

Section C

The Doctrine of Angels and Demons

The Holy Angels of God

We live in a world full of unseen spirits. Everywhere we go, we live in the presence of God, the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Spirit. A human spirit animates the body of every man, woman, or child that we encounter. Furthermore, angelic and demonic spirits move invisibly about us as they strive to advance or defeat Christ's kingdom.

We find a vivid illustration of the realities of the spirit world in an event that took place during the life of Elisha. The king of Syria sent an army by night to capture the prophet. When Elisha's servant rose early in the morning, he was terrified to see their city besieged by enemies. However, Elisha said, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Elisha then prayed, "and the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:15–17). The capture of Elisha turned into the capture of the Syrian army by angelic powers.

The topic of angels could be considered under the doctrine of creation, and often is so treated in systematic theology. Likewise, the topic of demons could be treated under the doctrines of sin (the fall) or salvation (spiritual warfare). However, in this chapter and the next, we take up the study of angels and demons under the doctrine of God, for divine providence has no instruments mightier than the angels, and God's purposes have no enemies greater than Satan and his demons. We begin with angels, who are the native inhabitants of heaven, where God's glory is openly displayed.

The Reality of Angels

In this scientific age, it may seem as if angels belong to the mythological realm of fairies and goblins. Earlier in this book, we quoted Rudolf Bultmann, who said, “We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medicinal and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament.”¹

However, belief in angels is not a relic from an age when men needed supernatural explanations for natural events. And skepticism about the existence of spirits is not the result of modern scientific discoveries, but appeared in ancient Epicurean philosophy² and persisted through the ages.³ Luke reports that in the first century AD, “the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:8). John Gill wrote in the eighteenth century of “our modern Sadducees . . . who assert that good and evil angels are no other than good and evil thoughts.”⁴

Science can neither prove nor disprove the existence of angels, for spirits cannot be detected by scientific instruments designed to measure physical phenomena. All certain knowledge of angels comes from divine revelation, and the Bible abounds in testimony—from Genesis to Revelation—to their existence.⁵ Angels have appeared to human beings, spoken with them, and performed works of power (Gen. 19:1–25; Matt. 28:1–7). Angels are not merely personified natural forces, for they have names, can speak, and refer to themselves in the first person (Luke 1:19). They are not psychological factors in men’s minds, for angels can open prison doors and strike people dead (Acts 5:19; 12:23). Given this abundant testimony, it is not possible to dismiss the reality of angels without rejecting the trustworthiness of God’s Word. R. C. Sproul said, “If we are to be consistent Christians, believing all of the Bible rather than portions of it, we must recognize that the supernatural places and beings described on its pages are real. There is an uncompromising supernaturalism at the heart of the Christian worldview, and

1. Bultmann, *New Testament Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, 4. See chap. 15, under the topic of liberal modernism.

2. S. R. Obitts, “Epicureanism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 358.

3. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:444–45.

4. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 264.

5. C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 19–25.

we must not let the world’s skepticism with regard to these things affect our belief systems.”⁶

At the same time, we should not exaggerate the angels’ power or give religious devotion to them. It is notable in this regard that there is only one passing reference to angels in the Heidelberg Catechism (LD 49, Q. 124) and in the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. 103).⁷ The moment we pay more attention to angels than to God and Christ, we have started down the road to animism.⁸ It was one of the imbalances of medieval Christianity that angels permeated religious devotion, academic theology, architecture, and art.⁹ Similar observations might be made today. The recent upsurge of interest in angels in our culture shows that many people, including evangelical Christians, are deeply interested in this topic and vulnerable to all manner of speculation and imaginings. However, God prohibits us from seeking knowledge or power by contacting the spirit world; we must seek God in his Word (Deut. 18:9–15; Isa. 8:19–20). The Holy Scriptures must also provide us with our knowledge of the angels.

The Biblical Terminology for Angels

The words translated as “angel” (Hebrew *mal’ak*, Greek *angelos*) both mean “messenger,” and are used more than one hundred times to refer to human messengers.¹⁰ Thus, in the original languages, not every “angel” in the Bible is an angel. However, these terms most often refer to supernatural beings, implying that God sent them to communicate or implement his word.¹¹

A second term is “cherub” (Hebrew *kerub*), or plural “cherubim.” Cherubim guarded Paradise after the fall (Gen. 3:24). The art of the

6. R. C. Sproul, *Unseen Realities: Heaven, Hell, Angels and Demons* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier, 2011), 9.

7. *The Three Forms of Unity*, 113; *Reformed Confessions*, 4:367. By contrast, the Westminster Larger Catechism, which was designed not for basic instruction but for the teaching and preaching of the whole counsel of God, contains several references to angels (Q. 12, 13, 16, 19, 56, 88–90, 105, 192).

8. On animism, see the discussion of polytheism in chap. 31.

9. David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

10. For example, see Gen. 32:3, 6; Deut. 2:26; Job 1:14; Isa. 42:19; Mal. 2:7; 3:1; Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52; James 2:25. Some interpreters identify the “angel” of each of the seven churches that Christ addresses in Revelation 2–3 as a human messenger, perhaps representing the leadership of that church.

11. Gen. 24:7, 40; Ex. 23:20; 33:2; Num. 20:16; 1 Chron. 21:15; 2 Chron. 32:21; Ps. 78:49; Dan. 3:28; 6:22; Luke 1:19, 26; Acts 12:11; Rev. 1:1; 22:6, 16.

tabernacle and temple depicted them as winged creatures (Ex. 25:20; 1 Kings 6:24–27). In the vision of Ezekiel, cherubim called “living creatures” (plural *khayah*) have four faces (a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle) and four wings, and are full of eyes, symbols revealing their manifold powers and wide-ranging knowledge (Ezek. 1:5–6, 10, 18; 10:15). They serve as the bearers of the Lord’s flying chariot-throne (1 Chron. 28:18). They are the attendants of his revealed glory (Ezek. 1:28; 10:18–19; 11:22) as he comes down from heaven to save his people (2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10) and dwell among them (Ex. 25:22; 1 Kings 8:6–12).

Third, there is one passage in the Bible where angels are called “seraphim” (Hebrew *seraphim*, Isa. 6:2, 6) The seraphim appear in Isaiah’s vision with six wings, and they hover around God’s throne and cry out to the Lord, “Holy, holy, holy,” with voices that shake the heavenly temple (vv. 1–7). The same cry appears again in the vision of Revelation, springing from creatures whose appearance resembles that of cherubim, though not exactly (Rev. 4:7–8). Like the cherubim of Ezekiel, they too are called “living ones” (plural *zōon*).¹² The similarities between Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, and Revelation 4 suggest that cherubim and seraphim might not be distinct kinds of angels, but different ways of describing the same spirits.¹³ It is difficult to be sure.

A fourth term used of angels is “spirit” (Hebrew *ruakh*, Greek *pneuma*). God “maketh his angels spirits” (Ps. 104:4; cited in Heb. 1:7). The terms rendered as “spirit” can also be translated as “wind” (Ps. 104:3) and “breath” (v. 29), but may be used of personal beings, such as God (John 4:24) and angels (Heb. 1:14). When applied to angels, these terms are often used in a negative sense (1 Kings 22:22–23; Job 4:15; 1 Tim. 4:1), such as “unclean spirit”¹⁴ or “evil spirit.”¹⁵

Fifth, angels are called flames of fire or bolts of lightning. God “maketh . . . his ministers a flaming fire” (Ps. 104:4; cited in Heb. 1:7). Ezekiel’s living creatures or cherubim burned like fire and moved like lightning (Ezek. 1:13–14). The term rendered as “seraphim” appears to be related to the

12. Rev. 4:6–9; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; etc. Though the term *zōon* can be used of animals (Heb. 13:11), the translation “beasts” (KJV) does not capture the sense of the word, which means “living thing” (cf. *zōē*, “life”).

13. MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 669–70.

14. Matt. 10:1; 12:43; Mark 1:23, 26–27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; Luke 4:36; 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16; 8:7; Rev. 16:13. Cf. Zech. 13:2.

15. Judges 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14–16, 23; 18:10; 19:9; Luke 7:21; 8:2; Acts 19:12–16.

verb “to burn” (*saraph*),¹⁶ suggesting a comparison to fire or lightning. Angelic beings elsewhere appear as chariots and horses of fire (2 Kings 2:11; 6:17), and they accompany God’s glory in a storm cloud flashing with lightning (Ezek. 1:4; cf. Ps. 97:2–4; Rev. 4:5).

A sixth term for angels is “sons of God.”¹⁷ The Hebraic expression “sons of . . .” need not indicate fatherhood or adoption,¹⁸ but may express the dominant characteristic of these creatures: angels dwell with God, reflect his glory, and do his will.¹⁹ Angels are mere creatures, but of all God’s creatures, they are especially associated with his heavenly glory.

Seventh, on rare occasions, we find angels referred to as “gods” (*elohim*) because of their power and heavenly character (Pss. 8:5; 97:7). The same term is sometimes used of human beings who have power and authority.²⁰ The Septuagint rendered these references as “angels” (*angeloi*), as did the author of Hebrews when he quoted them (Heb. 1:6; 2:7).

Eighth, the Bible refers to angels as the “host of heaven.”²¹ The word rendered as “host” (*tsab’ā*) refers to an army (1 Kings 4:4; 16:16) or any large group (Gen. 2:1). The angels are “his hosts” who praise his name and do his will (Pss. 103:20–21; 148:2). “Host of heaven” can also refer to the stars in the sky (Deut. 4:19; 17:3), perhaps implying a comparison between angels and the innumerable celestial lights (cf. Jer. 33:22). In Job 38:7, “the sons of God” is parallel to “the morning stars.” In the visions of Revelation, John sees “a star fall from heaven,” which is later identified as a destroying “angel” (Rev. 9:1, 11).

Ninth, we find angels described in Paul’s epistles by several terms for rulers, such as “principalities” and “powers.” At times, such terms refer to human authorities (Titus 3:1). However, in other texts, they include *invisible* beings: “all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers” (Col. 1:16); *heavenly* beings: “the principalities

16. The word is elsewhere used of serpents (Num. 21:6, 8; Deut. 8:15; Isa. 14:29; 30:6), but that may be due to the burning pain inflicted by a venomous bite, not any resemblance between snakes and seraphim.

17. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; cf. Ps. 89:6.

18. Wicked men are called “sons of the Most High” (Ps. 82:6 ESV) because of their earthly power and majesty—despite being foolish (v. 2), wicked (v. 5), and mortal (v. 7).

19. As to dwelling in God’s presence, note the repeated clause, “The sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD” (Job 1:6; 2:1). In Job 38:7, “sons of God” is parallel to “morning stars,” a figure for glory.

20. Ex. 21:6; 22:7–8; 1 Sam. 2:25; Pss. 82:1, 6.

21. 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18; Neh. 9:6; cf. Isa. 24:21; Luke 2:13.

and powers in heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10); and *spiritual* beings: "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (6:12).

Tenth, only two individual angels are given names in the Holy Scriptures. One is Gabriel,²² whose name appears to mean "Mighty One [*gibor*] of God [*El*]," perhaps a comparison to a valiant warrior (*gibor*; cf. Josh. 8:3; Joel 2:7). The other is Michael,²³ whose name is a rhetorical question of worship, meaning "Who is like God?" Some Reformed divines have considered Michael to be a name for Christ.²⁴ However, Michael is called "one of the chief princes" (Dan. 10:13), not the Lord of all.²⁵ Someone might object that the name Michael is not a rhetorical question, but an assertion of its bearer's divinity ("He who is like God"). However, the same name was given to nine Israelites recorded in Scripture, and they were certainly not divine.²⁶ Though many other holy angels appear in the Scriptures, none are named, perhaps to discourage people from calling upon angels in prayer and worship.

