

The Angelology of Jonathan Edwards

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Christ is the head of the angels, and that the angels are united to him as part of his body.¹ Jonathan Edwards

The work of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) served as a brilliant example of the vigor of the Puritans’ inherited Calvinism.² Historian Mark Noll writes,

Twentieth-century students are partially correct in drawing attention to the modernity of Edwards’ intellectual universe, for he was influenced by the sensationalist epistemology of Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding*, he marveled at the lofty regularities portrayed in Newton’s science, and he accepted the affectional emphases in the new moral philosophy of his age. But if he was the colonial American who most deeply engaged the new era’s thought, he was also the colonial American who most thoroughly repudiated it.³

While studying theology after his graduation from Yale College in 1720, Edwards experienced a conversion during which, as he later writes, “There came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being.”⁴ To properly communicate this divine glory became his

preeminent burden as a pastor-theologian. While pastoring the historical Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts, Edwards participated in intense seasons of revival in 1734–1735 and again in 1740–1742. Yet in 1750, Edwards was overwhelmingly dismissed from his pulpit in Northampton when he challenged the long-established practice of admitting individuals to the Lord's table in communion when they could not give credible testimony as to the genuineness of their saving faith. This seeming crisis for Edwards and his large family, and subsequent move to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, proved to be the season in which he would finish several theological treatises for which he later won theological renown.⁵ On March 22, 1758, Edwards died from an inoculation against smallpox, only weeks after his installation as president of the College of New Jersey in Princeton.

The unifying epicenter of Edwards' theology was the glory of God, Noll states, "Depicted as an active, harmonious, ever-unfolding source of absolutely perfect Being marked by supernal beauty and love."⁶ It is within this grand theological framework that Edwards presents his views of angels. Angelology, for Edwards, was viewed as a corollary of Christology.⁷ However, this centralized focus on Christ did not mean that Edwards' works were not free from speculation regarding the angelic world. Within the private musings of his miscellaneous observations, the reader discovers numerous unexpected statements concerning the heavenly spiritual realm. For example, he described Lucifer as a "type of Christ," and also stated that Christ replaced Lucifer as the "head of angels." In addition, he also defined the angelic rebellion and fall as taking place when the angels learned of God's plan of incarnation for his son. Upon learning that the son of God would become human to redeem the elect, the angels were brought to temptation and thus fell from their glorious state. More than other theologians before him, Edwards highlighted the ascension of Christ and his "enthronization" in heaven as a significant event in the disclosing of redemptive history. For Edwards, the ascension of Christ was the event at which Christ became the "head of angels" and the unfallen angels were, for the first time, "confirmed" in grace so that they could be removed forever from the danger of sinning.

Edwards' angelology was traditional in its central focus and emphasized three standard medieval themes of creation, fall, and confirmation of angels.⁸ Yet, Edwards' angelology was innovative in its construal of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels and its portrayal of their role within the

framework of redemptive history. Rather than stationing the angels to a distant celestial realm, Edwards conceived the angels as human-like in their capacity for temptation, joy, outrage, surprise, development, wonder, perseverance, and growth. Angels and humans were two parts of “one society” in heaven that was itself in an eternally “progressive state.”

THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION

Between March and August 1739, Edwards delivered thirty sermons on the OT text of Isaiah 51:8: “For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation” (KJV). The doctrine Edwards provided for his series was continuous from the first sermon to the last, and was basically stated, “The Work of Redemption is a work that God carries on from the fall of man to the end of the world.”⁹ Expanding on this presented doctrine, Edwards explains,

The generations of mankind on the earth did not begin till after the fall. The beginning of the posterity of our first parents was after the fall, for all his posterity by ordinary generation are partakers of the fall and the corruption of nature that followed from it. And these generations by which the human race is propagated shall continue to the end of the world; so these two are the limits of the generations of men on the earth: the fall of man, the beginning, and the end of the world—the Day of Judgment—its end. The same are the limits of the Work of Redemption as to those progressive works of God by which that redemption is brought about and accomplished, though not as to the fruits of it, for they as was said before shall be to all eternity. The work of salvation and the Work of Redemption are the same thing. What is sometimes in Scripture called God’s saving his people is in others called his redeeming them; so Christ is called both the Savior and the Redeemer of his people.¹⁰

Historian Harry S. Stout comments on the simplicity of Edwards’ doctrine and that it is “surprisingly straightforward and almost common place,” however this covers “a vast apparatus of reflection.”¹¹

