

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 16

Halifax, 4 November 2007

Q. 16 How did God create angels?

A. **God created all the angels, spirits, immortal, holy, excelling in knowledge, mighty in power; to execute his commandments, and to praise his name, yet subject to change.**

Introduction:

Over the last few weeks, we have been studying about the decrees of God...

- We have seen that God's decree is His plan,
 - and that His plan includes absolutely everything that happens!
 - Ephesians 1:11 says that "He works all things according to the counsel of His will."
 - Nothing happens unless God planned it.
 - If something exists, it is because God created it...
 - If something happens, it is because He purposed it.
- This is one of the hardest things for fallen human beings to accept...
 - We are uncomfortable with a God who exercises so much power and control...
 - We want Him to be either a bit more impotent—sort of struggling about what is happening with us...
 - or to be impersonal—just a force without judgement.
 - These desires for God to be what He is not are the seedbed of false religion—idolatry—in which we make our own gods or versions of God because we don't like what He is.
 - But it is the most futile thing in the world to try to pretend the God is what you want Him to be...
 - He is what He is, and it is much better for you to deal with truth instead of fairy tales.
 - And the truth is that God makes Himself known to every one of us as the Creator of *everything* who is a righteous and holy judge who hates and judges sin because He is good.
 - It does no good to pretend that He is something else—something like what all the false religions of the world want to pretend that He is...

- Not one false religion really takes Him seriously as a sovereign God who judges sin and before whom no man or woman or child can stand without a Saviour.
- They all tone Him down a bit and make it at least possible for us to attain salvation apart from a Saviour.
- But we all really know better...
 - Because we know intuitively what God is really like—
 - We also know intuitively when we meet up with the scriptures that they are the very word of the true God.
 - The only reason we reject the truth when we hear it is because of our wickedness...
 - Before we will accept the truth,
 - The Holy Spirit has to come and change our hearts.
 - Until He does, we won't even allow ourselves to admit that the Bible is true.
 - But it is true...

But saying that we know much about God intuitively does not mean there are not many things taught in the scriptures that we do not already know.

- Last week we looked at God's creation of the heaven and the earth...
 - We know intuitively that God made the heaven and the earth,
 - but scripture teaches us **how** He did it...
 - that is something we must learn from scriptures, and know by believing the scriptures.
- This week we come to an interesting topic that we don't often give much attention to...
 - The creation of angels...
 - Here again, this is something that we learn by revelation from the scripture.
 - To learn the truth about how God created the angels,
 - we must turn to scripture and see what God tells us about it there.

So I will begin tonight with a reading from Psalm 103 where we are told something about angels and what they are...

- I will refer to many other scriptures besides this one tonight, but this is where we will begin...

- READ> Psalm 103:19-22.

Psalm 103 is a beautiful Psalm about God's saving mercy to us sinners...

- The psalm opens with the psalmist exhorting himself to bless the LORD for all of his mercies to us as sinners...
 - He lists off all the ways God has been kind to us as if to stir himself up to praise.
 - He talks about God's daily care and about the complete forgiveness of sin.
 - He seems quite full of praise!
- And interestingly, when you get to verse 20,
 - the psalmist gets so excited that he turns to the angels and calls upon them to bless God for all of these mercies to human sinners!
 - The psalmist is saying, "Look, angels, look at how merciful and kind He is!"
 - It almost seems as if the psalmist realises that our praises are inadequate—
 - He is painfully aware that we are still full of sin, even after we have been redeemed...
 - He knows that we do not yet worship the Lord as we ought.
 - And so, feeling inadequate, he turns to the holy angels who are not corrupted by sin and calls upon them to bless God!
 - And in doing this, he speaks about their superior qualifications for praising God.
 - From this, we learn much about how God created them—not the mechanics of how He did it, but what He created them to be!
 - Let's explore what we are taught about them.

I. First, see how we are taught here that they are indeed created by God.

- A. This is brought out in verse 22 when the Psalm says, "Bless the LORD all His works in all places of His dominion."
 - 1. When it says, "all His works" it is clear that he includes the angels.
 - Angels are God's works, created for Himself just as we are...
 - There is nothing that exists independently of God, but all things were created by Him and for Him.
 - Although they are higher and more perfect beings than we are, they are still creatures...

2. We do not accept the doctrine of the Greek philosophy that there are different gradations of deity...
 - that there is a stone that has no divinity,
 - that there are people who have some divinity...
 - And that there are angels that have even more divinity...