The Nature of Angels

Although much about angels is mysterious to us, their frequent mention in the Bible allows us to deduce certain truths about what kind of beings they are. Here we consider the nature of created angels, not the divine angel of the Lord,²⁷ whose person and activities will be examined under the doctrine of Christ.²⁸ The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 16) gives us a good summary of the nature and work of angels: "God created all the angels (Col. 1:16) [to be] spirits (Ps. 104:4), immortal (Matt. 22:30), holy (Matt. 25:31), excelling in knowledge (2 Sam. 14:17; Matt. 24:36), mighty in power (2 Thess. 1:7), to execute his commandments, and to praise his name (Ps. 103:20–21), yet subject to change (2 Peter 2:4)."²⁹ We will organize our treatment of the angelic nature by viewing angels as God's spirits, servants, army, and creatures.

22. Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26.

23. Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7.

24. Thus, Wollebius, *Compendium*, 1.7.(1).v (62); and Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 263.

25. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:166.

26. Num. 13:13; 1 Chron. 5:13–14; 6:40; 7:3; 8:16; 12:20; 27:18; 2 Chron. 21:2; Ezra 8:8. See Dickason, *Angels*, 70–71.

27. Gen. 16:7–14; 22:11–18; 48:16; Ex. 3:1–6; 23:20–22; Num. 22:35; Judg. 2:1–5; 6:11–24; 13:1–22; 2 Kings 19:34–35; Zech. 1:12; 3:1–5.

28. See the treatment of Christ's preincarnate ministry in *RST*, vol. 2 (forthcoming).

29. *Reformed Confessions*, 4:302.

Angels Are God's Spirits

Angels are “spirits” (Heb. 1:14). However, they are not the spirits of deceased men; righteous men do not become angels when they die (12:22–23).³⁰ Neither are they the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. Angels are a distinct kind of created spirit. God made angels to be pure spirits, more comparable to wind or fire than to our bodies (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7). Yet they are spirits in the sense of being personal beings like mankind, not impersonal forces, as will appear when we consider their intelligence, affections, and moral agency.

Whereas God gave the earth to mankind (Ps. 115:16), angels are *heavenly* beings (Matt. 22:30; 24:36; Gal. 1:8); as already noted, they are the “host of heaven” (1 Kings 22:19). They descend from heaven to earth and ascend from earth to heaven (Gen. 28:12). Their proper abode is in the place of God’s special presence in heaven (Matt. 18:10; Luke 1:19).

Since angels are spirits, they are *immaterial*, that is, not composed of physical matter like our “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). What their spiritual substance is, we do not know; theologians have debated for centuries whether we may consider angels to consist of “matter” in any sense.³¹ What is clear is that they do not have bodies like ours. Consequently, thousands of such spirits can dwell in a single man (Luke 8:30).

Angels are also *invisible* by nature (Col. 1:16). A large group of angels could be nearby, but we would not see them unless the Lord granted us supernatural enablement (2 Kings 6:17). Although immaterial and invisible, angels sometimes clothe themselves with bodies in which they look and act like men (Gen. 19:1–3). Their spiritual nature does not hinder them from causing physical effects (vv. 10–11), just as God acts upon the physical world and our human spirits interact with our bodies.³²

Unlike mankind and animals, angels are *asexual* beings. Christ said that after the resurrection, men “neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Matt. 22:30; cf. Mark 12:25). Angels cannot reproduce themselves, and they do not have the relations of husband-wife or parent-child with each other. Therefore, they lack the

30. Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:288.

31. Isaac Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, in *Works of Isaac Ambrose* (London: Henry Fisher, 1823), 475; and Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:455–58. In contemporary scientific theory, matter is usually defined as an object with rest mass, but some physical particles have no rest mass, such as photons, gluons, and perhaps some neutrinos. Of course, such massless particles are not personal spirits.

32. Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:291–92.

corporate unity that mankind has in Adam or in Christ; each angel stands or falls on his own.³³

Angels are *immortal*, though only by the will of God, for God alone is immortal by nature (1 Tim. 6:16). Christ said of the resurrected saints, “Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36). The angel Gabriel who visited Daniel also came to Mary seven centuries later (Dan. 8:16; Luke 1:26). The angels have lived through thousands of years of history.

Angels Are God’s Servants

Some people have viewed angels as mere manifestations of God’s power or temporary emanations from the divine being.³⁴ However, the Scriptures present angels as distinct beings who serve God. Angels are “ministering [*leitourgikos*] spirits” (Heb. 1:14), God’s “ministers” (plural *leitourgos*) or official servants (v. 7), a term also used of civil rulers (Rom. 13:6), priests (Heb. 8:2), and gospel preachers (Rom. 15:16). Angels exist not for themselves, but to do the will of God for his glory (Ps. 103:20). This has several implications for their nature.

Angels are *intelligent* beings, not mindless forces. The Lord commands them, and they have the ability to understand and obey his word. Angels can also talk to men, as they often do in the scriptural narratives.³⁵ They have personal consciousness. One angel said, “I am Gabriel” (Luke 1:19). Angels have extraordinary knowledge and wisdom. A woman said to David, “As an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad. . . . My lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth” (2 Sam. 14:17, 20). Though she spoke hyperbolically (for neither David nor the angels know everything), she expressed the truth that angels have superhuman knowledge.

Angels are *affectionate*; they are not bare intelligences, but have affections something like human emotions, though without the physical effects. Observing God’s work of creation, they “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7); the verb used here (*ru’ā*) is often translated as “make a joyful noise.”³⁶ Angels

33. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:462.

34. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. 128, in ANF, 1:264. Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:445.

35. For example, see Zech. 1:9, 13, 19; 2:3; 4:1, 4, 5; 5:5, 10; 6:4.

36. Pss. 65:13; 66:1; 81:1; 95:1–2; 98:4, 6; 100:1.

“desire” (*epithumeō*) to better understand God’s ways in Christ (1 Pet. 1:12), a verb that, as Thomas Manton noted, refers to a yearning that “is earnest and affectionate.”³⁷ When one sinner repents, “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God” (Luke 15:10).

Apart from those spirits that rebelled against the Lord, the angels are *holy*. The purity and innocence of angels was proverbial in the ancient world (1 Sam. 29:9). The angels are called God’s “saints” or “holy ones.”³⁸ Cornelius received direction from a “holy angel” (Acts 10:22), probably so called to identify it as “an angel of God” (v. 3) as opposed to an evil spirit. Christ spoke of his coming to judge the world with “the holy angels.”³⁹ As God’s servants, they reflect the majesty and moral excellence of the Lord.

Since angels are God’s intelligent and holy servants, we may ask whether God made them in his image as he did mankind (Gen. 1:26). Thomas Aquinas said that he did, for angels also have “an intellectual nature.”⁴⁰ John Calvin asserted that angels are divine image bearers, for when God’s children are glorified, we will be like the angels (Matt. 22:30).⁴¹ However, other Reformed theologians have been more cautious, noting that angels are *not called* God’s *image bearers* in the Holy Scriptures.⁴² Part of the problem lies in defining the image of God, which may refer broadly to man’s whole being and function as God’s visible reigning representative on earth (Gen. 1:26–28), or more narrowly to knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).⁴³ The elect angels possess the latter, but not the former, or they would be men. Neither do they represent God in heaven, for God’s glory is openly manifested there.

God holds angels *morally responsible* for their actions. Angels will be subjected to judgment in the future (1 Cor. 6:3). God has already condemned “the angels that sinned,” and presently they are “reserved unto judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4). The fires of hell were prepared first of all for “the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:31, 41; cf. Rev. 20:10).

The angels that continued in holiness are *preserved by God’s sovereignty*. God chose them, for they are called “the elect angels” (1 Tim. 5:21). This implies, by parallel with our election, that they persevere in

37. Manton, “Sermon upon 1 Peter 1:12,” in *Works*, 18:206.

38. Deut. 33:2; Dan. 4:13, 17, 23; Zech. 14:5; Jude 14.

39. Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; cf. Rev. 14:10.

40. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 93, Art. 3, Answer.

41. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3.

42. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:460–61; and Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:161.

43. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 206. See the discussion of man’s creation in God’s image in *RST*, vol. 2 (forthcoming).

perfect righteousness because of God's eternal and sovereign decree. The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 13) says, "God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of his mere love, for the praise of his glorious grace, to be manifested in due time, hath elected some angels to glory."⁴⁴ There is no indication in Scripture that any angels have fallen from their initial holiness since Satan and demons rebelled long ago. Therefore, though some angels sinned, God "established the rest in holiness and happiness."⁴⁵

Angels are *not redeemed or glorified in Christ*. God's Son did not come to rescue fallen angels: "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). Angels do not know God's saving grace, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness by experience, but only by observing his ways with men. The holy angels are not "heirs of salvation" or rulers of "the world to come," but the servants of God's children, those whom Christ will bring to glory (Heb. 1:14; 2:5). It is a mark of God's sovereignty that he made the greater to serve the lesser. As Jonathan Edwards said, the angels are the great nobles of the King's court, but believers in Christ are the King's children.⁴⁶ Herman Bavinck said, "Angels may be the mightier spirits, but humans are the richer of the two."⁴⁷

Angels Are God's Army

Though angels may manifest themselves individually to human beings, together they compose the spiritual "host" or army of the Lord (Ps. 148:2; Luke 2:13). They can appear as "horses and chariots of fire" (2 Kings 6:17), a symbolic visionary representation of their "military-like missions for God."⁴⁸ They are the soldiers of heaven, engaging in God's holy battles against Satan and his forces of evil (Rev. 12:7).

There are *many* angels (Ps. 68:17; Dan. 7:10). Christ spoke as if it were a small thing for him to secure a personal bodyguard of "twelve legions of angels" (Matt. 26:53). The vision of Revelation says that "ten thousand times ten thousand" angels surround God's heavenly throne (Rev. 5:11), literally "myriads of myriads" (*myriades myriadōn*), a figure of speech

44. *Reformed Confessions*, 4:301.

45. Westminster Larger Confession (Q. 19), in *Reformed Confessions*, 4:302. For Jonathan Edwards's rather speculative doctrine about the confirmation of the angels through Christ, see Edwards, "Miscellanies," nos. 442, 515, in *WJE*, 13:490–91; 18:58–62.

46. Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 824, in *WJE*, 18:535–36.

47. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:462.

48. MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 668.

for an immense number. Bildad exclaimed, “Is there any number of his armies?” (Job 25:3).

The angels are an army *organized* according to the Lord’s will. There are degrees of authority or rank among the angelic forces, as well as specific assignments given by God. Michael is called “one of the chief princes” (Dan. 10:13); “your prince,” that is, the one assigned to Israel (10:21; cf. 12:1); and an “archangel” (Jude 9; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16). Michael has angels under his command (Rev. 12:7). Gabriel spoke of fighting against “the prince of Persia,” evidently a demon ruling that nation (Dan. 10:20). Paul may allude to different orders within an angelic hierarchy with terms such as “thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers” (Col. 1:16). We will discuss this matter further when treating questions about angels.

Angels are very *swift*. The Bible’s comparison of angels to fire, lightning, and wind⁴⁹ implies that they move with great speed and agility. They sometimes appear with wings and can fly.⁵⁰ They can come from heaven to earth before we finish our prayer to God (Dan. 9:21). Samuel Willard said, “Spirits are the most agile, active, or nimble beings among creatures.”⁵¹

As the soldiers of God’s heavenly army, angels are *powerful*. They “excel in strength” (Ps. 103:20); literally, they are “mighty ones of strength” (*gibore koakh*). We do not know precisely how much power they have,⁵² but angels are “greater in power and might” than men (2 Pet. 2:11). Two angels blinded an angry mob of men in Sodom and then destroyed the entire city and its surroundings (Gen. 19:1, 11, 13). An angel can shut the mouth of fierce lions (Dan. 6:22); release a prisoner from his chains, guards, and prison (Acts 12:7–11); and strike a king dead (Acts 12:23). Christ will come with “his mighty angels” to destroy the world “in flaming fire” (2 Thess. 1:7–8).

