

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANGELOLOGY

The Doctrine of Angels, Demons, and the Spiritual Realm

UNIT 2: THE NATURE AND MINISTRY OF THE HOLY ANGELS

Lesson 3

The Nature of Angels What Scripture Reveals

Created, Spiritual, Powerful, and Personal

Key Texts: Colossians 1:16; Psalm 103:20; Hebrews 1:14; 12:22; Revelation 5:11–12; Matthew 22:30

“Bless the Lord, you His angels, mighty in strength, who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word!”

Psalm 103:20, NASB 1995

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Introduction

With Lessons 1 and 2 behind us, the methodological foundations established, the history of the doctrine surveyed, the two perennial errors identified and guarded against, we are now prepared to open the Scriptures themselves and ask with fresh directness: what do they actually teach about the nature of the holy angels? This is the question that drives the whole of Unit 2 (Lessons 3 through 6), and it is a question that must be answered before any other angelological question can be addressed responsibly. We cannot meaningfully discuss what the angels do, in the service of God, in the ministry to believers, in the great arc of redemptive history, until we have a clear and scripturally grounded account of what they are.

The answer the Scriptures give is, in its broad outline, simple and consistent. The angels are created personal spiritual beings of great power who exist to serve God and to minister to the heirs of salvation. But that summary, while accurate, must be unpacked with some care, because each of its constituent claims is substantive and each carries significant theological freight. What does it mean that angels are created? What does it mean that they are spiritual? What does their personality consist in? What is the nature and scope of their power? How numerous are they? What are the limits of their attributes? How does their present condition, those who have remained faithful, relate to their original holiness? These are the questions this lesson addresses, drawing exclusively on the scriptural testimony and resisting the temptation to speculate beyond it.

It is worth pausing at the threshold of this lesson to note how theologically significant the very existence of the angels is. The angels are not an afterthought in the created order, not a background feature of the biblical landscape that can be acknowledged and then set aside. They are, as Hebrews 1:14 declares, ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation, which means that their existence and activity are woven into the very fabric of the redemptive economy that Scripture describes from Genesis to Revelation. To know what the angels are is to know something important about how God governs His creation and accomplishes His purposes within it. We approach the question, therefore, not as theological curiosity but as pastoral necessity.

We will organize this lesson around eight biblical affirmations about the angelic nature, each drawn directly from the scriptural witness and each illuminating a different facet of what these remarkable beings are. Together, they build a portrait that is simultaneously awe-inspiring and humbling: awe-inspiring, because the holy angels are creatures of extraordinary power, intelligence, and holiness; humbling, because their entire existence is derivative, dependent, and directed toward ends that are not their own but God's. And that combination, greatness in service, power in submission, glory in reflection, is, as we shall see, not only the defining characteristic of the angelic nature but a parable of what redeemed humanity is called to be.

I. Angels Are Created Beings: Neither Eternal Nor Divine

The Ontological Boundary That Separates the Angels from God

A. *The Creaturely Status of the Angels*

The most fundamental truth about the nature of the angels is also the most often assumed and least often clearly stated: they are creatures. They did not always exist; they were brought into being by an act of God's creative will, and they exist moment by moment by God's sustaining power. The Apostle Paul states this with absolute clarity in his great cosmic Christology in Colossians 1:16: "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him" (NASB 1995). The invisible things created through and for the Son of God include the entire angelic hierarchy in all its ranks and orders. There is no angel, however exalted, however luminous, however close to the divine presence, who did not receive his existence as a gift from the One who is existence itself.

The theological significance of this creaturely status cannot be overstated. It means, first, that the angels are not eternal. They had a beginning. Before God created them, they were not. This distinguishes them absolutely from the triune God, who alone is eternal, self-existent, and uncreated, who is the ground of all being rather than a being among beings. It means, second, that the angels are not self-sustaining. They exist by the continuous will and power of God; if God were to withdraw His sustaining act, they would cease to exist. It means, third, that the angels have no claim on existence, no rights before the Creator, no independent standing in the order of being. Their entire existence is a gift, which means their entire existence is a call to gratitude, worship, and service toward the One who gave it.

B. *When Were the Angels Created?*

Scripture does not state explicitly when the angels were created, but several texts suggest that the angelic host existed before the creation of the visible universe. In Job 38:4–7, God challenges Job from the whirlwind with a sequence of rhetorical questions about the act of creation: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?... When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (NASB 1995). The "sons of God" who shouted for joy at the laying of the earth's foundations are almost certainly the angelic host, which means they were present to witness the creation of the visible world, and therefore existed before it. This is the inference the Cappadocians drew, and it is exegetically responsible: it does not require the angels to be eternal (they could have been created in the interval between "in the beginning" and the first day), but it does suggest they predate the visible creation.

What we do not know, and what we should resist the temptation to speculate about, is the precise moment of their creation, the circumstances of it, or the experiential content of their beginning. The Scriptures tell us what we need to know: they were created, they were created holy, and they were created before the visible world they were called to witness and serve within. That is sufficient for our theological purposes, and the boundary of what is sufficient is the boundary of what responsible angelology will say.

