. 14.20, Lk. 4.34)
- E. They are stronger than men but are not omnipotent (Ps. 103.20, Mt. 28.2, Ac. 5.19, 12.7)

The Fall of Angels

- A. The fact of their fall (Mt. 25.41, 2 Pet. 2.4, Rev. 12.7-9)
- B. The time of their fall (before the fall of man: Gen. 3.1ff)
- C. The results of their fall: lost holiness, some cast into hell immediately, some work to oppose good, no source of redemption (Eph. 6.11, Jude 6, Jude 9, Heb 2.16, respectively)

The Good Angels

- A. "Angel" means messenger (Lk. 2.9-14)
- B. Cherubim guarded the garden (Gen. 3.24), the tabernacle (Ex. 26.1, 31; 1 Kings 6.23-28), and paradise (Ps. 18.10)

- C. Seraphim worship and purify God's children for worship and service (Is. 6)
- D. Archangels had specific responsibilities in relation to Israel (Dan. 10.13, 21), Jesus birth (Lk. 1.26-38), defeating Satan (Rev. 12.7-12), and heralding Christ's return (1 Ths. 4.16-18)
- E. They "render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1.14)

The Evil Angels

- A. Some are already in hell (2 Peter 2.4)
- B. Demons can cause physical defects (Lk. 13.11-17); they seek to deceive (2 Cor. 11.14-15), distort doctrine (1 Tim. 4.1-3) and promote false wisdom (Jms. 3.15)
- C. The eternal fire is prepared for them (Mt. 25.41)

Some Applications to Life, Ministry and Counseling

- Give thanks for God's provision of helping angels.

Take time to give thanks for God's faithful work of love. He provides everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1.3). Included in this provision are angels, whose service befits those who inherit salvation (Heb. 1.14).

- Be aware of the spiritual war and use God's weapons to fight

The mission of demons includes deceiving believers, distorting doctrine, promoting false wisdom (see refs. above). What examples of these activities do you see in your culture, the church of your era, your own local fellowship? "Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might." Review Ephesians 6.10-18 and be committed to fighting the war with all the armor of God, including using the Word as the final authority in all verbal conflicts.

- Consider eternity: the lake of fire

Some fallen angels are there now; others have the lake of fire as their certain destiny. I think about that and I think about people in my life and in my Bible study who have not submitted their lives to Christ. I remember past counselees who did not then and have not since trusted the blood of Christ as the means of forgiveness for sins. This is such a serious matter. I pray for the Lord to do His work of speaking to their hearts. I pray for help to love effectively. I pray for help to say what is true from the Word with the strength and compassion of Jesus Christ. I pray for their salvation. I ask the Lord to change me to become a more effective tool for His work.

- Be thankful that we as people have a means of redemption

Hebrews 2.16 makes it clear that there is no regeneration for fallen angels. There is no Savior. May we realize how significant it is that God supplied a way to heaven for us as people. Great thanks can be offered by we sinners, saved by grace through faith---and even that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.

- See pride / self-esteem / self-love for what they are

In Isaiah 14.13-14 is the ultimate statement of self-worth. It is the most healthy (?) self-esteem ever. "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; And I will sit on the mount of the assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." This belief in self puts to shame all the millionaires and sports champions of our time who claim to have believed in themselves.

God's view of such a belief system is clear. The beautiful angel who uttered these words was banished from heaven forever; he became Satan.

Our society exalts self repeatedly. "Believe in yourself" is taught in many public schools. Many psychologists teach people that self-esteem is the basis for being healthy and whole. Whitney Houston's anthem of the eighties said that learning to love yourself is, "the greatest love of all." Since much of psychotherapy is based on the idea that man is good (unlike Scripture), many proponents also believe things like: truth is found within, the inner child is pure, you create your own destiny / reality, and self-esteem is good. Even more alarming is the fact that many professing believers accept this way of thinking. See these ideas for what they are. They insult our Lord. They replace love for God and worship of God with self.

Please also note the nature of the demonic wisdom which opposes the wisdom of God (James 3.13-17). "Jealousy and selfish ambition." This is certainly consistent with the self-exalting thinking of the father of lies the day he was ejected from heaven. See these ideas for what they are.

- Consider the scenes in heaven described in the book of Revelation, including the angels worshipping God

The angels continually worshipping the Lord provide an example of right hearts in the glorious presence of the Creator in the realm of eternity. How we as Christians look forward to worshipping the Lord in person and to pour out hearts filled with a lifetime of thanks for His grace and love! As Paul said, that will be "very much better" than anything here.

That day is in our future as believers. We are protected by the power of God for that day (1 Peter 1.3-5).

Since these things are so, how must I then live? These truths direct me to examine my heart.

How am I doing in thinking what is true / desiring to honor the Lord in my life today / being effective in the battle to put off sin and put on righteousness / love my wife as Christ loves me. I am again in need of mercy and grace to help in time of need; but the Lord is waiting to supply them to us who ask. I choose to pursue righteousness. I ask for the strength of the Lord to give an effort which would honor Him in these matters. For those of us in ministry, there is also the opportunity to examine our communication. Am I speaking the Word of God with the authority it demands? Am I serving with a heart of love the would represent well the eternal Lord? Am I involved with the souls I serve in a way that is painfully personal? Is the way I react to circumstances an example of a person who is sure of an eternity worshipping God?