Given their great power, it is not a surprise that angels are *fearsome* in their glory. Depictions of angels as cute babies with wings are ridiculous. An angel’s face is like “lightning,” and his appearance can make strong men fall down comatose (Dan. 10:4–9; Matt. 28:3–4; cf. Dan. 8:17–18). A visit from an angel fills people with fear (Luke 1:11–12; 2:9).

49. Pss. 18:10; 104:4; Isa. 6:2; Ezek. 1:14.

50. Ex. 25:20; 37:9; 2 Sam. 22:11; 1 Kings 6:24, 27; 8:6–7; 2 Chron. 3:11–13; Ps. 18:10; Isa. 6:2, 6; Ezek. 1:6–11, 23–25; 10:16–18; 11:22–23; Rev. 4:8.

51. Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, 53.

52. Some examples of amazing angelic power may refer not to the activity of created angels, but perhaps the divine angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Son of God (2 Kings 19:35; 1 Chron. 21:15–30; cf. 2 Sam. 24:15–25).

At times, angels seem to exercise divine power and manifest divine glory. The cataclysmic destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is attributed both to angels and the direct intervention of the Lord (Gen. 19:13, 24–25; cf. Deut. 29:23; Isa. 13:19). When an angel appeared outside of Bethlehem, “the glory of the Lord” appeared with him (Luke 2:9). Angels sometimes appear in a manner that seems to manifest the glory of God and Christ (Dan. 10:5–6; Rev. 10:1; 18:1; cf. 1:13–15). When the angels accompany Christ at his second coming, it will be a display of God’s glory.⁵³ Although angels are distinct, personal beings, they are heavenly *instruments of divine majesty and might* through which God acts. Heaven is the place of God’s special presence, where his glory irradiates all things like light shining through crystals and gems (Rev. 21:11, 18–23). Since angels are heavenly creatures, it may be that God designed the angelic nature to be a conduit of his power and glory.

Angels Are God’s Creatures

Angels are not gods or demigods. Though greater than men, they are in the same category as men (and worms). Angels depend upon God to make them what they are (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7). Although both God and angels are called “spirit” (John 4:24; Heb. 1:14), Willard reminded us, “The nature of God and the nature of angels are infinitely different one from another.”⁵⁴

Angels were *created* by God. Although the creation account in Genesis 1 focuses on man on earth and does not mention angels, other Scripture passages indicate that angels also had a beginning in time. After calling upon the “angels” and celestial lights to praise the Lord, the psalmist says, “Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created” (Ps. 148:2, 5). The Son no less than the Father made them: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible” (Col. 1:16). God may have created the angels on the first day of creation, for he said to Job, “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4, 7).⁵⁵ Furthermore, “all the sons of God” implies that

53. Matt. 16:27; 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26.

54. Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, 52.

55. Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:287.

God created all the angels together, which is fitting for beings that do not reproduce themselves. Certainly the host of heaven was made before the seventh day, for by then God had created “all the host” of heaven and earth (Gen. 2:1; cf. Ps. 33:6).⁵⁶

Angels are not omnipresent, but *local* in their presence. The Scriptures say that they must move from place to place to do their work (Matt. 4:11). An angel on earth is one that has “descended from heaven” (28:2). When angels’ mission is completed among men, they go “away from them into heaven” (Luke 2:15).

Angels have great gifts, but they are *limited*. They have limits to their power. Other powers (such as evil spirits) can hinder them for a time (Dan. 10:13). Neither “angels, nor principalities, nor powers” can separate God’s elect people from his love (Rom. 8:38–39). Angels are limited in their knowledge, for they do not know the time of Christ’s return (Matt. 24:36). They do not have direct knowledge of our inner selves, for Solomon said to God, “Thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men” (2 Chron. 6:30). Angels are not immutable by nature, but were created with the capacity to change and fall from their holy state (2 Pet. 2:4). Angels also have limits to their authority, for if “an angel from heaven” were to preach a gospel contrary to God’s Word, that angel would be cursed by God (Gal. 1:8). Even the archangel Michael, “when contending with the devil . . . said, The Lord rebuke thee” (Jude 9).

Angels are *not worthy of worship*. The “worshipping of angels” is an invention of men who do not hold to Christ as our head (Col. 2:18–23). John, perhaps overwhelmed by his visions, twice fell down before an angel to worship him, but both times the angel said, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you. . . . Worship God!” (Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9 ESV). In a book full of glorious angels, this is a strong admonition to distinguish clearly between the Creator and his servants, and to give our worship to God alone.⁵⁷

In summary, angels are heavenly spirits, immaterial, invisible, non-sexual, and immortal. They are intelligent, holy, personal, and morally responsible servants of God. They are the numerous, organized, powerful, and fearsome soldiers of God’s army. However, they are created by God, limited in various ways, and not worthy of worship.

56. Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 263.

57. On the religious veneration of angels, see Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:468–71.

The Work of Angels

God made angels with a twofold orientation: worship in heaven and obedient service on earth. David said, “The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word” (Ps. 103:19–20). William Ames said the work of angels is “to celebrate the glory of God and execute his commandments (Ps. 103:20), especially for the heirs of eternal life (Heb. 1:14; Pss. 34:7; 91:11).”⁵⁸ In the performance of heavenly worship and the execution of earthly labors, angels engage in a variety of activities.

First, angels *observe God’s works*. An angel is a “watcher” (Dan. 4:13, 17, 23). Angels observed God’s work of creation (Job 38:7), though they did not participate in that work. Johannes Wollebius said, “The work and honor of creation ought not to be attributed to any creature, even the angels, but only to God.”⁵⁹ Angels also observed the work of redemption, eagerly seeking to understand the sufferings and glory of Christ (1 Pet. 1:11–12). When Christ came and completed his redeeming work, the incarnate God was “seen of angels” (1 Tim. 3:16), perhaps a reference to his resurrection and ascension. The sufferings of the apostles as they propagated the gospel and established the church were “a spectacle . . . to angels, and to men” (1 Cor. 4:9). Each conversion is known and celebrated among the angels in heaven (Luke 15:10). Angels witness the faithfulness of the churches and their ministers (1 Cor. 11:10; 1 Tim. 5:21). It is God’s “eternal purpose” that “now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10). Angels will be witnesses to our vindication or condemnation by Jesus Christ on judgment day (Luke 12:8–9; Rev. 3:5).

Second, angels *praise God’s glory*. They praised him for his works of creation (Job 38:7; cf. Neh. 9:6). The seraphim cry out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:4). The heavenly host praised God on earth at the birth of God’s Son (Luke 2:13–14). The angelic praise of God’s holiness appears again in Revelation, where it is said that “they rest not day and night,” but constantly “give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne” (Rev.

58. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.8.39 (103). Cf. Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, 112–13.

59. Wollebius, *Compendium*, 1.5.(1).ii (54).

4:8–9). John writes, “And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (5:11–12).

Third, angels *guard God’s holy places*. The first mention of angelic creatures in the Bible appears after God banished fallen man from his special presence in Paradise: “So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24). When God established his holy presence with Israel, the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant was overshadowed by the wings of golden cherubim.⁶⁰ The veil that closed the entrance to the Most Holy Place was embroidered with cherubim (Ex. 26:31; 36:35; 2 Chron. 3:14). Angels are the heavenly counterparts of the Levites, who guarded God’s holy places from anything that would defile them and dishonor his holiness (Num. 1:53; 3:8, 38). Thus, in Revelation we read that an angel is posted at each gate of the heavenly Jerusalem, and no defilement can enter that holy city (Rev. 21:12, 27).

A fourth angelic work is *communicating God’s word*. Angels, as the word indicates, are messengers; they do not speak for themselves, but bear messages from God. Not all of God’s revelation came through angels—for example, consider the teachings of the incarnate Christ. However, Christ’s ministry was attended by angels. Further, God revealed the law to Israel through the ministry of angels.⁶¹ Angels brought divine revelation to Daniel, Zacharias, Mary, Joseph, Philip, Paul, and John.⁶² Now that the Holy Scriptures are complete, and God has ceased to give new special revelation, we should not look for angelic messages—indeed, we should beware of Satan, who can appear as “an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14).

Fifth, angels *care for God’s children*. Jacob’s dream of God’s promise to be with him and bless him was a vision of angels descending from heaven (Gen. 28:12–15). When Jacob returned to the land of Canaan

60. Ex. 25:20; 1 Kings 6:27; 8:6–7; Heb. 9:5.

61. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2; cf. Deut. 33:2.

62. Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Matt. 1:20; 2:13, 19; Luke 1:11, 13, 19, 26; Acts 8:26; 27:23–24; Rev. 1:1; 22:6.

and anticipated facing Esau, “the angels of God met him,” and Jacob said, “This is God’s host” (32:1–2). Every angel is a servant of God’s children: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. 1:14). Michael is an archangel and a great prince, but he defends God’s people.⁶³ Gabriel stands in God’s presence, yet he also serves God’s people as a messenger of the divine word.⁶⁴ Angels care for God’s people throughout life. Psalm 91:11 promises the believer, “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” When a righteous person dies, he “is carried by the angels” into heaven (Luke 16:22; cf. 2 Kings 2:11). There he joins “an innumerable company of angels” and “the spirits of just men made perfect” gathered around the throne of God and Christ (Heb. 12:22–24). When Christ returns in glory, “he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect” (Matt. 24:31; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16). Thus, angels accompany and assist believers all the way to glory.

Sixth, angels *protect God’s servants*. Angels defend the preachers of the gospel from persecution so that they may continue their ministry. When the high priest and Sadducees imprisoned the apostles, “the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:19–20). An angel released Peter from prison, where he awaited the same death that had just fallen upon James (12:5–11). Then an angel killed the persecuting king who had imprisoned Peter, and the word of God multiplied (vv. 23–24). However, while God may send angels to assist the church in its evangelistic mission, he does not send them to replace members of the church as the heralds of the gospel. Even when God sent an angel to Cornelius, the angel did not proclaim the gospel, but directed him to Peter so that the apostle could preach to him (10:3–7, 22, 32). The New Testament gives us no expectation that men will be saved except by hearing the gospel through human preachers (Rom. 10:13–15).

Seventh, angels *execute God’s judgments*. God uses angels in his ordinary providential judgments on the wicked; for example, as we just noted, an angel killed Herod (Acts 12:23). When God sent extraordinary

63. Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9.

64. Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26.

plagues upon Egypt, it was through “a company of destroying angels” (Ps. 78:49 ESV). Angels also execute divine judgment against the invisible powers of evil, taking up the victory of Christ and making war against Satan and his demons (Rev. 12:5–8). While we agonize in prayer on earth, angels are warring in heavenly places (Dan. 10:12–13). Angels will be prominent in Christ’s return to judge the world, in which they will be agents to arrest the wicked and execute God’s sentence of doom on them.⁶⁵

Eighth, angels *serve God’s Son*. Angels exist for the glory of Christ. The angels, like all things visible and invisible, were “created by him, and for him” (Col. 1:16). He is God’s Son, the immutable Creator and eternal King; they are his worshipers and servants (Heb. 1:4–14). Angels accompanied every step of his incarnate work. The angels announced Christ’s coming and sang God’s praises when Jesus was born (Luke 2:10–14). The angels cared for Christ in his humanly exhausting fast and spiritual combat with Satan (Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13). When Christ submitted his human will to the Father’s will in Gethsemane, “there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him” (Luke 22:43). His resurrection was first heralded by angels from heaven, who rolled away the stone of his tomb and spoke with his disciples (Matt. 28:2, 5; John 20:12). When the risen Lord ascended into heaven, two angels appeared to his disciples and foretold Christ’s return in the same manner (Acts 1:9–11). Now he “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Pet. 3:22). As he reigns as Lord at God’s right hand, he commands the angels as the incarnate Mediator of salvation for his people. When he returns, he will come with “his angels,” his royal retinue and heavenly army, to gather his people and judge the world (Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:31). Jesus Christ is “the head of all principality and power” (Col. 2:10). The God-man is the King of angels.