Desiring to explore the doctrine of redemption and weave its thread within the history of the cosmos, Edwards organized these sermons differently than his other preaching.¹² In order that his doctrine might be understood in all its

comprehensiveness, Edwards shifted it away from the polemical confines of the academy and delivered it as a narrative story. Stout points out, “This Work of Redemption is so much the greatest of all the works of God, that all other works are to be looked upon either as part of it, or appendages to it, or are some way reducible to it.”¹³ The themes developed by Edwards in the framework of this discourse on redemption engaged him both directly and indirectly in most of the expositions he preached throughout this time period. These themes can be summarized under three traditional headings: “Heaven,” “Earth,” and “Hell.” When Edwards took a principal role in the Great Awakening, he appealed to these same classifications to grasp the significance and validity of the revivals and to shape his public discourses. It is within this same context that Edwards shapes his view of angels and their prominent involvement in redemptive history.

Angels play a frequent role in the tri-world narrative that Edwards constructs. He drew these themes out of his “Miscellanies” and included them in his sermons, reminding his congregants, “The creating heaven was in order to the Work of Redemption; it was to be an habitation for the redeemed and the Redeemer, Matthew 25:34. Angels [were created to be] ministering spirits [to the inhabitants of the] lower world [which is] to be the stage of the wonderful Work [of Redemption].”¹⁴ Throughout the sermons in the 1739 series, Edwards positions the angelic beings at the epicenter of his teachings: “Scripture is filled,” he said, “with instances when God hath ... sent angels to bring divine instructions to men.”¹⁵ Angels, in heaven, “spend much of their time in searching into the great things of divinity, and endeavoring to acquire knowledge in them.”¹⁶ When they are not employed in ministration and singing, Edwards considered that angels may be studying. Frequently, Edwards asks his parishioners to follow the example of angels and mimic their diligence in the study of Scripture. Both angels and humanity, Edwards assured, will find “the glorious work of redemption” at the heart of that study:

[W]e ourselves may become like angels, and like God himself in our measure ... Such things as these have been the main subject of the study of the holy patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, and the most excellent men that ever were in the world, and are also the subject of the study of the angels in heaven.¹⁷

According to Edwards, the love of Christ stands at the center of all angelic contemplation vis-à-vis redemption: “He is so lovely and excellent that the angels in

heaven do greatly love him; their hearts overflow with love to him, and they are continually, day and night without ceasing, praising him and giving him glory.”¹⁸

Though angels find their origin and citizenship in the empyrean heaven, Edwards agreed with the medieval theologians that they also spend a substantial amount of time as ministering spirits to humanity. They exist, he thought, as invisible armies around all true believers in Christ. Edwards vehemently rejected the Roman Catholic teaching of “guardian angels” as being assigned to children at the event of their baptism, but frequently reminded children in his Northampton congregation that angels were chiefly attentive to them. In August 1740, in his sermon, “Children Out to Love the Lord Jesus Christ Above All,” Edwards comforted his young hearers with these words:

If you truly love Christ, all the glorious angels of heaven will love you. For they delight in those that love Christ; they love to see such a sight as children giving their hearts to Christ. There will be joy in heaven among the angels that day that you begin to love Christ. And they will be your angels; they will take care of you while you sleep, and God will give ‘em charge to keep you in all your ways.¹⁹

Edwards was careful to emphasize that the care of angels has not been exclusively reserved for only children, nor are angels childish in their mannerisms and actions. For Edwards, the angels were ever-present realities and there existed the potential for the nature of humanity to take on the form of angelic. In essence, Edwards believed the angels offered a magnification of existence, unavailable to fallen humanity.

ANGELS

The reflections of Jonathan Edwards on angels and demons repeated much of the traditional orthodoxy. The angels were created by God and are bodiless or incorporeal beings. They are intelligent beings who are spectators to God’s work in the universe from the moment of their creation up to the present time. They are moral beings with a capacity to choose both good and evil. They exist in vast numbers and have powers that greatly exceed those of human beings. Some angels fell through sin or disobedience, and these fallen angels are the demons. Satan was once the foremost of the unfallen angels and, after his fall, became the leader and foremost of the demons. The

unfallen angels serve as ministers of God's providence, performing many functions throughout the physical universe and in the lives of human beings.