 - No, that is all wrong. It does not agree with the Bible.
 - That is a false way of bringing God down to our level...
 - In the Bible, He is always presented as entirely separate from us—as alone transcendent—as alone self-existing...
 - There is always a sharp distinction between what is creator and what is created.
 - Rather than being derived out of God, the angels are the works of God.
 - To blur this distinction between creature and Creator is to dishonour the God we are supposed to worship—
 - It is idolatry!

TRANS> So you see then that we must regard angels as God's works...

- This implies that He created them...though it is not expressly stated...

B. But that God created the angels is expressly stated in Psalm 148.

1. In that Psalm, the Psalmist is also calling everything created to praise God...
 - And after calling the angels and many other created things to praise the Lord, he then says of the whole company of them in verse 5:
 - **Psa 148:5-6: "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for He commanded and they were created. He also established them forever and ever; he made a decree which will not pass away."**

2. So you see that the angels are not in any way self-existing, but are created.
 - It is important to understand at this juncture that this is true of Satan also, for he is a fallen angel...
 - Some false religions see Satan as God's equal—but he is only a creature whose daily existence is only from God...
 - Like us, he can only do his evil with the life that God imparts to him...
 - He is as dependent on God for his next moment of life as we are for our next breath!
 - It is surely the height of folly for a creature to make war with his Creator by whose clemency he lives and moves and has his being!
 - but such is the case with Satan and with all other rebels!

- We are fools!
- Rather than rebel, let us bless God our Creator with the angels who did not fall with Satan!

TRANS> But having seen that some of the angels (like Satan) fell,

C. We should understand that the angels were all created good and holy...

- In other words, they were not evil when they came from God's hand, but corrupted themselves and became evil.
 - How do we know this?
- 1. You will remember last week that on the sixth day of creation, God looked at everything that He had made and declared that it was all very good.
 - That declaration was obviously made before either Satan or man fell...
 - What's more, the Bible teaches us that God is not the author of evil—
 - He did not create evil angels, but angels that were capable of falling.
- 2. That they did fall from original rectitude is made clear in Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4.
 - a. Jude 6 refers to fallen angels as not keeping their proper domain:
 - **Jude 1:6: "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day"**
 - In other words, they did not remain in submission to God.
 - The idea is that they did not remain in the place that God appointed for them.
 - For this reason, God will be glorified in their judgment at the last day, and is keeping them for that day.
 - b. 2 Peter 2:4 refers to them as "the angels who sinned."
 - This suggests that they were at first holy and upright, but then sinned at some time.
 - It also suggests that there were some angels who never sinned, but who remained holy.
 - We know this is true because the Bible speaks about elect angels who obviously will never sin.
 - c. We need to understand that angels are not a race like we are...
 - 1) By a race, I mean that we all come from each other—
 - God created Adam, then made Eve from Adam's body,

- and all of us are the offspring of Adam and Eve.
- We all come from Adam as one race.
- Because this is so, Adam was our federal head—we were all in him and he represented us all...
 - so when he fell, we all fell.
 - That is why the whole human race is lost in sin with the exception of Jesus Christ...
 - We are all in it together because we are one race.

2) But the angels are not related.

- They are each separate creations—they are not the offspring of anyone and so they have no federal head...
 - each one stands or falls on his own...
 - And some of them fell and some of them did not fall.
 - That is what the scriptures teach us.

TRANS> But now, having seen that God created the angels and that He made them holy, let us move on to our next topic...

II. For what purpose did God create the angels?

A. The Catechism teaches that He created them to execute His commandments and to praise His name.

- This is brought out by the psalmist in the passage we read in Psalm 103.
- 1. First, that they were created to praise the Lord is brought out by the simple fact that the Psalm writer exhorts them to praise Him...
 - a. I have already mentioned the fact that the psalmist was exhorting himself to praise the LORD and then turned to the angels to ask them to join him...
 - He is not asking them to do something that is alien to them...
 - something that they were not made to do.
 - b. That angels are appointed to praise the LORD is shown throughout the whole Bible...
 - 1) In the great vision that Isaiah had of our holy God in the temple,
 - when he saw the LORD seated on a throne, high and lifted up,
 - he also saw the Seraphim, a particular kind of angel, surrounding His throne.
 - And what were they doing?