Questions about Angels

Among many things that people ask concerning angels, two matters stand out. First, what do we know about the hierarchy of the various orders of angels? Second, does each person have a particular guardian angel who helps him throughout life?

65. Matt. 13:39, 41, 49; 16:27; 2 Thess. 1:7–8; Jude 14; Revelation 15–16.

The Question of Angelic Hierarchy

We noted earlier that Paul employs various terms of power and authority to describe angels. Scripture also speaks of Michael as “one of the chief princes” (Dan. 10:13) and an “archangel” (Jude 9). We should recognize that angels bear various kinds or degrees of authority while avoiding speculation about how they are ranked.

The medieval church taught a complex organization of angelic authority. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, in his book *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, ranked angels in three basic hierarchies, each of which has three orders: first, angels that focus upon God: thrones, cherubim, and seraphim; second, angels that focus on execution of the divine decree and plan: authorities, lordships, and powers; and third, angels that focus on the execution of divine providence in particular events: principalities, archangels, and angels.⁶⁶ This structure of angelic authorities has no basis in God’s Word, but it entered the church’s tradition, as seen in the theology of Aquinas.⁶⁷

Though Paul’s terms of power suggest distinct kinds of angelic authority, they appear in no fixed sequence, except the combination “principality” (*archē*) and “power” (*exousia*), always in that order, as Table 54.1 reveals. For example, sometimes he lists “dominion” or “lordship” (*kuriotēs*) after principalities and powers (Eph. 1:21), and sometimes before (Col. 1:16). Therefore, the lists do not reveal specific hierarchical relations. It is also possible that some terms overlap in their referents.

Neither does the Bible teach us that angelic functions are divided among distinct angelic orders, such as in the Dionysian theory that higher angels simply attend to God and lesser ones serve men. Noting that angels are “*all* ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb. 1:14), Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) said, “The highest angel is not exempted from this office.”⁶⁸ The “living ones” that worship before God’s throne also execute God’s providential decrees on earth (Rev. 4:8; 6:1–7). William Perkins said, “That there are degrees of angels, it is most plain. . . . But it is not for us to search, who, or how many be of each order, neither ought we curiously to inquire how they are distinguished.”⁶⁹

66. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, chap. 6, in *Works*, 2:23–24. Some of the terms for the angelic orders are variously translated.

67. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 108, Art. 5–6.

68. Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, in *Works*, 477–78.

69. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, chap. 8 (21).

Rom. 8:38	<i>angelos</i>	<i>archē</i>	<i>dunamis</i>
1 Cor. 15:24		<i>archē exousia</i>	<i>dunamis</i>
Eph. 1:21		<i>archē exousia</i>	<i>dunamis kuriotēs</i>
Eph. 3:10		<i>archē exousia</i>	
Eph. 6:12		<i>archē exousia</i>	<i>kosmo-kratōr</i>
Col. 1:16	<i>thronos kuriotēs</i>	<i>archē exousia</i>	
Col. 2:10		<i>archē exousia</i>	
Col. 2:15		<i>archē exousia</i>	
Titus 3:1		<i>archē exousia</i>	

Table 54.1. Order of Terms in Paul's Lists of Powers.

The Question of Guardian Angels

Does God assign to each person a particular “guardian angel”? The idea that each person has a good angel and an evil angel appears in ancient Judaism⁷⁰ and the Christian book *The Shepherd of Hermas*.⁷¹ Jerome argued for the existence of guardian angels from Christ’s words, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10).⁷² Aquinas made the same argument.⁷³ When disciples gathered for prayer for Peter, whom they presumed was still in prison, and Rhoda reported that Peter was knocking at the door, they said, “It is his angel” (Acts 12:15).

However, neither Matthew 18:10 nor Acts 12:15 explicitly says that God assigns one angel to guard (much less to guide) each person. Neither is this doctrine a necessary consequence of those texts. Christ’s

70. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 119b, <https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.119b?lang=bi>.

71. *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 2.6.2, in *ANF*, 2:24.

72. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, The Fathers of the Church 117 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 209 (on Matt. 18:10).

73. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 113, Art. 2, Answer.

words about the “little ones” probably refer to believers who are child-like before God (Matt. 18:6). “Their angels” could refer to the many angels caring for all of God’s children—a sign of his great love for them—not specific angels assigned to individuals. As to the disciples who said, “It is his angel” (Acts 12:15), they were not at that moment examples of strong faith or clear thinking. Furthermore, if these texts did refer to guardian angels, then the angels would be derelict in their duties, for they were not with the people they were supposed to be guarding. Therefore, we judge the doctrine of guardian angels to lack scriptural warrant.⁷⁴

Furthermore, that doctrine tends to make angels into mediators whom we can know personally and call upon for guidance and help. We see this tendency in Roman Catholicism. Pope Francis says that a Christian should ask himself, “How is my relationship with my guardian angel? Do I listen to him? Do I bid him good morning? Do I tell him: ‘guard me while I sleep’? Do I speak with him? Do I ask his advice?”⁷⁵ Rather than praying to angels, we must pray to God through Christ alone.

Implications of the Doctrine of Angels

God’s Word does not encourage us to seek direct interaction with angels in this life. In particular, we must avoid “worshipping of angels” (Col. 2:18). However, Scripture does affirm the reality and activity of angels for our faith because of the practical benefits that this doctrine brings.

The doctrine of angels implies that we must *worship God alone*. Angels are awesome beings. Reading Revelation fills the mind with vivid images of angelic power and majesty. One can understand why those who encounter angels might be tempted to worship them. However, Revelation teaches us that the angels themselves worship God (Rev. 4:8–9; 5:11). Furthermore, the angel of Revelation twice insists that we give no worship to angels, but “worship God” (19:10; 22:9). If the very angels of God are not worthy of our worship, then how can we give our worship to earthly idols or mere men? Let us learn from the thunderous praises of the seraphim to give our wholehearted worship to the Holy One, and to him alone.

74. See Calvin, *Commentaries*, on Matt. 18:10; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 464–65; and Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 276.

75. Pope Francis, “We All Have an Angel,” October 2, 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2014/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20141002_we-all-have-an-angel.html.

Since God delivered his revelation through the ministry of angels, then we must *listen to God's Holy Word*. Since the law of God given through angels was trustworthy and brought severe penalties on those who rejected it, “we must pay much closer attention” to the message of salvation declared by God’s Son, or “how shall we escape” (Heb. 2:1–3 ESV)? Could God have sent more august and authoritative messengers to us than the very nobles of heaven and his only begotten Son? Let us therefore believe every word of Scripture with all our hearts.

The ministry of angels to believers calls us to *trust God's gracious protection*. God, of course, needs no help in caring for his people; they are safe in “the shadow of the Almighty” (Ps. 91:1). However, in order to manifest more fully his intention and ability to preserve his people through all the evils that afflict them, God engages the armies of heaven “to guard you in all your ways” (v. 11 ESV). Will you then be so unbelieving as to doubt that he will bring you safely to his kingdom, child of God? Can any evil get past the fiery armies of God unless God designs it for your good? What can the strongest man or fiercest lion do to you if a single angel stands at your side? Wilhelmus à Brakel wrote, “Since God has commissioned them to guard, protect, and keep the godly, one ought to be quiet and without fear, even when all things appear to be against us. ‘For they that be with us are more than they that be with them’ (2 Kings 6:16).”⁷⁶

The obedience of angels to their Master implies that we must *keep God's commands*. Angels are constantly “obeying the voice of his word” (Ps. 103:20 ESV) with the fervency of fire and the speed of lightning (104:4). Augustine rightly said that we should not invoke the angels, but imitate them.⁷⁷ When we pray, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10), we are asking God to graciously work so that “every one may attend to and perform the duties of his station and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven.”⁷⁸ Shall they outdo us in zeal when Christ shed no blood for their salvation but gave his all for us?

Another implication of the doctrine of angels is that we should willingly *serve God's lowly people*, just as angels are servants to God's children (Heb. 1:14). Perkins said that “the angels of God are very notable and excellent creatures,” yet “they abase themselves to become guardians

76. Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:296.

77. Augustine, *The City of God*, 10.26, in NPNF¹, 2:197.

78. Heidelberg Catechism (LD 49, Q. 124), in *The Three Forms of Unity*, 113.

and keepers unto sinful men.” This has special relevance for ministers of the Word who may think that the importance of their special work exempts them from the universal call for Christians to serve one another by love. Perkins concluded that since the angels are willing “to become servants unto us, we must not think ourselves too good to serve our poor brethren.”⁷⁹

The future coming of the angels with Christ teaches us to *fear God’s righteous judgment*. When angels came with messages of mercy, they often terrified people. What will it be like when they come with the flaming wrath of God? Let us consider that heaven will one day unleash a vast army of holy warriors led by the King of kings and Lord of lords—and they will come to wage war and shatter sinners as an iron rod shatters clay pots (Rev. 19:11–16). Learn from the doctrine of angels to fear the living God.

Finally, the biblical teaching about angels implies that we must *live for God’s only begotten Son*. The angels live for Christ; their very existence is for his sake (Col. 1:16). They walked with Christ through all his earthly trials and magnified him at his exaltation. Since such high and noble creatures give themselves for the glory of Christ and attend him so faithfully, much more should we count it our highest privilege to say, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Since innumerable angels sing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Rev. 5:11), surely those whom he redeemed with his blood must “no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15 ESV).

Sing to the Lord

Glorifying God for His Angels

In the heav’ns the Lord Almighty
 Fixed His everlasting throne;
 Over all is His dominion,
 He is God, and He alone.

Bless the Lord, ye mighty angels,
 Ye that hearken to His voice,
 All His gracious word fulfilling;
 Ever bless Him and rejoice.

79. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbol*, in *Works*, 5:63.

Bless the Lord, all ye His servants,
Ministers of God Most High;
Ye His hosts, that do His pleasure,
God your Maker glorify.

Bless the Lord, all things created;
Be His holy Name adored
All throughout His wide dominion;
O my soul, bless thou the Lord.

Psalm 103:19–22

Tune: Rathbun

The Psalter, No. 282

Questions for Meditation or Discussion

1. Why might someone find it difficult to believe in angels? How would you help him to overcome his difficulties?
2. What terms does the Bible use for angelic beings? What do they mean?
3. Give at least one Scripture reference that shows that angels are each of the following:
 - heavenly
 - immaterial
 - invisible
 - asexual
 - immortal
 - intelligent
 - affectionate
 - holy
 - morally responsible
 - preserved by God
 - not redeemed in Christ
 - many
 - organized
 - swift
 - powerful
 - fearsome
 - instruments of God
 - created

- local
- limited
- not worthy of worship

4. How do angels relate to God's work of salvation?
5. What are some examples of angels' involvement in divine judgment, past and future?
6. What did Paul mean in Colossians 1:16 when he said that all things, including angels, are "for him"? Give some specific examples.
7. In what ways should you imitate the angels? How can knowing the doctrine of angels provide us with reasons and motives to do these things?

Questions for Deeper Reflection

8. Where does our attitude toward angels cross the line into animism and polytheism?
9. What arguments might be made in favor of the doctrine of guardian angels? What arguments might be made against that doctrine?
10. How can faith in the biblical doctrine of angels increase a Christian's confidence and hope?

Satan and the Demons

Angels are real, but not every angel is good. In a day when God was giving new prophecies to his people, the apostle John sounded a necessary warning: “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). A messenger who appears to be an “angel of light” may prove to be “Satan himself” (2 Cor. 11:14). But an encounter with Satan or his host of demons does not necessarily involve extraordinary experiences. All believers in Jesus Christ are engaged in a spiritual war against unseen enemies (Eph. 6:10–13). No Christian can escape the front lines of battle; every disciple of Christ is at the tip of the spear.