II. Angels Are Spiritual Beings: Incorporeal Yet Capable of Visible Appearance

The Nature of the Angelic Substance and Its Relationship to Bodily Form

A. The Incorporeal Nature of the Angels

The second fundamental truth about the angelic nature is that the angels are spiritual beings, that is, they are incorporeal, without physical bodies of the kind that constitute the essence of human embodiment. The writer of Hebrews describes them simply as “spirits” (pneumata, Hebrews 1:14), and this designation reflects the consistent biblical presentation of the angels as belonging to the invisible realm rather than the visible. They are not composed of matter; they do not have flesh and bones; they are not spatially located in the way that embodied creatures are. This is why the psalmist can describe God as “mounting the cherubim and flying” (Psalm 18:10) without implying that the cherub is a physical object with physical wings, the language is accommodating itself to the constraints of creaturely description.

The incorporeal nature of the angels has important implications. It means they are not subject to the physical limitations that constrain embodied creatures: they are not tired by distance, not weakened by physical injury, not diminished by time in the way that organisms with biological bodies are. Their mode of existence in the created order is fundamentally different from the mode of existence of the animals, the humans, and the other embodied creatures that populate the visible world. This difference is not a deficiency; it is a different kind of creaturely being, suited to the different kind of creaturely ministry that angels perform. The angel who appeared to Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:5) was not constrained by the physical exhaustion that had overcome the prophet; the angel who released Peter from prison (Acts 12:7–11) moved through locked doors in a way that no embodied creature could.

B. The Assumption of Visible Form

That angels are incorporeal does not mean they cannot appear in bodily form. The Scriptures record numerous instances in which angels assumed a visible, human-like appearance in order to communicate with human beings: the three “men” who appeared to Abraham at Mamre (Genesis 18:1–19), the two “men” who came to Lot in Sodom (Genesis 19:1–3), the angel who appeared to Gideon and to the parents of Samson, the angels who appeared at the resurrection and the ascension. The writer of Hebrews draws a direct pastoral implication from this pattern: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2, NASB 1995).

The theological question raised by these appearances, whether angels assume a genuine physical body, temporarily created for the purpose, or produce some kind of localized physical manifestation without strictly becoming embodied, is one on which the Reformed tradition has wisely declined to offer a definitive answer. Calvin, characteristically, refuses to speculate: the Scriptures tell us that angels appear in human form when God sends them to communicate with human beings; they do not explain the metaphysics of how. What the Scriptures do make clear is that these appearances are temporary and purposeful, assumed for the sake of a specific divine mission and then laid aside. The angels do not have bodies of their own; they take on visible form when God’s purposes require it. This is very different from

the permanent, essential embodiment of the incarnate Son of God, who assumed human nature not temporarily but permanently and irrevocably.

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13:2, NASB 1995

III. Angels Are Personal Beings: Intellect, Will, and Moral Character

The Angels Are Not Impersonal Forces but Rational, Volitional, Moral Agents

A. Angelic Intellect

The angels possess genuine intellect, they are rational beings capable of knowledge, understanding, and the exercise of cognitive capacities that far exceed the natural limits of human intelligence. The Apostle Peter describes them as beings who “long to look” into the mysteries of the gospel (1 Peter 1:12), which presupposes both the capacity for intellectual inquiry and the experience of wonder before truths that exceed even their remarkable cognitive reach. The woman of Tekoa, in her flattery of David, describes the king’s wisdom as being “like the wisdom of the angel of God, to know all that is in the earth” (2 Samuel 14:20, NASB 1995), a comparison that assumes the angels’ cognitive abilities as a recognizable standard of excellence, even while the comparison itself is hyperbolic.

The intellectual capacities of the angels are, however, genuinely creaturely and genuinely limited. The angels do not know all things; there are truths concealed from them, including the time of Christ’s return (Matthew 24:36), and there are depths of the gospel into which they peer with longing precisely because those depths exceed their present comprehension. Their intellect is vastly superior to the human intellect in its natural powers, but it is not omniscient; it is expansive, but it is bounded; it is swift and penetrating, but it is dependent on what God has chosen to reveal. Here, as everywhere in angelology, the creaturely status of the angels sets the boundary: the intellect of an angel is the intellect of a creature, not the intellect of God.

B. Angelic Will and Moral Character

The angels also possess genuine will, the capacity for genuine choice, genuine agency, and genuine moral responsibility. This is demonstrated most powerfully, and most tragically, by the fact that some angels chose to rebel against God. The language of Isaiah 14:12–14, traditionally understood as describing the primordial fall of Satan, is the language of deliberate, willful self-assertion: “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God... I will make myself like the Most High” (NASB 1995). The angels who followed Satan in his rebellion (Jude 6; Revelation 12:4) exercised genuine will in doing so. They were not compelled; they were not deceived in the way that human beings are deceived; they chose, with the full exercise of their intellectual and volitional capacities, to abandon their proper station. This is why their condemnation is without the possibility of redemption that is extended to fallen human beings: there was no external temptation to mitigate their culpability, no weakness of the flesh to account for their fall.

