

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 19.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #19. *What is God's providence towards the angels?*

A. God by his providence permitted some of the angels, willfully and irrecoverably, to fall into sin and damnation,¹ limiting and ordering that, and all their sins, to his own glory;² and established the rest in holiness and happiness;³ employing them all,⁴ at his pleasure, in the administrations of his power, mercy, and justice.⁵

Question 1—*What is God's providence toward the fallen angels?*

Answer—Although God created all the angels holy, *cf.* Matt. 25:31 *with* Gen. 1:31; yet, some have fallen, while the rest remained in their original integrity, Matt. 16:27. The providential permission that some angels should fall is revealed in the event, Eph. 6:12. There are some wicked and impure spirits, sunk into the depths of misery, from that state in which they were created, as the consequence of their rebellion against God, Matt. 25:41.

Additionally, as it was only a part of the angels that fell, *cf.* Rev. 12:4, 7-9; we may infer that the dispensation of providence towards the angels was quite different from that which mankind was subject to when first created, *cf.* Rom. 5:12. Unlike man, it does not appear that one of the angels was constituted the head and representative of the rest, in whom they were all to stand or fall, *cf.* 1 Cor. 15:22; instead, the happiness and misery of every one of them was to be the result of his own personal conduct, Jude 6. As their persistence in obedience to God was necessary to their establishment in holiness and happiness, so the least instance of rebellion against him would bring inevitable ruin upon them, which is observed concerning a part of them, who fell into sin and damnation, 2 Pet. 2:4.

Their sin, or fall, was willful, 1 John 3:8; they commenced an open war against their Creator, Rev. 12:7. Herein their enmity to God and goodness took its rise, which they have ever since expressed, *cf.* Matt. 17:21. Their sin appears to have been willful, inasmuch as it was committed against the greatest degree of light, for all the angels excelled in the knowledge of the good, 2 Sam. 14:17. The subtlety, which discovers itself in the fallen angels, and which is knowledge abused and depraved with sin, argues that their knowledge, before they fell, was very great, and that their rebellion is, therefore, aggravated in proportion to that knowledge, *cf.* Ezek. 28:14-17. Moreover, they sinned without a tempter, at least the first in this rebellion, *cf.* Isa. 14:12-15. This rebellion was begun without a tempter because there were no fallen creatures to present a temptation, Job 38:7; nor any corruption in their natures, which internally drew them aside from God,

¹ Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4; Heb. 2:16; John 8:44.

² Job 1:12; Matt. 8:31.

³ 1 Tim. 5:21; Mark 8:38; Heb. 12:22.

⁴ Ps. 104:4.

⁵ 2 Kings 19:35; Heb. 1:14.

John 8:44. The consequence of this willful sinning was their irrecoverable ruin, in which God designed forever to leave them, having provided no mediator to give satisfaction for them, Heb. 2:16.

Finally, we know that the providence of God is that which has set restraining bounds and limits to their sins, so that, like the waves, they cannot exceed their appointed place, Job 38:11. How destructive to mankind would the malice of fallen angels be, were it not restrained, as appears in Satan's taunt concerning Job, Job 1:9. Though Satan was desirous that providence give him up to his will, he could only proceed as far as he was suffered of the LORD, Job 1:12; 2:7. So, too, the demons are subject to his limitations and ordering, Matt. 8:31. Thus, the demons and their sins are made to serve the glory of God, Prov. 16:4; Isa. 54:16; Job 26:13.

Question 2—*What is God's providence toward the holy angels?*

Answer—These holy angels, who retain their integrity, are mentioned as possessing two privileges which are always connected together, holiness and happiness, Heb. 1:9; 12:14; Ps. 48:1, 2. It is not said that they were brought into this state, or, like man, recovered out of a fallen state, *cf.* Jude 6; for they are considered as sinless or holy angels, Mark 8:38.

That these angels, which did not fall, were recipients of a privilege bestowed upon them by providence, in confirming or establishing of them in the state in which they were created, may be seen from them being denominated "elect angels," 1 Tim. 5:21. This election imports the purpose of God to confer everlasting blessedness on those who are its objects, and so implies, in the case of unfallen angels, the eternity of their holiness and happiness and their being established in it, Heb. 12:22. Of these angels, it is said, they always behold the face of the Father, Matt. 18:10. These angels form part of that holy assembly of saints and angels together in heaven, Dan. 7:10; as well as being joined with Christ and the saints in his coming again in judgment, 2 Thess. 1:7. Again, these holy angels are said to be observers of God's righteous judgments, which punishment shall be inflicted for eternity, wherein we may infer the eternality of the duration of the holiness and happiness of the elect angels, Rev. 14:10, 11.

Question 3—*What is the ministry of the angels?*

Answer—God employs all of the angels at his pleasure in the carrying out the purposes of his providence, for they are his ministers serving in this work, Ps. 104:4. Thus, they are engaged particularly in those purposes as they relate to the salvation of his people and the church, John 1:51.

This ministry of angels may be described as either *extraordinary* or *ordinary*; the *former* when, especially in the Old Testament, they appeared in a human form, assumed for the purpose of their ministering, Gen. 18:2, 16; 19:1, 2. Under this guise, they do from time to time appear in the path of the servants of God, Heb. 13:2. The *latter*, when the angels apply those promises of the covenant to the people of God, without detection of the eye, Ps. 91:11, 12. Unto them, it belongs to make a hedge around the people of God, Ps. 34:7. To them is entrusted the care of the souls of believers in death, Luke 16:22.

At the divine pleasure, they must administer: 1.) The power of God, in the face of the weakness of men, Gen. 32:1, 2; 2 Kings 6:15-17; especially in ministering deliverance, Dan. 6:22; Acts 5:19. 2.) The mercy of God, in cases when it might ordinarily seem to fail, 1 Kings 19:5-8; Gen. 24:7; especially to the people of God, Heb. 1:14. 3.) The justice of God, 2 Sam. 24:16; especially against the enemies of his people, 2 Kings 19:35.