

## Angels and Demons.

(The Nature of Angels Considered)

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Question 1—*What should we consider regarding the nature of angels?*

*Answer*—We must carefully keep in mind that angels are said to be spirit beings (*pneúmata*; πνεύματα), Heb. 1:14. This word “spirit” connotes being that is without corporeal presence through which it may be perceived by the physical senses, *cf.* John 4:24. Thus, Jesus, when appearing to His disciples, after the resurrection but before His ascension, assures them that their ability to see Him was due to His resurrected body which was discernable to their physical senses, having both flesh and bones unlike a spirit (πνεῦμα), *cf.* Luke 24:37-39. Moreover, when used with the flesh, the word spirit denotes that immaterial part of the personality in question, *cf.* Col. 2:5. Men are composed of soul and body, having spirits (*harûhôt*; אַרְוַחִים, the plural from *rûah*; רוּחַ; spirit—like the Greek, the basic idea is of “air in motion”) which are capable of communion with God and bodies (*bāsār*; בָּשָׂר; flesh) which share communion with the physical, or corporeal, creation, *cf.* Num. 16:22. Nevertheless, we should understand that angels are not composed of flesh and blood and are consistently denoted as *pure* spirit beings, *cf.* Ps. 104:4. This is not inconsistent with understanding that the angels have some sort of organized form, *cf.* Acts 6:15 (*prósōpon angéλου*; πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου; the face, or presence, of an angel).

Of their appearance, we may note that it is very glorious, dazzling to behold, Rev. 10:1. Their voice is compared to thunder, when they utter the judgments of God, Rev. 10:3, 4. They are beings who excel in strength, 2 Thess. 1:7. Thus, a single angel is able to destroy a multitude of people in three days, 1 Chron. 21:14, 15. On another occasion, a single angel destroyed 185,000 soldiers of Sennacherib, 2 Kings 19:35.

Question 2—*Why do we affirm that angels are spiritual and incorporeal?*

*Answer*—*First*, not only are the angels explicitly called spirit beings (*pneúmata*; πνεύματα), Heb. 1:14; they are classed amongst those things which are declared to be invisible, Col. 1:16 (*tà aórata*; τὰ ἀόρατα; not subject to the sense perception of sight). They are thus differenced from the works of God which strike the senses, *cf.* Ps. 8:3, 4. Additionally, although they are compared to winds and flames of fire, because of their swiftness, Heb. 1:7; they are yet not to be termed corporeal, *cf.* Heb. 12:9 (*sarkòs*; σαρκὸς; here this term *flesh*, which denotes that form which is able to strike the physical senses, is contrasted to *pneumatōn*; πνευμάτων; *spirits* which are invisible to those senses).

*Second*, they have spiritual faculties and operations, such as intellect and will, attributed to them which cannot proceed from a corporeal nature, but demand a spiritual and immaterial cause, *cf.* Ps. 146:4. That angels do have intellect, is to be seen in their keen interest in the great work of the redemption of men through Jesus Christ, *cf.* 1 Pet. 1:12. That they have the faculty of will is displayed in the fact that some of the angels did not keep their first estate, *cf.* Jude 6.

*Third*, if they were corporeal, they would have quantity and so would be impenetrable, so that not more than one could be in the same place at the same time, *cf.* Isa. 57:14; yet this is precisely what was able to happen with that “legion” of demons in the one man possessed, *cf.* Luke 8:30.

*Fourth*, if they already had bodies, corporeal quantities, they could not and ought not be able to assume other bodies, *cf.* Mark 5:12. However, it is evident that they not only present themselves in assumed bodies, *cf.* Gen. 18:2-8; but the demons have taken hold of the bodies of men and animals, *cf.* Matt. 8:28, 31, 32.