The holy angels, those who did not fall, are described with expressions that indicate genuine moral character. They are called “holy angels” (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26), and Jesus warns that the Son of Man will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of Him “when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels”, a phrase that treats the holiness of the angels as a recognized moral quality rather than a mere neutral description. The angels who stand before the throne of God in Isaiah’s vision cover their faces and their feet in a gesture of profound moral deference before the infinite holiness they behold, a gesture that only makes sense if the beings performing it are themselves moral agents capable of recognizing and responding to the claim of holiness upon them. The angels are not moral automatons; they are genuinely virtuous in the truest sense, because their virtue is the virtue of beings who have will, who face the genuine possibility of its misuse, and who by the grace of God have persevered in the right use of it.

IV. Angels Are Powerful Beings: Mighty Yet Creaturely

The Scope and Limits of Angelic Power in the Service of God

A. The Power of the Holy Angels

The Scriptures speak of the angels’ power with a consistency and vividness that should permanently disabuse us of any tendency to domesticate them into the sentimental guardians of popular culture. The Psalmist describes them as “mighty in strength, who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word” (Psalm 103:20, NASB 1995). The Greek term used in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 to describe the angels who accompany Christ at His return is *angeloi dynameos autou*, “angels of His power,” angels whose very description is defined by the power they exercise. The narrative record of angelic activity in the Old Testament gives concrete content to these descriptions: a single angel struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night (2 Kings 19:35), an action of military force for which no army in human history has a parallel. An angel rolled away the stone from the tomb of Christ (Matthew 28:2), a stone that required multiple men to move, with what the text implies was effortless ease, and sat upon it.

The power of the angels is, moreover, not merely physical force of the kind that can be measured in terms of mechanical energy. It is the power of spiritual beings operating in the created order at the direction of the omnipotent God, which means it is power of a categorically different kind from the power of even the strongest embodied creature. The angel who appeared to Daniel described a cosmic conflict with the “prince of Persia” in which the outcome of earthly kingdoms hung in the balance (Daniel 10:12–13), language that presupposes a kind of angelic power that operates at the level of geopolitical history rather than merely individual events. The “mighty angel” of Revelation 10:1, who stands with one foot on the sea and one foot on the land and whose voice is like the roar of a lion, represents the biblical imagination’s most vivid effort to communicate the sheer scale of angelic power.

B. The Limits of Angelic Power

Great as the power of the angels is, it is unmistakably and absolutely creaturely power, derivative, dependent, and bounded by the will of the One who gave it. The angels are not omnipotent; they do not

have unlimited power; they cannot accomplish anything that exceeds the permission and purpose of God. The book of Job is the paradigmatic illustration of this truth in the domain of the demonic: Satan, the most powerful of the fallen angels, could not touch Job without explicit divine permission, and the permission given was bounded with precise limits (“Only do not put forth your hand on him,” Job 1:12; “Spare his life,” Job 2:6, NASB 1995). If the most powerful of the fallen angels is on a leash held by the sovereign hand of God, then a fortiori the power of the holy angels is entirely under divine governance and direction.

This limitation is not a deficiency in the angels’ nature; it is the proper condition of creaturely power. The power of the angels is precisely as great as it needs to be to accomplish the purposes for which God employs them, and no more. They are, in the most profound sense, servants, and the power of a servant is always and appropriately bounded by the authority of the one served. For the believer, this means that the power of the holy angels operating in one’s defense is not the independent power of a protective force operating on one’s behalf, but the directed power of God’s servants executing God’s specific providential purposes for God’s own glory. The comfort this provides is ultimately a comfort rooted not in the angels’ power but in God’s sovereign governance of it.

“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him.” Colossians 1:16, NASB 1995

V. Angels Are Numerous: An Innumerable Multitude

The Scale of the Angelic Host Exceeds the Reach of Human Enumeration

The Scriptures consistently suggest that the number of the angelic host is vast beyond any human calculation. The Apostle John, in his throne-room vision, hears the voice of “many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11, NASB 1995). The Greek phrase, *myriades myriadōn kai chiliades chiliadōn*, is a numerical superlative, a Hebrew-style expression of incomprehensible multitude: it does not specify a number but gestures toward a quantity that exceeds the capacity of human arithmetic to express. The parallel in Daniel 7:10 is equally emphatic: “Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him.”

The writer of Hebrews, describing the heavenly assembly to which the church comes in corporate worship, speaks of “myriads of angels, in festal gathering” (Hebrews 12:22, NASB 1995), language that evokes not merely a large crowd but a celebratory assembly of a scale that defies visualization. Jesus Himself, in the Garden of Gethsemane, speaks of the possibility of calling upon “more than twelve legions of angels” as a divine rescue force (Matthew 26:53), a Roman legion numbering approximately six thousand soldiers, which means the Lord is gesturing toward a force of more than seventy-two thousand angelic warriors as the minimal available response to His need. The pastoral implication of the angels’ innumerable multitude is the implication Elisha drew for his frightened servant: “Those who are with us are more than those who

are with them” (2 Kings 6:16, NASB 1995). The servants of God are never outnumbered by the adversaries of God, because the host that serves the Most High is beyond counting.