- They were worshipping the holy God!
 - They were crying out “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.”
 - We are told that each of these Seraphim had six wings,
 - and with two of these wings they fly...
 - with two they cover their faces before the glorious majesty of God!
- 2) John the apostle also saw a vision of the throne of God surrounded by worshipping angels in Revelation...
- He writes:
 - **Rev 5:11-12: Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, 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 who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!”**
 - Here are thousands and thousands of angels joining together to worship the exalted Christ!
 - This is their glorious purpose.
- 3) The presence of all these angels around the throne of God adds to the honour and glory that is shown toward Him...
- I do not say that they add to His essential honour and glory, for He has all honour and glory in Himself...
 - but they are able to show forth His glory to one another and to us.
 - That is what we do when we worship—we behold His glory and we show forth His glory—we do not add to Him, but we point out His greatness to each other.
 - What a wonderful privilege this is and what a delight it must be to these angels!
 - What makes us happier than to discover something precious, something wonderful and great!
 - We delight in seeing beauty, in seeing the accomplishments of an athlete, in watching a great movie or performance, in excellent food...
 - But what it must be to these angels to admire Him who is more glorious and lovely than all! How they must be taken up with it!
 - What a calling is theirs!

- c. Think of all that they were privileged to do!
 - 1) In Job 38:7 we are told that they sang together and shouted for joy at the creation of the world...
 - 2) In Luke we are told how they were present at the birth of Christ and raised a great heavenly chorus, singing, “Glory to God in the Highest, and peace on earth, good will toward men!”
 - 3) We are told how they were at the tomb when Christ was raised from the dead and were the first heralds of the good news that He was risen!
 - 4) We are told that they rejoice in heaven whenever a sinner is saved.
 - 5) In 1 Cor 11:10, Paul indicates that they are present when we gather for worship...
 - 6) And in 2 Thes 1:7, we are told that they will accompany Christ when He comes at the end of the world in all His glory!

TRANS> They were created to praise the LORD!

- 2. Secondly, we see that they were created to execute God’s commandments—to do His service...
 - a. Do you remember when Jacob had his dream at Bethel?
 - God promised to be his God and to care for him according to His gracious covenant promise.
 - And Jacob had a dream in which He saw a ladder with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it!
 - Jesus tells us that He is that ladder...
 - but what were those angels doing?
 - They were going back and forth between heaven and earth to bring God’s gracious blessings to His people—
 - to work for them, to protect them, to provide for them!
 - b. In Psalm 103, they are described as eagerly doing God’s will—carrying out His orders...
 - The psalmist addresses them as:
 - **“you who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word...you ministers of His who do His pleasure!”**
 - They perfectly do His will!
- 1) And much of what He asks them to do is for us, the people He has redeemed...

- In Hebrews 1:14, Paul says:
 - **“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”**
- In Psalm 91:9-12, we are told that God appoints them to protect us and that they do protect us...
 - **Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.**
- In Matthew 18:10, Jesus warns us not to do anything that might cause a covenant child to stumble because
 - “their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”
 - He seems to be saying that if you cause a child to stumble, the angels of God will deal with you!
 - They will be used to chasten you—to bring sickness or injury upon you perhaps!

2) We do not know all that they do,

- but they obviously do quite a lot for us...they ascend and descend upon Jesus Christ with blessings from heaven...
- I will have a lot more to say about their work in the world when we come to question 19 in the Catechism which talks about God’s providence concerning the angels...

B. But now I want to encourage you to let them be an example to you in these two works of theirs—praise and service...

- This is why we are told about the angels...and why we need to know about them.

1. We are not told about them in order that we might worship them, for they are not gods, but servants of God as we are...

- (When John started to worship an angel that appeared to him in Revelation, the angel commanded:
 - **Rev 22:9: “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”**
- Nor are we told about them in order that we might pray to them...
 - Our prayers are to be directed God alone.
 - It is up to Him to dispatch His angels or do whatever He wishes to do.

- The angels do not act in such a way as to draw attention to themselves, but they rather carry out God's will,
 - often in answer to our prayers...
 - The goal is not for us to trust in angels, or to return thanks to them, but to trust in God and to give thanks to Him as they one who employs them...
 - Nowhere are we commanded or given example that we ought to pray to them or anyone other than God.
 - Prayer is always to be directed to Him through Jesus.
- Beware of the tendency of many to become overly fascinated with angels—
 - There is a lot of that going on today in both traditional Roman Catholicism as well as in New Age spirituality with their spirit guides.
 - Angels, whether they be good or evil,
 - are not to be trusted in or communicated with for guidance...
 - Such practices are strongly condemned in Deuteronomy 18 where we told to listen to the prophet that God appoints, not to spirits and demons.
 - In Colossians 2:18-19, Paul gives strong warning against the worship of angels...he says:
 - **Col 2:18-19: Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.**
 - It is a pathway that will lead you away from Christ!
 - and that is the worst thing that could ever happen to you...

TRANS> So you see that we are not told about them in order that we may worship them or that we might pray to them...