Yet, there are several points at which Edwards' account of the angels differs from that of his predecessors. Based on his interpretations and of inferences from Scripture, Edwards concluded that the angels were not confirmed in grace until long after the world's creation. In fact, the unfallen angels were unconfirmed in grace and on probation from their creation until the ascension of Christ—truly an inconceivably long period of time as compared with Aquinas' notion of an instantaneous fall from grace (for the fallen angels) and an equally instantaneous confirmation in grace (for the unfallen angels). Moreover, Edwards' angels were capable of growing in grace and blessedness—a quality that makes them human-like. Unlike the heavenly figures of perfect blessedness that one finds in Aquinas' account, Edwards' angels were directly involved, invested, and interested in human events and affairs. They themselves—even in their unfallen state—were reconciled to God when the Son of God took on a creature's nature in the Incarnation. This is one reason that angels rejoiced at Jesus' birth. In eternity, angels and humans will together make a single holy community in heaven. Edwards did not present the entire story of angels in a single text, but repeatedly returned to the same themes in his *Miscellanies*, and it is from there that one can piece together an interconnected narrative. The story, as Edwards tells it, sweeps from creation through all of history to consummation.

God created the angels to be “fit witnesses and spectators of God's works here below.”²⁰ The problem is that human beings “see but a very little ... and they don't live long enough to see more than a very small part of the scheme.”²¹ For this reason, “God saw fit that there should be creatures of very great discerning and comprehensive understandings” to be “spectators of the whole series of the works of God.”²² The angels were created “in the beginning of creation” so that they could see all that transpired “from the beginning to the consummation of all things.”²³ Edwards cites the text in Job 38:7, which speaks of the “sons of God”—taken as a reference to angels—shouting for joy when God laid the foundations of the earth.²⁴

Given the high stature of the angels, possessing “more excellent natural powers” than human beings, it might seem “a very improper thing that saints in some respects should be advanced above angels.”²⁵ Yet Edwards reasons that this is no more improper than that a “queen” of a kingdom should be advanced above “nobles and barons, of far nobler natural powers.”²⁶ The

argument here presupposes Edwards' nuptial or bridal theology. The church, as the bride of Christ, receives its stature wholly from its relationship with Jesus Christ—the bridegroom. It is a derived rather than inherent standing. Edwards assigns momentous significance to the church's status as the Bride of Christ, for he writes that “this spouse of the Son of God, the bride ... is that for which all the universe was made. Heaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse.”²⁷

The ultimate purpose of God in creating the world, for Edwards, was linked with the Incarnation of the Son of God—the joining of the eternal Son with a human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. Despite a focus on the sufferings and the crucifixion of Christ, Edwards' reflections on God's purposes began with the Incarnation: “It seems to me very proper and suitable, that the human nature should be advanced far above the angelical nature by the incarnation of Christ.”²⁸ The reason for this is that “men are a more ultimate end of the creation than the angels,” and “the angels ... are created for this end, to minister to the creatures.”²⁹ There is a parallel between Christ and the angels at this point. Christ's divine nature places him inherently higher than all human beings, and yet Christ humbles himself to serve humanity in his earthly life. The angels are also inherently above human beings (though not so high as Christ), yet the angels are called to serve those lower than themselves. In other passages, Edwards develops this idea further with regard to the church's ministers and eminent saints, who show their excellence by embracing a position of lowliness and servitude.

The angels, for Edwards, were limited beings with only a partial grasp of God's purposes. Based on his exegesis of certain key biblical texts (esp. Eph 3:9-11; Col 1:26; 1 Cor 2:7-9), Edwards concluded that God's sweeping plan for cosmic redemption was “a secret that [God] kept within himself, was hid and sealed up in the divine understanding, and never had as yet been divulged to any other.”³⁰ This means that the angels—though witnessing God's works in history from the beginning of creation—were not able to understand all the intricacies of God's redemptive plan. And this is where the problem began. Some angels did not—or would not—understand, accept, and embrace God's plan.

Between 1729 and 1733, a number of Edwards' sermons focused on Christ. Beginning with an emphasis on the doctrine of the incarnation and Christ's humility during his earthly life, Edwards shifted later to focus on