VI. Angels Are Not Omniscient, Omnipotent, or Omnipresent

The Divine Incommunicable Attributes Belong to God Alone

One of the most theologically important things that can be said about the angelic nature is what cannot be said about it. The so-called incommunicable attributes of God, those attributes that belong exclusively to the divine nature and are not shared with any creature, are precisely what the angels do not and cannot possess. The angels are not omniscient: they do not know all things. Jesus Himself states explicitly that the angels do not know the day or the hour of His return (Matthew 24:36), and the Apostle Peter notes that even the angels longed to look into the mysteries of the gospel and did not fully grasp them (1 Peter 1:12). Their knowledge, vast as it is, is creaturely knowledge, extensive but bounded, penetrating but not exhaustive.

The angels are not omnipresent: they are finite, localized, personal beings who can be in only one place at a time. This is why, in Daniel 10:13, the angel sent to Daniel was detained by the prince of Persia for twenty-one days, a text that implies both the angel’s spatial location and the possibility of spatial impediment. The popular notion that one’s guardian angel is simultaneously present everywhere one goes, like an omnipresent divine companion, exceeds what Scripture teaches; the angel who guards and assists a believer is in a specific place at a specific time, executing a specific commission from the God who directs all angelic activity. And the angels are not omnipotent: as established in the previous section, their power is great but creaturely, bounded by divine permission and directed by divine purpose. They can do everything God commands them to do and nothing beyond it.

The theological importance of this point cannot be overstated for the practice of Christian devotion. The incommunicable attributes, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, are precisely the divine attributes on which prayer depends: we pray to a God who knows all things (including our need before we articulate it), who is present everywhere (so that no location is beyond His reach), and who is all-powerful (so that nothing we need is beyond His ability to provide). To pray to an angel, or to place in an angel the trust that belongs to God alone, is not merely a theological error; it is a practical deprivation, a substitution of a finite, localized, bounded servant for the infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent Lord. This is precisely why the angel who appears to John in Revelation 22:8–9 rebukes his instinct to worship, saying, “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours” (NASB 1995). The fellow servant does not receive what belongs to the Master.

VII. Angels Do Not Marry or Procreate: A Different Order of Creaturely Being

The Angelic Mode of Existence Is Not Organized Around Biological Generation

One of the most distinctive statements in the New Testament about the angelic nature comes from Jesus Himself in response to the Sadducees' question about the resurrection. Having described the absurdity of their scenario in which a woman is successively married to seven brothers, Jesus replies: "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30, NASB 1995). This statement reveals several things about the angelic nature: the angels do not exist within the structure of marriage and family, they do not reproduce, and the resurrection life of redeemed humanity will in some respects resemble the present mode of existence of the angels.

The angels' existence outside the structure of marriage and biological generation is not a deficiency or a limitation in the negative sense; it is simply a different mode of creaturely existence, suited to beings who were not created with bodies, who do not age and die and require generational replacement, and whose corporate life is organized around the service of God rather than around the covenant structures of family and community that are appropriate to human life in a fallen and mortal world. The angelic host is a fixed multitude: it does not grow through reproduction and it does not diminish through biological death. This is why Jesus can speak of the number of the angels as something established, "more than twelve legions", without implying any process of generational increase.

The reference to the resurrection life being "like angels in heaven" is suggestive but carefully limited by its context. Jesus is not saying that the resurrection life of human beings will be identical to the present existence of the angels, or that the resurrection body will be incorporeal as the angels are incorporeal. He is making the specific point that the resurrection life will not be organized around the institution of marriage, because the purposes that marriage serves in this age, companionship, bearing children, and providing a picture of the covenant relationship between Christ and the church, will be fulfilled in a higher register in the age to come. The comparison to angels is precise and contextual; it should not be generalized into a broader claim about the nature of resurrection life.

VIII. Angels Were Created Holy: The Elect and the Fallen

The Original Holiness of the Angelic Host and Its Preservation in the Holy Angels

The eighth and final affirmation about the angelic nature in this lesson is in some ways the most profound: the angels were created holy. They did not begin their existence in a morally neutral state, to be determined by subsequent choices; they began in a state of genuine holiness, of genuine conformity to the character and purposes of their Creator. This is implied by the narrative of the angelic fall: the language of Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:12–19, whatever its precise relationship to the historical entity called Satan, describes a being who was originally "blameless" and in whom "unrighteousness was found", which means the unrighteousness was not original but introduced by free creaturely choice. The angels did not fall from a morally neutral starting point; they fell from holiness.