Question 3—*Does this mean that angels exist in the highest simplicity without being subject to accidents?*

*Answer*—No. We must confess that to God alone belongs the absolute and highest simplicity, *cf.* Deut. 6:4; for unto God alone belongs the quality of being exalted over all things, Ps. 8:1. In contrast,

angels are separated into *genus* (general essential class) and *differentia, subject* and *accident*, because their natures, as pure spirit, are distinguished by their wills, by which some of the angels fell from their first estate, *cf.* 2 Pet. 2:4.

In bodily substance, we distinguish the *species*, or *specific* essential kind (this is the principle of *specification*) of material nature, which distinguishes one bodily (or corporeal) form from another, *cf.* 1 Cor. 15:38-40; and the quantities of individuation which make individuals (this is the principle of *individuation*) of that *species*, *cf.* Matt. 10:2-4. The *first*, as in all creatures, marks the substantial form which makes him distinguished as essentially a human being, *cf.* 1 Cor. 15:22; the *second*, as this or that particular individual human being, *cf.* 1 Tim. 1:12-15. For humans, like all creatures with corporeal bodies, the principle of individuation is material and bodily, *cf.* Matt. 22:42-45; for they all descend from a common stock, or *species*, of nature, *cf.* Rom. 5:12, 19. Angels, being pure spirit, are not individuated; that is, they are not individuals representing the same *species*, though they belong to the same *genus*, *cf.* Dan. 7:10; instead each angel, by reason of its *differentia* of will, is a *species*, or specific kind, of substantial being, *cf.* Acts 12:15.

Nor can it be said that angels, though pure spirit, are infinite spirit; this alone belongs to God, *cf.* 1 Kings 8:27. Angels can be in a single place with a definitive presence so that they are first in this place then afterwards in that place, sometimes assuming bodies, *cf.* Gen. 18:16, 22; 19:1; sometimes simply by an ethereal change of location, *cf.* Dan. 9:21; Acts 12:7. Since angels are not ordinarily moving locally under an assumed body (and when they do, it is merely using bodily organs as instruments of angelic power), this local movement must be understood to be by the exercise of its powers being applied in this place rather than another, *cf.* Dan. 10:16-19. Angels are, like men, created intellectual natures, or intelligences, capable of discernment, *cf.* 2 Sam. 14:17, 20. In man, because the body has been substantially united with the spiritual soul, intellectual activities (such as understanding and willing) presuppose the body and its senses, *cf.* Isa. 38:18; Heb. 5:14. Nevertheless, an intellectual nature, or intelligence, requires nothing bodily for its activity, *cf.* 1 Cor. 2:14; thus, the angels, as pure spirits without bodies, in no way depend upon material substance, as do men, for their intellectual operations of understanding and willing, *cf.* Ps. 103:20.

Question 4—*How do angels know and understand?*

*Answer*—Clearly, God gives to the angels a knowledge of things, when He brings them into existence, which demonstrates their understanding of their status in the creation, *cf.* Job 38:7. This knowledge is sufficient for them to have perceptions of right and wrong which are perfect, *cf.* 2 Sam. 14:17; and, the holy angels are characterized by their always keeping the commandments of God, *cf.* Heb. 1:14. Yet, it is confessed that they do not have comprehensive knowledge, for that belongs to God alone, *cf.* Matt. 24:36. Additionally, an angel's knowledge, which constitutes his peculiar species, is directly imparted by God, so that each angel receives the extent of knowledge it needs according to the choosing of God, to fulfill the purposes for which it was created, *cf.* Luke 1:19. Thus, the extent of knowledge is not the same in all the angels, there are higher and lower angels, each receiving what is fitting and necessary for its status and service, *cf.* Eph. 1:21. This imparting of knowledge is like the imparting of light, it is direct and incorporeal, the result of an immediate intuition of the beatific vision, which is to gaze upon the divine Word, *cf.* John 1:9; 17:24; by Whom they were created and are upheld, Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:3. Hence, these angels are the angels of His power, 2 Thess. 1:7; gazing upon the unfolding salvation of the elect men, *cf.* 1 Cor. 4:9.