Belief in evil spirits faces an uphill climb against the modern mind-set, which presupposes that all people are basically good, morality is relative, all things are one and thus divine, and the highest virtue is tolerance. However, Christ believed in these spirits. Jesus directly addressed a legion of demons that inhabited a wretched man. Demon possession was not simply a colorful way to describe the man’s mental illness, for when Christ cast the demons out of the man, they entered a herd of pigs and drove them to their destruction (Luke 8:27–33). Christ spoke of the Devil with absolute earnestness. Jesus said to people who did not believe in his word, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). If we will receive Christ as our Lord and Teacher, and follow him as his disciples, then we must believe in the Devil.

Biblical Terminology for Demons

God's Word employs a variety of terms to refer to evil spiritual powers, both to Satan, the great enemy of God and mankind, and to the many spirits that collaborate with Satan.

The Devil

The Holy Scriptures refer to Satan with terms of malevolence, moral corruption, and might. Terms of malevolence or hatred dominate. He is the “serpent” or “dragon” that tempted the first man and woman to sin, deceives the world, and assaults Christ and his church.¹ He is “Satan,” literally, “the Satan” (Hebrew *hasatan*), which means “the adversary.”² The Greek transliteration (*satanas*) is used in the New Testament thirty-six times.³ Christ called him the “enemy” (*echthros*).⁴ The New Testament also refers to this evil being thirty-eight times with the term we translate as “Devil” (*diabolos*),⁵ which means opponent, slanderer, or accuser.⁶ The Septuagint used this term to translate “Satan,” and so it became a synonym for the great adversary.⁷ The New Testament similarly calls him “the accuser [*katēgoros*] of our brethren” (Rev. 12:10). Revelation names “the angel of the abyss,” who rules the apocalyptic locust plague, with the Hebrew word *Abaddon*, or “destruction,” which John renders in Greek as *Apollyon*, or “destroyer” (Rev. 9:11). The latter term probably alludes obliquely to the Greek god Apollo, who was called *Parnopios* (“Of Locusts”).

The Devil is also described with terms of moral corruption and sin. Satan can be called simply “the Wicked One” or “the Evil One” (*ho ponēros*) as the great influence behind all sin.⁸ The New Testament refers

1. Gen. 3:1–4, 13–14; Isa. 27:1; Rev. 12:4–9; 20:2. Cf. Matt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33. On the Serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve, see the chapter on the fall of man under the doctrine of sin in *RST*, vol. 2 (forthcoming).

2. Job 1:6–9, 12; 2:1–7; Zech. 3:1–2. Without the article, the Hebrew term *satan* can refer to human adversaries (Num. 22:22; 1 Sam. 29:4).

3. Matt. 4:10; 12:26; 16:23; Mark 1:13; 3:23, 26; 4:15; 8:33; Luke 4:8; 10:18; 11:18; 13:16; 22:3, 31; John 13:27; Acts 5:3; 26:18; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:20; 5:15; Rev. 2:9, 13, 24; 3:9; 12:9; 20:2, 7.

4. Matt. 13:25, 28, 39; Luke 10:19.

5. Matt. 4:1, 5, 8, 11; 13:39; 25:41; Luke 4:2–6, 13; 8:12; John 6:70; 8:44; 13:2; Acts 10:38; 13:10; Eph. 4:27; 6:11; 1 Tim. 3:6, 7; 2 Tim. 2:26; Heb. 2:14; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8; 1 John 3:8, 10; Jude 9; Rev. 2:10; 12:9, 12; Rev 20:2, 10.

6. See the use of *diabolos* for slanderous human enemies (Est. 7:4; 8:1 LXX; 1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Titus 2:3) and the cognate verb translated as “accuse” (*diaballō*, Dan. 3:8 LXX; Luke 16:1).

7. Cf. Job 1:6–9, 12; 2:1–7; Zech. 3:1–2 LXX. Cf. Wisdom of Solomon, 2:23–24.

8. Matt. 13:19, 38; Eph. 6:16; 1 John 2:13–14; 3:12; 5:18–19. There are other texts containing the articular masculine singular *ponēros*, and in some of them it is not entirely clear whether the words refer to Satan, to an evil man, or to evil in abstract (Matt. 5:37, 39; 6:13; Luke 11:4; John 17:15; 1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:3).

to personified evil in opposition to Christ as “Belial” (Greek *belial*, 2 Cor. 6:15),⁹ which transliterates a Hebrew word (*beliya’al*) that means worthlessness, sometimes used to describe wicked men as “sons of Belial.”¹⁰

Lastly, the Bible speaks of Satan in terms of might and power. The New Testament refers to Satan as a spiritual “prince” (*archōn*), which means ruler or authority. Satan is “the prince of demons,”¹¹ “the prince of this world,”¹² and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). He is the “king” (*basileus*) over the swarming hordes of demons that torment mankind (Rev. 9:11). He is “the god [*theos*] of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4). The prince of demons is called “Beelzebub” or “Beelzebul” (ESV),¹³ the name of the pagan deity “Baal-zebub the god of Ekron” (2 Kings 1:2, 3, 6, 16).¹⁴ “Baal” (*ba’al*) means “lord, master,” often the title of a false god. The Hebrew term *zebub* means “flies” (Eccl. 10:1; Isa. 7:18), but it may be that the Old Testament writers twisted *zebul* (“prince” or “lofty one”) to make the deity’s name into an insult, “lord of the flies.”¹⁵

In summary, the biblical vocabulary for the Devil portrays him as a being of intense hatred against God and his people, complete moral corruption and wicked influence, and great power and authority over the demons and this world of fallen men. His names associate him closely with the pagan gods of nations such as Canaan and Greece.

Demonic Spirits

The Holy Scriptures refer to a demonic power as an “evil spirit,”¹⁶ an “unclean spirit,”¹⁷ or, in one scenario, a “lying spirit.”¹⁸ The King James Version renders two Hebrew words as “devil”: first, a term (*sa’ir*, Lev.

9. Some Greek manuscripts read *beliar* in 2 Cor. 6:15.

10. Deut. 13:13; Judg. 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 2:12; 10:27; 1 Kings 21:10, 13; 2 Chron. 13:7; cf. 1 Sam. 1:16.

11. Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15 ESV. The KJV reads “the prince of devils,” but the last word is not *diabolos* but *daimonios*.

12. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11.

13. Matt. 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18–19.

14. “Beelzebub” reflects the Hebrew spelling in the Old Testament, and “Beelzebul” the Greek spelling in the New.

15. Paul R. House, 1, 2 Kings, The New American Commentary 8 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 243.

16. Judges 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14–16, 23; 18:10; 19:9; Luke 7:21; 8:2; Acts 19:12–16. In some cases, particularly in the Old Testament, some scholars argue that “evil spirit” refers to a bad mind-set. However, the repeated statements that the spirit was sent from the Lord and the parallel between the coming of the evil spirit and the departure of God’s Spirit (1 Sam. 16:14) both imply that the “evil spirit” was a supernatural influence.

17. Matt. 10:1; 12:43; Mark 1:23, 26–27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; Luke 4:36; 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16; 8:7; Rev. 16:13. Cf. Zech. 13:2.

18. 1 Kings 22:20–23; 2 Chron. 18:18–22.

17:7; 2 Chron. 11:15) with a literal meaning of “goat” (Lev. 4:24), perhaps an allusion to the perverse worship of satyr-spirits;¹⁹ and second, a word (*shed*, Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37) for a protective spirit represented in ancient art as a winged bull or lion (Mesopotamian *shedu*).²⁰

In the New Testament, in addition to references to the “Devil” (*diabolos*), the KJV uses “devil” to translate the terms *daimōn* or *daimonion* five times and sixty times respectively.²¹ In Hellenistic polytheism, *daimōn* denoted a divine being, such as lesser gods and the spirits of deceased men, while a *daimonion* was a minor spirit-power of popular animism, often a capricious or hostile spirit (cf. Acts 17:18).²² The latter word was used in the Septuagint to render the Hebrew words for “devils” noted above.²³ The vast majority of occurrences of “demon” appear in the Synoptic Gospels in accounts of Christ casting out harmful spirits. One of its rare occurrences in the writings of Paul identifies demons as the objects of idolatrous worship (1 Cor. 10:20–21). That is to say, if there is any real spiritual power connected with pagan gods and idols, it is satanic in origin and demonic in character.

Paul applies to demons the terminology of powers and authorities that we noted in the previous chapter concerning angels. He says, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil [*diabolos*]. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities [plural *archē*], against powers [plural *exousia*], against the rulers [plural *kosmokratōr*] of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness [literally, “the spiritual things of the evil,” *ta pneumatika tēs ponērias*] in high places” (Eph. 6:11–12). Like the angels, the demons are an organized, invisible army, but one of evil powers.

The Origin and Nature of Demons

The Bible indicates that demons are angels. The spirits that follow Satan are “his angels” (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7, 9). Apollyon is called “the angel

19. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 182–83; and Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, The New American Commentary 3A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 234.

20. H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (New York: New American Library, 1962), 301, 303.

21. For *daimōn*, see Matt 8:31; Mark 5:12; Luke 8:29; Rev. 16:14; 18:2. For *daimonion*, see Matt. 7:22; 9:33–34; 10:8; 11:18; 12:24, 27–28; 17:18; Mark 1:34, 39; 3:15, 22; 6:13; 7:26, 29–30; 9:38; 16:9, 17; Luke 4:33, 35, 41; 7:33; 8:2, 27, 30, 33, 35, 38; 9:1, 42, 49; 10:17; 11:14–15, 18–20; 13:32; John 7:20; 8:48–49, 52; 10:20–21; Acts 17:18; 1 Cor. 10:20–21; 1 Tim. 4:1; James 2:19; Rev. 9:20; 18:2.

22. TDNT, 2:2, 8–9.

23. *Daimonion* renders *shed* in Deut. 32:17; Ps. 105 [106]:37 LXX, and *sa’ir* in Isa. 13:21; 34:14 LXX. It also renders *’elil* (“idol”) in Ps. 95 [96]:5 LXX.

of the bottomless pit” (Rev. 9:11). Therefore, what is true about the “essential properties” of angels pertains to demons as well, as William Gouge observed.²⁴ Demons are immaterial, invisible, asexual, and immortal spirits. They are intelligent, affectionate, and morally responsible beings made to serve God. They are organized, swift, powerful, and fearsome beings. Yet they were created by God, and are local and limited, not omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent. Demons are not worthy of our worship (v. 20). There are many demons (Mark 5:9), even hundreds of millions (Rev. 9:16–21).

As angels, Satan and the demons were created by God in holiness with heaven as their abode. We do not know much about the fall of Satan and his angels into sin or about God’s casting them out of heaven under divine judgment, but it is clear that God made all things very good (Gen. 1:31) and that some angels rebelled against his will. Peter says, “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4). Similarly, Jude writes, “The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).²⁵ The angels fell by seeking another “estate” (*archē*) or “principality,” that is, a position of authority not granted to them by God.

Aspirations for divine authority and glory appear in Isaiah 14:12–14: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” However, in its context, this statement is directed to “the king of Babylon” (v. 4), who had gone down to “the grave” and “the worms” (v. 11). He is described as “the man . . . that did shake kingdoms” (v. 16). These textual elements are not well suited to describe an angel.²⁶ It should also be noted that Lucifer is not a proper name, but a Latin term meaning “light-bringer” or “morning star,” a translation of

24. William Gouge, *The Whole-Armour of God* (London: John Beale, 1616), 40.

25. Some scholars understand Jude 6 to refer to “the sons of God” who took “wives of all which they chose” (Gen. 6:1–4; cf. 1 Enoch 6–11). However, angels are spirits, not sexual beings, and do not marry (Matt. 22:30).

26. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1:440–41.

the Hebrew text. Stars can represent human beings (Gen. 15:5; 37:9–10), and fallen stars can stand for humiliated men (Dan. 8:10). There is nothing here that does not fit the fall of a human king, though human pride is an image of satanic pride (James 3:14–15).