The holy angels, those who did not join the primordial rebellion, are distinguished in Scripture by designations that acknowledge their confirmed and persevering holiness. They are called "holy angels" (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26), distinguishing them from the fallen angels whose holiness has been perverted into

wickedness. And in a phrase of extraordinary theological significance, Paul refers to them as “elect angels” (1 Timothy 5:21), a designation that places the holy angels’ perseverance in holiness within the framework of divine election rather than mere creaturely achievement. The angels who remained faithful did not do so by the superior exercise of their own will; they were preserved in holiness by the sovereign choice of God, who elected them to persevere as surely as He elected His human people to salvation. This parallel between the election of the holy angels and the election of the redeemed is not elaborated further in Scripture, but it is rich with implication: the foundation of angelic perseverance is the same foundation as the foundation of human perseverance, not creaturely faithfulness, but divine grace.

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?”

Hebrews 1:14, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Incorporeal	Without a physical body; not composed of matter. The primary descriptor of the angelic nature in its essential constitution. The angels are incorporeal in the sense that they do not possess bodies as part of their essential nature, though they may assume visible, bodily form when sent by God to communicate with human beings. Incorporeality does not mean the angels are non-existent or merely abstract; they are real personal beings, but their mode of existence in the created order is not constituted by material embodiment.
Creaturely	Belonging to the category of created beings, as distinguished from the Creator. A creature is any being that has received its existence from God and is therefore dependent on God for its continued being. The angels are creaturely in the most fundamental sense: they were brought into existence by an act of divine creative will, they exist by divine sustaining power, and they are in every respect dependent on and subordinate to the God who made them. Creaturely existence is not a deficiency; it is the appropriate mode of being for all that is not God.
Elect Angels	The phrase used by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:21 (“in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels”, NASB 1995) to describe the holy angels. The designation “elect” (Greek: <i>eklektōn</i>) suggests that the holy angels’ perseverance in holiness is not merely the product of their own superior will but reflects the sovereign choice of God, who preserved them in faithfulness while permitting other angels to fall. The parallelism between “elect angels” and the elect among humanity is theologically suggestive: in both cases, perseverance in holiness is grounded in divine grace rather than creaturely merit.
Incommunicable Attributes	Those attributes of God that belong exclusively to the divine nature and cannot be shared with or communicated to any creature. The incommunicable attributes typically include omniscience (knowledge of all things), omnipresence (presence everywhere simultaneously), omnipotence (unlimited power), aseity (self-existence), and immutability (changelessness). The angels, however powerful and intelligent, possess none of the incommunicable attributes: their knowledge is bounded, their presence is localized, their power is creaturely, their existence is derived, and they are capable of change. The incommunicable attributes belong to God alone.
Aseity	From the Latin <i>a se</i> , “from oneself.” The divine attribute of self-existence: God exists from Himself, by Himself, through Himself, needing nothing outside Himself for His existence. God alone is aseitic; all other beings, including the

Term	Definition
	angels, exist by derived existence, they receive their being from the One who is being itself. The aseity of God is the ontological foundation of the absolute distinction between Creator and creature, which is the foundation of all proper angelology.
Pneumata	Greek: spirits, the plural of pneuma (spirit, breath, wind). The term used by the writer of Hebrews (1:14) to describe the essential nature of the holy angels: they are “ministering spirits” (leitourgika pneumata). The use of pneuma rather than sōma (body) or sarx (flesh) confirms the incorporeal nature of the angelic beings. The same term is used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe the Holy Spirit (Pneuma Hagion) and the spirits of deceased believers (Hebrews 12:23), though the angels are distinct from both.
Leitourgika Pneumata	Greek: “ministering spirits” (Hebrews 1:14). The defining phrase for the present ministry of the holy angels in the redemptive age. Leitourgika derives from leitourgia (liturgical service, public ministry), the word from which the English “liturgy” derives. The designation places the angels’ ministry in a liturgical frame: they are not merely task-workers but servants engaged in the divinely ordered service of God’s redemptive purposes, specifically directed toward those who will inherit salvation.
Sons of God (bene elohim)	Hebrew: literally “sons of God.” A designation used in the Old Testament (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Psalm 29:1; 89:6) to describe the angelic beings who stand in the presence of God and participate in the divine assembly. The phrase does not imply that the angels are divine or ontologically related to God in the way that the eternal Son is; it reflects their status as beings who dwell in God’s immediate presence and serve in His council. The New Testament equivalent is “angels” (angeloi), though the specific Old Testament term carries the additional connotation of the heavenly court.
Omniscience	The divine attribute of all-knowing; perfect, complete, and simultaneous knowledge of all things past, present, future, actual, and possible. Omniscience belongs to God alone. The angels possess extensive and penetrating knowledge, vastly superior to human knowledge in its natural range and acuity, but their knowledge is creaturely, bounded, and dependent on divine revelation. They do not know the day of Christ’s return (Matthew 24:36); they long to understand the depths of the gospel (1 Peter 1:12). Their knowledge is great; it is not omniscient.
Confirmed in Holiness	The theological description of the state of the holy angels after the angelic fall. The elect angels, having persevered through whatever probation their original condition involved, are understood to be confirmed in holiness, that is, their moral state is no longer susceptible to the kind of defection that the fallen