Knowledge is of two sorts: 1.) Either, of underlying realities, intelligible forms (*eĩdos*; εĩδος; intellectual appearance, or substantial form), perceived through intelligence, *cf.* Ezek. 1:26; which none can perceive of God, John 5:37. Thus, faith must bring understanding to matters pertaining to divinity because sight, or *eidōs*, cannot attain to that knowledge, *cf.* Heb. 11:1-3; 2 Cor. 5:7. 2.) Or, of outward manifestations, being sensible forms (*morphē*; μορφή; outward appearance, or shape), perceptible by the

senses, *cf.* Mark 16:12. Sense forms are only potentially intelligible, they must be joined to universals to be actually intelligible and that requires an apprehension of the intelligible form which gives understanding to the senses, *cf.* 1 John 1:1-3. Potential intellect can receive intelligible forms, but it requires active intellect to make things actively intelligible, *cf.* 2 Cor. 9:7. This is because only something active can bring what is potential to actuality, *cf.* John 1:4; so, these angels must be not only intelligences but active intelligences, *cf.* Heb. 1:14.

The angels, then, having fellowship with the Father in His beloved Son, Who is the Word of the Father, rejoice ever to hear the Word of the Father, *cf.* Ps. 148:2. And they hear the Word of the Father not as with an outward ear, but as an inward vision or intuition, *cf.* Isa. 6:2, 3. By abiding in the Son, they abide in the truth, they know the divine will, and find fulness of joy in doing that will, *cf.* Matt. 6:10. The Son has said of Himself that He can do nothing of Himself, without the Father, but whatsoever things He seeth the Father do, those He does likewise, that the Father may be glorified in the Son, John 5:19; 14:13. The Son, ever dwelling in the bosom of the Father, beholds all the Father's mind, and does all the Father's will, John 1:18. Now, the holy angels, abiding in the Son (and, consequently, the truth), *contra* John 8:44; behold, according to the measure of their created intelligence, the vision of the Father's mind and of the Father's eternal purpose, *cf.* Ezek. 1:4, 11-14.

The angels, also, have a complete understanding of all that is needed for their service, by reason of this beatific vision, *cf.* Isa. 6:2, 3; so that whatever area of their natural knowledge, of intelligible forms, is employed by the angelic intellect, any particular angel will understand the implications and consequences of its actions in its surroundings, demonstrating these are active intelligences, *cf.* Isa. 6:6, 7. Yet, though they are not subject to discursive thinking (as men), they are capable of advancing in knowledge and learning about new events, as they occur, *cf.* Eph. 3:10.

Question 5—*How might this knowledge and contemplation of angels define their circumscription?*

*Answer*—The answer seems related to the question of whether or not angels are unisex. Although angels do not individuate and, therefore, have no necessity of procreating or marriage, *cf.* Matt. 22:30; it does not mean that they have no definite sex, for they are uniformly portrayed as men (at least the holy angels), *e.g.*, Judg. 6:21; Zech. 1:19. There is a single case where angels may be in view and depicted as women but they would clearly be wicked angels, *cf.* Zech. 5:7-9. On the principle that intelligences become like what they worship, *cf.* Ps. 115:8; and knowing that the beatific vision will be transformative to men, *cf.* 1 John 3:2; it seems reasonable to suppose that this appearance, when holy angels show themselves to men, would reflect their contemplation of the divine Word, even the Son incarnate, *cf.* Col. 1:15. Their assumed bodies, then, would be icons (*eikōn*; εἰκόνη; likeness, or portrait) rather than in substantial union with their pure spirits, *cf.* 1 Cor. 15:49. Perhaps, this is the reason why godly men, including the apostle John, who had personal experience with Jesus, became confused and sought to worship the angel who appeared to him, Rev. 19:10. After all, the apostle Paul condemns such worshipping of angels, Col. 2:18. Furthermore, their limitations, as spirits which are not infinite, would also be dictated by their state of contemplation of the divine, so that holy angels will always be active in support of the vision of the Father's mind as mediated through Christ, *cf.* Heb. 1:6, 7.