We may find more information about the fall of Satan in Ezekiel's oracle against the king of Tyre (Ezek. 28:11–19). While directly addressed to a man, the prophecy transcends anything that can be properly attributed to a human being. The person addressed is “the anointed cherub” who dwelt gloriously “in Eden the garden of God” (vv. 13–14). He was “full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty” (v. 12), “perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee” (v. 15). He fell into sin and misery because “thine heart was lifted up because of thine beauty” (v. 17). It is possible that such language could be used hyperbolically of an ancient king; they often thought of themselves as divine beings (cf. Ps. 82) and tried to re-create Paradise in their courts (cf. Est. 1:3–9; Dan. 4:30).²⁷ However, the descriptions here are far more fitting for an angelic prince, suggesting a double reference.²⁸ Jonathan Edwards considered the king of Tyre to be “a type of the devil.”²⁹ If the text does refer to Satan, then it indicates that Satan's fall took place in the garden of Eden because of his pride. The ugly fruit of that pride was his successful bid to overthrow mankind, God's ruling image bearer on earth.

Perhaps this is the meaning of Jude's comment that some angels did not stay in their “first estate” or assigned positions of authority (Jude 6), namely, to use their power to serve mankind (Heb. 1:14). Satan envied man—or perhaps held man in contempt as beneath his own dignity as an angel—rebelled, and sought to destroy him. This view has been found as early as the fourth century,³⁰ and it was affirmed by Girolamo Zanchi, Thomas Goodwin, and Edwards.³¹ The earliest revelation of Satan's sin is his deadly and deceitful temptation of man (Gen. 3:1–4), to which Christ

27. Note also the comparison of the greatness of kings to the trees in the garden of Eden in Ezek. 31:9, 16–18.

28. Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, The New American Commentary 17 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 266–68; and Peter Naylor, *A Study Commentary on Ezekiel*, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2011), 430.

29. Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 980, in *WJE*, 20:296–99.

30. Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75–76.

31. Goodwin, *The Knowledge of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ*, in *Works*, 4:351–52; and Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 320, in *WJE*, 13:401. On Girolamo Zanchi and Goodwin, see Edwards, “Miscellanies,” nos. 1261 and 1266b, in *WJE*, 23:200, 213. Goodwin and Edwards

alluded when he said that “the devil . . . was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth” (John 8:44). If there was a demonic rebellion and fall prior to Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve, we do not have a record of it in Scripture. Christ’s statement that “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18) is set in the context of Christ’s victory over the Devil through the preaching of the gospel (vv. 17–20). The casting of the Devil and his angels out of heaven to the earth in Revelation takes place after Christ’s birth and exaltation to God’s right hand (Rev. 12:5–9).

The angels that fell into sin found no saving grace from God, but God reserved them for eternal punishment (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Christ did not come to save fallen angels, but men, though angels are more glorious (Heb. 2:7, 16). This led Stephen Charnock to marvel that when the angels sinned, “divine thunder dashed them into hell,” whereas when man sinned, “divine blood wafts the fallen creature from his misery.”³² How great is God’s grace to man!

The Kingdom of Darkness

In popular culture, the Devil is said sometimes to trick people into selling him their souls in exchange for supernatural favors.³³ However, the Holy Scriptures teach the horrifying truth that Satan already rules over mankind. Christ taught that Satan has an undivided “kingdom” (Matt. 12:26). The Lord Jesus compared the Devil’s grip on people to that of “a strong man” who holds his goods securely until someone stronger conquers and plunders him—namely, the Son of God (v. 29; cf. Luke 11:21–22). Sinners are “the children of the wicked one” (Matt. 13:38). Christ said to people who would not listen to his word, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44). The kingdom of Satan is not a subset of humanity, but the entire unsaved world; Christ called him “the prince of this world” (12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

The apostle John teaches, “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

linked the Devil’s proud rebellion against God’s exaltation of man to a revelation given to the angels that human nature would be joined to the Son of God, but this is speculative.

32. Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:263.

33. The motif of a person selling the Devil his soul in exchange for supernatural favors finds a classic example in the story of Faust, popularized by Christopher Marlowe (d. 1593) and later by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (d. 1832).

Though the Devil did not create anyone, he is the spiritual father of sinners because they do his will and imitate his ways. Salvation breaks into the Devil's family to create a new spiritual family: the children of God. John says, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (v. 10). For this reason, Christians are no longer of this world, for "we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (5:19 ESV).³⁴

The apostle Paul says that Christians formerly "were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:1–2). We were saved when God "delivered us from the power of darkness, and . . . translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). Satan is "the god of this world," who has "blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Cor. 4:4). Conversion proceeds from Christ's opening of their blind eyes "to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). When God gives sinners repentance, they "escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:26 ESV).

Since the world is Satan's kingdom, it swarms with unseen demonic powers. "Babylon the great," that ancient city that symbolizes the world with all its vice and enticements, is "the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit" (Rev. 18:2). When human civil authorities and military powers become like a "beast" oppressing God's people, they are empowered by the ancient dragon (13:1–9). False religions and corrupt spirituality are but painted masks worn by Satan. When people worship idols, they offer their worship to demons (1 Cor. 10:20; cf. Deut. 32:17). Sorcerers who oppose the gospel are children of the Devil (Acts 13:8–11). In ancient writings, astrological powers and Greek gods were called "world rulers" (plural *kosmokratōr*),³⁵ but Paul tells us that these "rulers" are the demons that war against the church (Eph. 6:12). Neither is the visible church free from Satan's influence. Hypocrites are the Devil's agents (Acts 5:3). False teachers in the church are Satan's "ministers" (2 Cor. 11:14–15). The Devil

34. Literally, "the whole world lies in the evil one" (*ho kosmos holos en tō ponērō keitai*), where "the evil one" (*ho ponēros*) appears in the previous verse as the one from whom God saves us (1 John 5:18–19).

35. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 444.

is not “out there” somewhere; his forces confront us here and now—even as you read this book.

Satan and the Sovereignty of God

Although Satan rules over this world, he does so as a limited creature. Christians must not succumb to an ultimate dualism in which God and Satan are two equal but opposite eternal powers acting on the same level. The Devil and his demons are fallen angels, created by God and still subject to his decree and providence.³⁶ A demon has no power to do anything unless his being is preserved by God, his action permitted by God, and the result decreed from the throne of God.³⁷ Revelation tells us that when satanic forces do evil, they work according to the power, time, and extent that “was given” (passive *didōmi*) them,³⁸ the same expression used of God’s giving power to other creatures according to his sovereign will.³⁹ Though Satan leads people to serve the “beast,” nevertheless “God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (Rev. 17:17).

Satan could do nothing against Job until “the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand” (Job 1:12). Though Satan instigated the harm that fell upon Job’s family, Job rightly attributed all to his sovereign God, saying, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (v. 21). Again, Satan could not do any harm to Job’s person without divine permission and is subject to divine limitation: “The LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life” (2:6). Job spoke rightly when he attributed to the Lord the boils that afflicted his body: “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (v. 10). John Calvin concluded, “Therefore Satan is clearly under God’s power, and is so ruled by his bidding as to be compelled to render him service.” By “compelled,” Calvin meant that Satan, though he is of his own malice “urged on to attempt courses of action which he believes to be most hostile to God,” still, by God’s sovereign power, “carries out only

36. Regarding God’s sovereignty over demons, see chap. 52 on God’s control of all his creation.

37. Note the sending of evil spirits from the Lord in Judg. 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14–16, 23; 18:10; 19:9.

38. Rev. 9:1, 3–5; 13:5, 7.

39. Rev. 6:2, 4, 8; 12:14; 16:8; 19:8.

those things which have been divinely permitted to him; and so he obeys his Creator, whether he will or not.”⁴⁰

The most striking instance of God’s sovereignty over Satan is Christ’s death. Satan instigated Christ’s betrayal, arrest, and murder.⁴¹ However, Satan’s actions to destroy Christ resulted in his own decisive defeat and the release of many sinners from his captivity (John 12:31–32; 16:11). William Gurnall said, “God sets the devil to catch the devil.”⁴² Just as David cut off Goliath’s head with Goliath’s own sword (1 Sam. 17:51), so God defeated the Devil by the Devil’s own machinations. So great is God’s wisdom! Surely, we can trust God to use Satan’s crimes against us to accomplish the Lord’s good will for us.

Therefore, we should fear God, not the Devil. Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) said that Christ holds the Devil on the “chain of omnipotency.” He added, “Christ numbers all the footsteps of devils. Satan hath not a general warrant to tempt the saints; but to every new act against Job (1:12; 2:6), against Peter, ere he can put him upon one single blast, to cast him but once through his sieve (Luke 22:31), yea against one sow, or a bristle of a sow (Matt. 8:31–32), he must have a new signed commission.”⁴³

The Activity of Satan and the Demons

Although we should have no interest in filling our minds with the depravity that Satan inspires (Eph. 5:11–12; Phil. 4:8) or in dabbling in the occult (Deut. 18:10), it is wise for us to understand the ways in which the Devil operates.

Deception

Satan does not force anyone to sin, but leads them to sin of their own volition by his lies. Our Lord says of the Devil, “When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). All lying originated in Satan. The primary target of his deception is faith in the word of God (Gen. 3:1, 4). It is folly for us to rely on our own wits to overcome Satan’s deceptions, for as Edwards said, the Devil was “educated

40. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.14.17.

41. Luke 22:3, 53; John 13:2, 27; 14:30.

42. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 1:102.

43. Samuel Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 389–90.

in the best divinity school in the universe, viz. the heaven of heavens.”⁴⁴ Deception is the Devil’s great stratagem that he employs upon all his victims: he “deceiveth the whole world” (Rev. 12:9).

Satan works through human instruments to teach lies. Leaders of false religions and practitioners of false spirituality serve the Devil (Acts 13:8–10). Demons cultivate worshipers through false gods (1 Cor. 10:20). Hypocritical teachers in the church teach “doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1–3). The Serpent who deceived Eve continues striving to lead those in the churches to a false view of Christ and salvation by his human servants (2 Cor. 11:2–4, 14–15).

The Devil can employ his angelic powers to promote deception. A person may have visions of “an angel of light,” but it is only “Satan himself” (2 Cor. 11:14). Satan may cause “signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9; cf. Rev. 13:13–15). His servants may claim to be prophets and prophetesses, but they are not of God (1 John 4:1–5; Rev. 2:20). Supernatural experiences, therefore, are no test of truth. Thomas Manton said most miracles claimed by false teachers are “mere fables, notorious impostures, and forgeries,” and others may be “done by diabolical illusions, as there may be apparitions, visions, specters.” But supernatural phenomena must not draw us away from the true God (Deut. 13:1–3).⁴⁵ This includes inward, mystical experiences. Edwards said, “There are many false spirits, exceeding busy with men, who often transform themselves into angels of light, and do in many wonderful ways, with great subtlety and power, mimic the operations of the Spirit of God.”⁴⁶

The Devil works deceptively in people to tempt them to reject God’s Word. When unbelievers hear the faithful preaching of the Word, “then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the glory of God in Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).

Satan also introduces into people’s minds deceitful temptations to disobey God’s will. The Devil tempted Christ in the wilderness to take the path of self-gratification and self-glorification (Matt. 4:1–11). When Christ went to Jerusalem for the last time, the Devil “put into the heart of Judas Iscariot . . . to betray him” (John 13:2). Satan filled the heart of Ananias

44. Edwards, “True Grace, Distinguished from the Experience of Devils,” in *WJE*, 25:614.

45. Manton, *Eighteen Sermons on the Second Chapter of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, in *Works*, 3:67.

46. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *WJE*, 2:141.

to lie about his donation to the church's benevolence ministry (Acts 5:3). Though it may be that Christ heard an audible voice, there is no indication in these texts that Judas or Ananias was aware of demonic activity; the Devil seems to have placed thoughts into their minds. This is particularly easy for the Devil to do in unsaved people, whose minds and desires are corrupted by deceit (Eph. 2:2–3; 4:22). Gurnall said, "Few kings are enthroned in the hearts of their subjects; they rule their bodies and command their purses. . . . But Satan hath the heart of all his subjects."⁴⁷

Demonization

Though Satan and his demons have a reigning spiritual influence over all sinners not yet saved by Christ, there are extreme cases in which a demon takes up controlling residence in a person's body. Such a person is said to have an evil or unclean spirit.⁴⁸ He is also said to be "possessed" by a demon or, literally, to be "demonized" (*daimonizomai*).⁴⁹ More than one demon can inhabit an individual in this way at the same time (Luke 8:2).