Term	Definition
	angels chose. This confirmation is not the product of their own moral achievement but of God’s sovereign grace. The parallel for human beings is the state of glorification, in which the redeemed are finally and irrevocably conformed to the image of Christ and freed from the possibility of sin.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the angels are real personal beings, not symbols, not metaphors, not culturally conditioned projections of human need onto the cosmos, but actual intelligent volitional creatures who exist and act in the created order that God governs. The four affirmations of this lesson that together constitute the core of what Scripture teaches about the angelic nature, that the angels are created, spiritual, personal, and powerful, are not optional theological decorations on a faith that can stand without them. They are integral to the biblical worldview, and the Christian who does not hold them will consistently misread the biblical narrative at precisely those points where the angelic world intersects the human story.

We must also believe, with equal clarity, that the angels are not divine, that none of the incommunicable attributes that belong to God alone are shared with even the most exalted of the angelic host. This is not a negative or limiting conviction; it is a profoundly liberating one. It means that the entire created order, including the vast and powerful angelic realm, is under the sovereign governance of the God to whom we pray, in whom we trust, and by whose providence we are kept. The most powerful angel in the heavenly host is as far beneath God as the least powerful; the most luminous seraph is as creaturely as the most insignificant sparrow. God alone is God. Everything else, all of it, every order, every rank, every power, visible and invisible, is His creature, serving His purposes, under His authority.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the truth about the angels' creaturely holiness press itself upon your self-understanding as a redeemed human being. The angels were created holy and, those who remained faithful, are described as "elect angels," their holiness preserved by divine grace. You, if you are in Christ, are headed toward a holiness more profound than what even the angels possess: not merely the creaturely holiness of a being created in conformity with God's character, but the holiness of a being united to Christ, conformed to His image, bearing not merely the imprint of God's creative work but the fullness of His redeeming grace. Paul declares that the redeemed will judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3), a statement whose full meaning exceeds our present comprehension, but which suggests that the eschatological destiny of the redeemed in Christ is in some respects higher than the destiny of even the holy angels. The angels minister to the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14) not because those heirs are already their superiors but because they will be, by grace, when all things are consummated in Christ.

Let this truth produce not pride but gratitude, not superiority but wonder, not self-satisfaction but a deepened sense of what the grace of God has done and is doing and will do in those who are being conformed to the image of His Son. The angels who minister to you are not inferior creatures assigned to an inferior task; they are magnificent beings of great power and holiness, engaged in the ministry of God's redemptive purposes, and they are engaged in that ministry on your behalf. The appropriate response is

neither worship of the angels nor dismissal of their ministry, but the grateful trust in the God who has ordered even the magnificent angelic host in the service of His redeeming love.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- **Read Colossians 1:15–20 as a doxological response to this lesson.** Paul’s affirmation that all things, including the entire invisible angelic realm, were created through Christ and for Christ is the Christological context within which the doctrine of the angelic nature finds its proper meaning. The angels are not merely interesting theological data; they are beings created for Christ, sustained by Christ, and ultimately directed toward the glorification of Christ. Let this Christological frame govern the way you think about the angelic world as this series progresses.
- **Meditate on Psalm 103:19–22.** This passage ends the great psalm of divine grace and redemption by summoning the entire created order, including the angels, to bless the Lord. Note how the angels are called to bless the Lord specifically as beings who “perform His word, obeying the voice of His word” (v. 20). Their power is inseparable from their obedience; their greatness is inseparable from their service. Let this vision of the angels’ worshipful obedience function as a model for the kind of powerful, joyful, unselfconscious service to which every redeemed human being is also called.
- **Evaluate any tendency to attribute omniscient or omnipresent characteristics to the angels in your devotional practice.** Do you think of a guardian angel as someone who is always with you, always watching, always aware of your needs? If so, you are attributing to a finite creaturely being the attributes that belong to God alone. The correction is not to stop believing in the protective ministry of the holy angels, which Scripture clearly teaches, but to reground that ministry in the sovereign providence of the God who directs it. The angels protect you because God sends them; they are aware of your needs because God is aware of your needs and directs them accordingly. The comfort is not in the angels but in the God who employs them.
- **Read Revelation 22:8–9 and let it govern your posture toward the angelic world.** When John falls at the feet of the angel to worship, the angel’s response is immediate and unambiguous: “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God” (NASB 1995). This response is not false modesty; it is the angel’s own accurate self-understanding. The angel knows what it is, a fellow servant, and directs all worship to the One to whom worship belongs. Let this be the posture your angelology produces: gratitude for the ministry of the angels, wonder at their nature, and all worship directed without remainder to the God who made and employs them.
- **Consider the pastoral implications of the angels’ innumerable multitude for the members of your congregation who face fear.** Elisha’s word to his terrified servant, “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (2 Kings 6:16), is not a privately encouraging remark but a theological statement about the structural reality of the spiritual realm. The forces of God arrayed in the service of His people genuinely outnumber and outpower the forces arrayed against them. This is not a metaphor or a spiritual pep talk; it is a description of the actual state of affairs in the created order as the Bible reveals it. How would your congregation’s experience

of anxiety, fear, and spiritual discouragement be changed if this truth were genuinely believed and regularly proclaimed?