2. Why then are we told about the angels?

a. We are told about them that we might follow their example...

- 1) We are told about how they rejoice, praising God whenever a sinner comes to repentance—

- and the context of that statement is right in the middle of Jesus' teaching about how we ought to rejoice when a prodigal son, a tax collector or a prostitute comes to repentance!
 - The angels are mentioned as an example!
 - They are in the presence of God rejoicing—what are we doing?
- 2) I have already mentioned that in Psalm 103, the Psalmist is spurring his own soul to praise God...
- And He seems to look to the angels as an encouragement to stir up even greater praise...
 - We are going to see later on in Ephesians how the angels look upon God's saving work of us and rejoice in it...
 - how much more ought we who are the beneficiaries of so great a salvation to rejoice!
- 3) Then there is the example of the angel's service to God...
- Our Lord Jesus teaches us to pray that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven!
 - He is referring to the angels whom we have seen are always ready to do service to God—waiting to hear His command and eager to fulfill it.
 - We are to imitate them!
- b. The Bible also seems to tell us about angels for our encouragement...
- 1) that we might know that the LORD has them working for us.
 - 2) It is comforting to know that they are working for us as we make our way through a world that is hostile to God.
 - they are busy fighting battles that we cannot fight.
 - Do you remember what happened when the king of Assyria was angry with Elisha and sent a great army to with horses and chariots to surround the city?
 - **2 Kings 6:15-17: And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.**

- You need to believe that the LORD also gives His angels charge concerning you...
 - God has placed a hedge about you if you trust in Him,
 - and the wicked one cannot touch you unless it will further the purposes of God concerning you.
 - This is written not merely to show how Elisha's servant was encouraged,
 - but that we might be encouraged.

TRANS> Now we have seen that God created the angels and that He created them to worship and serve...

III. Now I want you to consider their excellence...

A. The passage we read calls them "you His angels **who excel in strength!**"

1. As I mentioned before, the psalmist very likely was feeling his inability to praise the LORD as he ought when he considered what great things God had done...
 - so he turns to the angels and calls upon them to assist him!
 - He calls upon them because he knows that they are better at praise and worship than he is...
 - They excel in strength—
 - They are stronger than we are—especially in our fallen condition.
2. Because of their superior strength, they are referred to as mighty angels...
 - 2 Thes 1:7 tells us that Jesus will appear from heaven at the last day with His mighty angels...
 - They will do things like binding the wicked and casting them into the fires of God's wrath to be consumed...
 - They are the ones who will separate the wheat from the tares at the end of the age.
3. Because they are greater in power, they are able to assist us in our weakness...
 - When Jesus was arrested, he reminded His disciples that the angels could easily rescue Him...
 - He said,
 - **Matthew 26:53: "Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"**
 - He knew that it would be no problem for the angels to rescue Him if that was what they were commanded to do...

- but He reminds His disciples that it is His deliberate intention to go to the cross at this time.
- B. The superior strength of angels also resides in their minds—they are superior to us in knowledge...
1. Jesus implies this in Matthew 24:36 when He speaks about the fact that even the angels do not know the day or hour of His second coming...
 - The implication is that they would sooner know it than we who are humans...
 - and that if they don't know it, surely we do not know it!
 2. There are several reasons why this is so...
 - a. For one thing, the angels who are not fallen are not clouded by sin as we are...
 - They are holy angels, so their minds are not poisoned by the pollution of sin.
 - b. But for another, they are nearer to God, beholding His face and worshipping before His throne...
 - we are not yet there, but that is where we will be...
 - As we saw before, they continually behold the face of God...they are intimate with Him...much more than we are!
 - c. They are more excellent—even Jesus, coming in the likeness of sinful man, was made a little lower than the angels for a time...
 - But in Hebrews 1:4 we are told that after He completed the work of salvation and was exalted to sit at God's right hand,
 - “he became so much better than the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they...”
 - In other words, Jesus, in our nature, has raised our nature above the angels,
 - but until we are raised up to glory, we are yet lower than the angels.
 - They are superior in dignity, nearness to God, and might until we are raised to immortality!

Conclusion:

In conclusion, let us rejoice that God has created these most excellent beings and that they love us so and continually minister to us as the heirs of salvation...

- Let us give glory to God for them, for they will be with us for all eternity as our companions,

- and they will aid us in giving eternal praise and service to our God!
- Who knows what He has planned for us to do with them!
 - But what we know now is that He uses them greatly to aid us and that they are set forth to us as an example of holy praise and zealous obedience.
 - Let us praise God for them, give thanks for them, pray that God will use them, and imitate them.