The demon speaks and acts through the demonized man or woman. Consequently, demonized people can exhibit superhuman strength (Mark 5:4) and unusual knowledge, including that sought by divination (1:24, 34; Acts 16:16–18). However, demonization does not make a person an object of admiration by anyone, but the object of pity or exploitation because of the harmful effects that the demon has upon the mind and body.

The phenomenon of demonization in the Bible is especially associated with the coming of Jesus Christ, perhaps as one prong of Satan's resistance to Christ's ministry. Christ cast demons out of demonized people in conjunction with his healing of the sick (Mark 1:27, 34, 39) and gave his apostles the power to do the same (Matt. 10:1), though not always with equal effectiveness (17:14–21). Christ also sent out seventy other disciples to preach, heal, and cast out demons (Luke 10:1, 9, 17). Philip the Evangelist also worked miracles and cast demons out of people when he evangelized Samaria (Acts 8:5–7). However, exorcism is not listed among the spiritual gifts given to the apostolic church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:8–10). Neither do the Epistles of the New Testament give instructions for exorcism.

47. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 1:131.

48. Matt. 10:1; 12:43; Mark 1:23, 26–27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; Luke 4:36; 6:18; 7:21; 8:2, 29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16; 8:7; 19:12–16.

49. Matt. 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; Mark 1:32; 5:15–16, 18; Luke 8:36; John 10:21.

Therefore, it is best to view exorcism as a special ministry of the apostles and evangelists directly appointed by Christ.

Much superstition revolves around exorcisms. William Spurstowe (c. 1605–1666) pointed out that Satan is not disturbed by holy water, charms, sacred objects, and incantations, though he may at times make them appear successful in removing a demon in order to spur on false religion.⁵⁰ Christians defeat the demons by using the ordinary means of grace, such as the Word and prayer, and by walking in evangelical holiness (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 6:10–18).

The ultimate solution to demonization is salvation. When an evil spirit leaves a man but later returns to find the man's life reformed, the demon may very well gather “seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and . . . enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Luke 11:26). To defeat the Devil, the soul needs a new Resident, of whom we can say, “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Disease and Death

Once mankind fell under the divine sentence of death (Gen. 2:17; 3:19), Satan had the power to harm the bodies of people. One woman was crippled by “a spirit of infirmity” for eighteen years until Christ delivered her from “Satan” (Luke 13:11, 16). With God's permission, the Devil can inflict illness upon God's children (Job 2:7). Demonization often brings physical maladies such as blindness, deafness, inability to speak, and violent convulsions (Matt. 12:22; Mark 9:17–27).

God created man in his image (Gen. 1:27). Therefore, Satan hates all human beings and seeks to destroy them. God sends death as the sentence of his justice, but he has no pleasure in death itself (Ezek. 18:23). However, the Devil “was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). Like his servants, Satan comes “to kill, and to destroy” (10:10). The Devil has “the power of death” (Heb. 2:14). It is both illuminating and sobering to consider how Satan carried out his wicked plan to make Job curse God. Evidently, the Devil is able to kill through both human violence and natural events such as great storms (Job 1:13–19).

However, Satan is not the lord of death, for he is not really the lord of anything. He could not touch Job or his household until the Lord granted

50. William Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2004), 72.

him permission. As Job later confessed, it is God who determines the day of each man's death (Job 14:5).

Damnation

The Devil's ultimate goal with respect to mankind is not man's death, but man's damnation under God's eternal judgment. In Eden, Satan did not attempt to strike down Adam and Eve, but to lead them into sin so that God would condemn the entire human race (Genesis 3).

Since the Lord began executing his plan of salvation, Satan has labored to accomplish the damnation of God's redeemed people. Satan's attacks upon Job aimed not at his extermination, but at turning him from serving God to cursing him (Job 1:11; 2:5). In Zechariah's visions, Satan stood by Joshua, the high priest of Israel, to accuse him before the Lord (Zech. 3:1). The Devil is "the accuser of our brothers . . . who accuses them day and night before our God" (Rev. 12:10 ESV).⁵¹

However, we should not accept the popular notion that Satan is the ruler of hell and the demons are its prison guards. Such an idea has no basis in the Holy Scriptures. Rather, the "everlasting fire" of hell is "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Satan's future is to be "cast into the lake of fire," where he "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). For this reason, the demons themselves fear God (James 2:19). In the end, Satan will have won nothing, only having increased his own condemnation and served as an unwilling instrument of God's glory in Christ.

The Saints' Warfare against Satan and the Demons

The Christian life is a continuous battle to overcome Satan by the grace of God. The Lord initiated this war immediately following the fall of man. God said to the Serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Since then, there has been conflict between the forces of the Serpent and the family of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ. In him, Christians have "power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:19). They live in the hope that "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet

51. Though the KJV uses the past tense "accused," the Greek present participle *katēgorōn* is better understood as a present, repeated action (Rev. 12:10).

shortly,” not because of their strength, but by “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 16:20).⁵²

Rely upon Christ’s Victory

Paul opens his famous treatment of spiritual warfare by saying, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10). Immediately we see that this is a different kind of battle than that fought in the flesh—it requires divine power (2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4). Paul is teaching us that we fight from a posture of dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ and his victory. The same Greek words translated as “power” (*kratos*) and “might” (*ischus*) in Ephesians 6:10 also appear together in the first chapter of the epistle, where Paul writes of “the working of his mighty power [*tou kратous τῆς ischuos autou*], which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion” (1:19–21). The power by which Christians overcome the forces of Satan is not from themselves; they receive it by faith in the exalted Lord Jesus.

Christ came to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). God anointed the incarnate Son with the Holy Spirit to rescue those oppressed by the Devil (Acts 10:38). Christ faced Satan’s temptations as the last Adam, and though Adam fell into sin, Christ stood in obedience (Matt. 4:1–11). As Christ sent forth heralds of the gospel casting out demons, he announced, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18).

Christ overcame Satan particularly through his death and resurrection. The Lion conquered as a slain Lamb (Rev. 5:5–6). At the cross, Jesus Christ “spoiled principalities and powers” and “made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them,” for there he dealt once and for all with the judgment of God’s law against us so that we would be forgiven of all our sins (Col. 2:13–15). Satan received the power of death over man only because of the curse of God’s law. God the Son took on the “flesh and blood” of God’s covenant people so that “through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). His victory was not by the sheer power of a king, but by the sacrifice of a priest to make propitiation for our sins (v. 17). In the shadow of the cross, Christ declared judgment to have fallen upon the prince of this world (John 12:31; 16:11). Christ

52. See the discussion of God’s “seed promise” in Gen. 3:15 in the chapter on the fall of man in *RST*, vol. 2 (forthcoming).

rose from the dead with victory in his hand because he had bought his people with his blood. Calvin said, “We are conquerors before we engage with the enemy, for our head Christ has once for all conquered for us the whole world.”⁵³

Therefore, we overcome the Devil “by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11). We enter into the daily battle with the confidence that the war is already won. John Downame (d. 1652) wrote, “If we did indeed regard our enemies’ strength and our own weakness only, we might well be discouraged from undertaking this combat, but if we look upon our grand Captain Christ, whose love towards us is no less than his power, and both infinite, there is no cause of doubting. . . . He hath already overcome our enemies.”⁵⁴

We must actively exercise our faith in Christ’s finished work for every conflict against the Evil One. The apostle John laid down our basic battle plan: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4–5). We forget this and slip into self-reliance to our own peril. Though the war is won, each individual battle must be fought by faith. Rutherford said, “We fall short of many victories over Satan, which we might have, if we should improve [apply] the dominion and kingly power of Christ over that restless spirit.”⁵⁵

Resist Satan’s Schemes

Paul says, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). The word translated as “wiles” (*methodeia*) refers to the schemes or strategies by which the Devil tries to deceive us and overcome us.⁵⁶ Paul similarly warns against letting Satan “get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). “Devices” (plural *noēma*) means thoughts or designs.

It is our duty, therefore, to know Satan’s tactics, to keep watch against them, and to resist them with all our might. Thomas Brooks said, “Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan’s devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched.”⁵⁷ Calvin wrote,

53. John Calvin, *Commentaries*, on 1 John 2:13.

54. John Downame, *The Christian Warfare against the Devil, World, and Flesh* (1604; facsimile repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 2009), 14.

55. Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith*, 393.

56. See the use of *methodeia* for military strategy in 2 Macc. 6:18.

57. Brooks, *Precious Remedies for Satan’s Devices*, in *Works*, 1:3.

“All that Scripture teaches concerning devils aims at arousing us to take precaution against their stratagems and contrivances, and also to make us equip ourselves with those weapons which are strong and powerful enough to vanquish these most powerful foes.”⁵⁸

Satan is a fool for opposing God, but he is a highly intelligent fool. His methods are many and varied, and well proven over centuries. Gurnall said no actor has so many costumes to wear upon the stage “as the devil hath forms of temptation.”⁵⁹ To assist believers in their meditations upon Satan’s strategies, we present the following principles.⁶⁰

First, Satan promises that disobedience will make us happy, but obedience will ruin our lives. This strategy cast a sinless man and woman down into depravity (Gen. 3:1–4), cast mankind out of Paradise, and will cast many into hell. Charnock wrote, “Satan paints God with his own colours, represents him as envious and malicious as himself.”⁶¹ He also paints himself to be as good as God, seeking to supplant the Lord in our faith and affections. We must respond by believing in the goodness of God and the trustworthiness of his promises. Brooks said, “Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst: he promises honor and pays with disgrace, he promises pleasure and pays with pain, he promises profit and pays with loss, he promises life and pays with death; but God pays as he promises, for all his payments are made in pure gold.”⁶²

Second, Satan attacks at the point of our greatest personal vulnerability. For example, Paul warns married couples not to abstain from sexual relations, “so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:5 ESV). Our points of vulnerability can change over time. Spurstowe said Satan tempts a young man with sexual lust, a middle-aged man with “an itch for honor and to be great,” and an old man with “covetousness and peevishness.”⁶³ Therefore, continuously evaluate how your circumstances make you vulnerable to Satan.

Third, Satan can use one sin as a beachhead in the believer’s soul. Paul commands, “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26–27). To give place to

58. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.14.13.

59. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 1:382.

60. For the Puritans’ teaching on Satan’s devices, see Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 193–98.

61. Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:314.

62. Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, in *Works*, 2:322.

63. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 61.

bitterness is to give the Devil a headquarters from which to launch further attacks into our lives. The same is true of other sins. Spurstowe warned, “Small sins are as the priming of a post or pillar, that prepare it to better receive those other colors that are to be laid upon it.”⁶⁴ Therefore, wage war against the smallest temptations. If you do sin, double your guard against temptation and look continually to Christ for grace.

Fourth, Satan clouds our fellowship with God by igniting lusts for this world. Just as Balaam taught the Moabites to draw Israel away from the Lord by sex and idols (Num. 25:1–2; 31:16), so Satan entices Christians by worldliness (2 Pet. 2:14–15; Rev. 2:13–14). He may use lawful things, for it serves him just as well if he can get us to love things more than people and anything more than God. Food, recreation, and hard work are good in themselves, but, Spurstowe said, desires for such things become sinful “when they are unbounded and not according to the rule and warrant of the Word.”⁶⁵ Richard Gilpin (1625–1700) reminded us, “The world is not so desirable a thing as many dream”; indeed, the wealthy “walk in the midst of snares.”⁶⁶ The Devil would make us into “adulterers and adulteresses” who provoke God’s jealousy, but the Lord commands us, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:4–8).