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- This lesson has covered eight biblical affirmations about the nature of the holy angels. Before engaging the discussion questions, identify which of these eight affirmations was most new to you, which was most familiar, and which was most practically significant for your own spiritual life. Why did you choose the ones you did?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Colossians 1:15–20 carefully. Identify every affirmation Paul makes about Christ’s relationship to the created order, including the invisible realm. How does the phrase “visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities” (v. 16) establish the creaturely status of the entire angelic hierarchy? What does it mean that all these things were created “through Him and for Him” (v. 16)? How does the statement that “in Him all things hold together” (v. 17) bear on the question of angelic aseity?
- Read Psalm 103:19–22. Analyze the structure of the psalm’s closing summons. What specific descriptions does the Psalmist give of the angels in verse 20? What does the phrase “who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word” reveal about the relationship between angelic power and angelic obedience? Why does the Psalmist include the angels in a summons that also includes “all His works, in all places of His dominion” (v. 22)? What does this inclusion reveal about the proper context within which the doctrine of the angels is always situated?
- Read Job 38:1–7 alongside Job 1:6–12. What does the Job 38 passage suggest about when the angels were created relative to the creation of the visible world? What does the phrase “the sons of God shouted for joy” (38:7) reveal about the angels’ response to the act of creation? How does Job 1:6–12 illustrate the limits of angelic, specifically demonic, power? What does the structure of the divine permission in Job 1:12 reveal about the relationship between creaturely power and divine sovereignty?
- Read 1 Timothy 5:21 and compare with Matthew 24:36 and 1 Peter 1:12. What does Paul’s phrase “elect angels” in 1 Timothy 5:21 suggest about the basis of the holy angels’ perseverance in holiness? How does Matthew 24:36’s statement that the angels do not know the day or the hour qualify the common assumption that the angels have exhaustive knowledge? What does 1 Peter 1:12’s statement that the angels “long to look” into the gospel mysteries reveal about the relationship between angelic knowledge and human redemption?
- Read Matthew 22:23–30 in full context. What specific question are the Sadducees asking, and what is the precise nature of the comparison Jesus draws between the resurrection life and the angelic mode of existence? What does the phrase “they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” tell us about the structure of angelic existence? What does it explicitly not tell us? How should the precision of Jesus’ comparison guard against over-reading the angels’ mode of existence into the resurrection life of human beings?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the creaturely status of the angels is “the most fundamental truth” about their nature. Do you agree with this prioritization? Why is the ontological category of “creature” so foundational for understanding everything else that can be said about the angels? How does the creaturely status of the angels function as a safeguard against the tendency, visible in both popular culture and in charismatic angelology, to effectively divinize the angelic realm?
- The lesson distinguishes between the angels’ essential incorporeality and their capacity for visible, bodily appearance. Calvin refused to speculate about the metaphysics of how this visible appearance is accomplished. Is this refusal an evasion, or is it a model of appropriate theological restraint? What would the alternative look like, what kinds of claims would a more ambitious angelological metaphysics need to make, and how would they be justified? Does the Reformed instinct toward restraint leave any genuine theological questions unanswered that need to be answered for pastoral or doctrinal purposes?
- The lesson identifies the designation “elect angels” (1 Timothy 5:21) as suggesting that the holy angels’ perseverance in holiness is grounded in divine election rather than creaturely achievement. How does this angelic election relate to the Reformed doctrine of the election of the redeemed? Does the parallel illuminate the doctrine of human election, or does the difference between angelic and human existence make the parallel more misleading than helpful? What are the limits of the comparison?
- The lesson argues that the angels’ lack of the divine incommunicable attributes, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, is “profoundly liberating” rather than merely limiting. Unpack this claim. In what specific ways is it liberating to know that no creature, not even the most powerful angel, possesses the attributes that belong to God alone? What practical difference does this make to the believer’s experience of trust, prayer, and spiritual confidence?
- The lesson suggests that Paul’s statement that the redeemed will “judge angels” (1 Corinthians 6:3) indicates that the eschatological destiny of the redeemed is in some respects higher than the destiny of even the holy angels. What does this claim mean, and what are its limits? How does it relate to the teaching that the angels “long to look” into the mysteries of the gospel (1 Peter 1:12)? What does the centrality of redemption to the divine purposes suggest about the relative theological significance of angelology and soteriology?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson warns against attributing omniscient or omnipresent characteristics to angels in devotional practice. Have you been guilty of this in practice, not in formal theological confession, but in the working assumptions of your devotional life? How does the distinction between the protective ministry of the holy angels (real and biblically grounded) and the false attribution of divine attributes to them (theologically incorrect) change the practical texture of your trust in God’s providential care?
- The lesson argues that the appropriate response to the truth about the angels is “grateful trust in the God who has ordered even the magnificent angelic host in the service of His redeeming

love.” In your own experience, is your understanding of the angels’ ministry more likely to produce trust in God or a kind of secondary confidence in the angels themselves? What specific aspects of this lesson’s teaching most directly address the misplaced trust you are most prone to?

- The lesson suggests that the angels’ moral character, genuine virtue in beings with genuine will, is a “parable of what redeemed humanity is called to be.” How does the picture of the holy angels’ worshipful, powerful, joyful obedience function as a model or aspiration for your own discipleship? Is there a specific area of your life in which the angel’s posture, powerful in submission, glorious in reflection, great in service, most directly challenges your own patterns of resistance, self-assertion, or spiritual sluggishness?
- Elisha’s servant saw the enemy army and was terrified. Elisha prayed that God would open the servant’s eyes, and he saw the angelic army surrounding them. In your own experience of fear, spiritual discouragement, or the sense of being outnumbered and outmatched, have you genuinely engaged the biblical truth that “those who are with us are more than those who are with them”? What would it take for this truth to function not merely as a theological proposition but as a genuine resource of spiritual courage in the specific circumstances of your life right now?
- This lesson concludes the first lesson of Unit 2. How has your understanding of the holy angels’ nature changed, deepened, or been corrected by the eight biblical affirmations studied in this lesson? Which of the remaining lessons of this unit, on the ministry of angels to God (Lesson 4), to believers (Lesson 5), and in redemptive history (Lesson 6), are you most eager to engage, and what specific question do you most hope those lessons will address?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of Psalm 103, the great psalm of divine grace from which this lesson's title verse is drawn. Read it in full, allowing the arc of the psalm to carry you from the personal ("Bless the Lord, O my soul," vv. 1–5), through the redemptive-historical (the covenant mercies of God toward Israel, vv. 6–18), to the cosmic (the summons to the entire created order, including the angels, to bless the Lord, vv. 19–22). Notice how the psalm's ending, its summons to the angelic host to bless the Lord, is not a decorative flourish but the logical conclusion of a movement that begins with the individual soul's gratitude and expands to encompass the whole of creation. The individual believer's praise joins the angels' praise as a part of the universal chorus that rises to the God who "has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all" (v. 19, NASB 1995).

Spend time in adoration of God as the Creator and Sustainer of the angelic host. Praise Him for the magnificent beings He has made, powerful, holy, intelligent, personal, and wholly devoted to His service. Praise Him that the same sovereign wisdom and goodness that governs the angelic realm governs your life: that the God who directs the mighty angels who struck down the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:35) and who rolled away the stone from the tomb of His Son (Matthew 28:2) is the same God who numbers the hairs of your head (Matthew 10:30) and who will complete the good work He has begun in you (Philippians 1:6). The scale of God's governance, from the innumerable angelic host to the individual sparrow, is not a distraction from His personal care for you; it is the demonstration of the inexhaustible fullness of His sovereign love.

Pray specifically for the kind of faith-sight that this lesson has described. Pray that God would open your eyes, not to a literal vision of the angelic armies, but to the theological reality that the biblical worldview declares: that the created order is larger than the visible, that the invisible realm is populated with powerful personal beings who serve the sovereign purposes of your heavenly Father, and that the apparent imbalance of power in any spiritual conflict, whether personal temptation, ministry opposition, or the broader conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness, is not the whole picture. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Let this truth descend from the mind to the heart, and from the heart into the confidence of daily discipleship.

Pray for the members of your congregation who are most prone to the specific errors this lesson has addressed: those who dismiss the reality of the spiritual realm and live as functional naturalists, and those who are preoccupied with the demonic in ways that produce anxiety rather than confidence. Both need the same medicine: a clear, scripturally grounded, Christologically centered account of what the angels actually are and what God's sovereign governance of the invisible world actually means. Pray that this series, and this lesson in particular, would be an instrument of that medicine in the specific lives and specific needs of the people God has given you to shepherd.

Close with a prayer of dedication modeled on the angels' own posture before God: powerful in submission, glorious in reflection, great in service. Ask the God who made the angels "mighty in strength,

who perform His word” to produce in you something of that same quality of obedient, joyful, whole-hearted service, not the frantic striving of the anxious or the reluctant compliance of the half-committed, but the glad, strong, unreserved offering of everything you are to the God who made you, redeemed you, and is even now conforming you to the image of His Son.

“Bless the Lord, you His angels, mighty in strength, who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word! Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you who serve Him, doing His will.”

Psalm 103:20–21, NASB 1995

Key Texts: *Psalm 103:19–22; Colossians 1:15–20; Job 38:1–7; 1 Timothy 5:21; Matthew 22:23–30; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 22:8–9*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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