Fifth, Satan intimidates believers by the frightening persecutions he incites through unbelievers. He hunts Christians like “a roaring lion . . . seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). We must recognize that all our sufferings take place “under the mighty hand of God” and humble ourselves before him, waiting on him to exalt us “in due time” (v. 6). We must trust that the Father’s love overrules the Devil’s hate, and cast “all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (v. 7). We must “be sober” and “be vigilant” against compromise, but instead “resist” the Devil “sternly in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (vv. 8–9). Rutherford wrote, “The devil’s war is better than the devil’s peace. . . . When the dog is kept out of doors he howls to be in again.”⁶⁷ Finally, we must hold on to the hope that after

64. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 36–42.

65. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 60–61.

66. Richard Gilpin, *Daemonologia Sacra, or, A Treatise on Satan’s Temptations* (repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 443–44.

67. Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith*, 403.

we have “suffered a while,” God, “who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus,” will perfect and establish us, to the praise of his glory and grace (vv. 10–11).

Sixth, Satan uses one temptation to drive us toward an imbalanced and sinful overreaction. The presence of unrepentant sinners in the church is a temptation for others to compromise (Rev. 2:20), but when the church responds with discipline, it may err in the opposite direction by a harsh refusal to forgive and comfort the disciplined person when he repents. This too is one of Satan’s devices (2 Cor. 2:10–11). Similarly, Satan may push believers like a swinging pendulum from complacent presumption to despair over sin. He may tempt them to overreact against one heresy by embracing the opposite extreme. The way to avoid extremes is to draw near to God “according to the rule of the Word,” Spurstowe said.⁶⁸

Seventh, Satan may use bad counsel from our own brothers and sisters in the Lord to discourage us from following Christ fully. The same Peter who, by divine illumination, confessed Jesus to be the Christ also rebuked Jesus and sought to dissuade him from the path of the cross (Matt. 16:16–17, 21–22). Christ said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (v. 23 ESV). Therefore, let us listen to godly counsel, but not be swayed from obeying God’s Word by unbiblical advice, even if it comes from the best Christians.

Eighth, Satan may shock us with temptations we never thought would move us. Peter thought he was ready to go with Christ “both into prison, and to death,” but did not anticipate that Satan would “sift [him] as wheat” (Luke 22:31, 33). If you are prospering spiritually, give thanks to God, but “let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Spurstowe wrote, “Suspect yourself prone to every sin; do not repose anything on constitution or temperament,” but instead seek for wise Christians to counsel and pray for you.⁶⁹ Neither should we think that we face extraordinary temptations that no one has ever experienced. Paul reminds us, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

68. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 78–79.

69. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 70, 75.

Ninth, Satan makes strategic retreats so that he may attack again. Christ defeated all of Satan's devices, "and when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season" (Luke 4:13). When the Devil is quiet, he is reloading. Therefore, "watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. 26:41). There are no cease-fires in this battle. Spurstowe said, "It is a war without a truce."⁷⁰ Christians must always live with one hand on the work of the kingdom and the other hand ready for spiritual battle (Neh. 4:17). Do not think yourself strong and start to play with temptation as if it were a pretty pet. Spurstowe said, "Take heed of venturing upon the occasions of sin and coming near the borders of temptations. . . . Our hearts are [gun] powder, and therefore we must take heed of sparks."⁷¹

Tenth, Satan uses false reasoning to burden the believer's conscience with fear and guilt. He is "the accuser" (Rev. 12:10), who both tempts us to sin and then tempts us to despair of God's mercy once we have sinned. He entangles us with the logic that true Christians would not commit certain sins, but since we have committed those sins, we are not true Christians. We must remember that no sin makes a person a hypocrite except for reigning sin (Rom. 6:14). We also must not measure the genuineness of our love for God by perfect compliance with the strict demands of God's law, for then no one could stand (Pss. 130:3; 143:2). Spurstowe said, "We are not to place the strength of our confidence in our own righteousness, as if it would abide the severity of God's trial."⁷² We must confess our sins with true repentance and trust in Christ, who is the perfect propitiation and heavenly Advocate of his people (1 John 1:9–2:2).

Stand in God's Armor

The positive call to spiritual warfare is to "stand" against the Devil's forces while using "the whole armour of God" (Eph. 6:13). It is God's armor because he alone can save us with the armor and weapons of his righteousness (Isa. 59:15–17). To put on the armor of God is to put on Christ by faith in his saving work (Rom. 13:12–14). Yet putting on Christ is more than the act of faith, but is also the work of faith in obedience, just as putting on the new man involves actually practicing the virtues of truth, diligence, love, and so on (Eph. 4:24–32).

70. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 80–81.

71. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 92–93.

72. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 73.

Paul lists six pieces of spiritual armor and concludes with a call to prayer (Eph. 6:14–18). He begins with the belt of truth, saying, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth” (v. 14). The belt supported the lower body and held up much of the remaining armor. It also gathered up the loose garments so that they would not impede a man from moving quickly without hindrance. Thus, to “gird up the loins” meant to prepare oneself for vigorous action.⁷³ The Christian does this by knowing and meditating on the “truth” of God’s Word (1:13; 4:21). Brooks said, “A man may lawfully sell his house, land, and jewels, but truth is a jewel that exceeds all price, and must not be sold.”⁷⁴ Use the truth to gather up your loose thoughts and dwell in God’s presence. John Owen wrote, “Meditate of God with God . . . let it be done in a way of speaking unto God . . . in a way of prayer and praise.”⁷⁵

Another piece of armor is the “breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14). Soldiers wore a metal breastplate to protect the vital organs of their bodies. The vitality of the Christian life must be protected by divinely provided righteousness. This may be understood as the righteousness of either justification (Rom. 1:17; 3:21–22) or sanctification (6:13, 18; Eph. 4:24; 5:9).⁷⁶ Justifying righteousness, the gift of being counted righteous for the sake of Christ’s obedience and death (Rom. 3:24–25; 5:19), protects us from the condemnation that our sins deserve (8:1, 33–34). Sanctifying righteousness, the work of Christ’s Spirit in our souls (vv. 4–13), protects us from the wounds to our soul that sins would inflict upon us (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9–10). Christians are safe in the spiritual battle only insofar as they stand in reliance upon Christ’s finished work and resolve to obey Christ’s commandments.

The Christian must also wear the shoes of peace, having his “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15). A good soldier needs proper footwear to keep his feet from slipping. Roman soldiers wore heavy-soled leather sandals with cleats (*caligae*). Our spiritual standing is secured by the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁷⁷ The best way to stand up to

73. Ex. 12:11; 2 Kings 4:29; 9:1; Job 38:3; 40:7; Jer. 1:17 LXX; Luke 12:35; 1 Pet. 1:13.

74. Brooks, *Precious Remedies for Satan’s Devices*, in *Works*, 1:9.

75. Owen, *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*, in *Works*, 6:225.

76. On the evangelical righteousness of justification and sanctification, see chap. 42 in this volume and *RST*, vol. 3 (forthcoming).

77. The “preparation” or “readiness” (*hetoimasia*) in view here is not a readiness to speak the gospel (Roman *caligae* were not primarily offensive weapons). The term is used for a base upon which something stands (Ezra 2:68; 3:3; Ps. 88:15 [89:14]; Zech. 5:11 LXX).

the Devil is to have the clearest possible understanding of the gospel and to experience gospel peace through the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:13–14). Our identity, comfort, and stability depend on knowing the gospel intellectually and experientially. Then we can look Satan in the eye and say, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

Paul says that the spiritual soldier must take “the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16 ESV). The Roman “shield” (*thureos*) was not a small, round buckler, but measured four feet by two feet—large enough to cover the body. When soaked in water before a battle, the leather covering of the shield effectively quenched flaming arrows.⁷⁸ Satan’s temptations aim not only to pierce us with specific sins but also to inflame us into habits of sin. The defense against “all” such attacks is faith. William Ames said, “Faith is the resting of the heart on God.”⁷⁹ Over the course of this book, we have opened up many truths about God. When Satan tries to set us aflame with lust, anger, anxiety, or doubt, let us lift up the shield of faith and remember who our God is for us in Jesus Christ.

Paul adds, “And take the helmet of salvation” (Eph. 6:17). Without a good helmet, a soldier is vulnerable to being stunned or killed by a blow to the head. Believers are saved by grace through faith (2:8), but they must exercise hope in the complete salvation and victory they will receive when Christ returns (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8–9). A soldier without hope is a soldier without courage. Christian, you must believe that you have been saved, you are being saved, and you will be saved. This will give you gospel optimism and evangelical endurance.

The only offensive weapon that Paul mentions is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). This “sword” (*machaira*) was the Roman short sword (*gladius*), with a deadly blade two feet long and sharpened on both edges. The Word of God is a powerful weapon against Satan (Isa. 49:2) because it is both inspired by the Spirit in its revelation (Eph. 3:4–5; 2 Pet. 1:21) and empowered by the Spirit in its application (John 6:63). Another major topic of this book has been the doctrine of God’s Word. Christian, you must put this doctrine into practice by speaking the Word of God to others. Speak God’s Word to outsiders so that they might be saved as the Word pierces their hearts and exposes

78. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 449–50.

79. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.3.1 (80).

them before the holy God (Col. 4:5–6; Heb. 4:12–13). Speak God’s Word in love to the members of Christ’s church so that the body of Christ will grow in maturity (Eph. 4:15).

Lastly, Paul commands spiritual soldiers to be “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:18). We pray “in the Spirit” when we allow the Spirit to guide us in prayer through the Holy Scriptures that he inspired. What a mighty weapon is prayer! Though lifted up in weakness and need, it calls down the power and sufficiency of God. Bernard of Clairvaux said, “The enemy’s temptation is a burden to us, but our prayer to God is far more burdensome to the enemy!”⁸⁰ Have you gained more experiential knowledge of God by reading this book? The proof will be in your prayers, for prayer reflects our faith in God’s greatness and goodness. Therefore, devote yourself to prayer. The Devil will fear you, and God will hear you.⁸¹

Sing to the Lord

Victory over the Devil

A mighty Fortress is our God,
A Bulwark never failing;
Our Helper he amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and pow’r are great;
And armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?

80. Bernard of Clairvaux, *For the Dedication of a Church*, 3.2, in *Sermons for the Autumn Season*, trans. Irene Edmonds, rev. Mark Scott, intro. Wim Verbaal, Cistercian Fathers Series 54 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 189. Cf. the quotation of Bernard in Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 91.

81. See Joel R. Beeke, *Fighting Satan: Knowing His Weaknesses, Strategies, and Defeat* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

Christ Jesus, it is he,
Lord Sabaoth his Name,
From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him.

That Word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through him who with us sideth;
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever.

Martin Luther
Tune: Ein' Feste Burg
Trinity Hymnal—Baptist Edition, No. 81

Questions for Meditation or Discussion

1. How do we know that Satan and the demons were originally angels?
2. What is true about the nature of demons?
3. What does the Bible say about the fall of Satan?
4. What does God's Word teach about Satan's kingdom and this world?
5. Give biblical evidence for each of the following demonic activities:
 - deception
 - demonization

- disease and death
- damnation

6. How has Christ won the victory over Satan? How can Christians rely upon his victory to overcome the Devil in their own battles?
7. Of the several schemes of Satan that the authors mention, which methods has Satan been using most against you? How can you defeat these demonic methods?
8. Which of the pieces of God's armor is most encouraging to you? Which piece of armor is most lacking in your life? What are you going to do about it?

Questions for Deeper Reflection

9. Are Isaiah 14:12–14 and Ezekiel 28:11–19 revelations of the Devil's fall? Why or why not? What principles of hermeneutics can help us here?
10. How should Christians respond to demonized people today? Do we have the power to cast demons out? Why or why not?
11. In what ways do people underestimate the Devil? In what ways do people overestimate him? How does a wrong estimation of Satan affect our spiritual lives?