Christ's heavenly glory as a "reward" for his earthly sufferings. He particularly focused on Christ's "enthronization" at the time of his ascension into heaven.³¹ Edwards reasoned that Christ at the conclusion of his earthly life and sufferings, was "worthy ... to receive" (Rev 5:12) all power, glory, and blessing from the Father. During these years, Edwards developed what has been called "enthronement theology," centering on Christ's ascension—one of his truly distinctive theological motifs.³² At the time of his ascension, Christ became the "head of angels," for "the angels were not unconcerned in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ."³³ As he wrote, the angels "have this benefit by the incarnation of Christ that thereby God is become a creature, and so is nearer to them."³⁴ For this reason, angels and humans are "of the same family."³⁵ In constructing Christ's cosmic story, Edwards gave more attention to the ascension of Christ than to the resurrection per se. Of course, Edwards did not believe Christ's story found its ultimate culmination until his second advent to subdue his enemies and to reign in their midst. Edwards referred to this as a "second ascension"—an event even more majestic than the first ascension—when, at the end of his history, Christ with his glorified saints will rise from earth into heaven to establish his reign in the new heavens and new earth. After the judgment of the wicked, Edwards writes,

Christ and all his church of saints and all the holy angels ministering to them shall leave this lower world and ascend up towards the highest heavens. Christ shall ascend in as great glory as he descended, and in some respects greater, for now he shall ascend with all his elect church, with him glorified in both body and soul. Christ's first ascension to heaven soon after his own resurrection was very glorious. But this, his second ascension of his mystical body, his whole church, shall be far more glorious. The redeemed church shall all ascend with him in a most joyful and triumphant manner. And all their enemies and persecutors that shall be left behind on the cursed ground to be consumed, shall see the sight and hear their songs. And thus Christ's church shall forever leave this accursed world to go into that more glorious world, the highest heavens, into the paradise of God, the kingdom that was prepared for them from the foundation of the world.³⁶

The narrative of Christ's exaltation begins with humiliation. Suffering, Edwards said, was prerequisite to any reward for Christ: "'Tis fit ... that every creature, before he receives the eternal reward of his obedience, should have

some considerable trial of his obedience.”³⁷ For “respect to God’s authority” is only established through the overcoming of a trial. Even Christ, who is the most supreme existence in the cosmos, had to be the most greatly tested by God in respect of his obedience. Edwards states, “It is an honor that the holy angels have never had, to obey God in and by suffering. Herein the people of Jesus Christ, as well as Christ himself, have a higher honor in some respects than the angels.”³⁸ In terms reminiscent of the early Christian theme of *Christus Victor*, Edwards writes, “Christ poured the greater contempt upon Satan in his victory over him, by reason of the manner of his preparing himself to fight with him, and the contemptible means and weapons he made use of.”³⁹ He defeated him by

preparing to encounter that proud and potent enemy, the method he took was not to put on his strength and to deck himself with glory and beauty, but to lay aside his strength and glory and to become weak, to take upon him the nature of a poor, feeble, mortal man, a worm of the dust, that in this nature and state he might overcome Satan; like David who, when he went to fight with Goliath, put off the princely armor that Saul armed him with.⁴⁰

Edwards further describes the weapons used by Christ in this defeat of the devil:

The weapons that Christ made use of in fighting with the hellish giant were his poverty, afflictions, reproaches, and death. His principal weapon was his own cross, the ignominious instrument of his own death. These were seemingly weak and despicable weapons, and doubtless Satan disdained ‘em, as much as Goliath did David’s stones that he came out against him with. But with such weapons as these, Christ in a human, weak, mortal nature overthrew all the power and baffled all the craft of hell.⁴¹

For Edwards, the turning point in Christ’s story was his ascension, which was “the solemn day of his investiture with the glory of his kingdom ... an occasion of great rejoicing in the whole church in heaven and earth.”⁴² Edwards spoke of “the happy effects of Christ’s enthronization.”⁴³ In some sense, this “enthronization” at the ascension was a renewal of what had already taken place at creation: “At Christ’s first enthronization after the creation, Christ was set over the angels, as he was at the second after the new creation.”⁴⁴ At

Christ's exaltation, the Father declares, "let all the angels of God worship him" (Heb 1:6). For "it was very congruous that Christ should have this honor immediately, after such great humiliation and sufferings."⁴⁵ If it was fitting that Christ should be publicly rewarded after his sufferings; it was no less fitting and suitable that the angels should be rewarded at the same time. For Christ's trial and suffering were equally a trial to the angels who beheld it happening: "It was fit that the angels should be confirmed after they had seen Christ in the flesh, for this was the greatest trial of the angels' obedience that ever was."⁴⁶ In particular, the sight of him as "a poor, obscure, despised, afflicted man" was a trial to them.⁴⁷ Previously many angels had fallen at the mere announcement that this was to happen. Now it had occurred. This was a great trial to

those thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers ... [So] it was very fit that God should honor the day of the ascension and glorious exaltation of his Son, which was a day of such joy to Christ, with joining with it such an occasion of joy to the angels, as the reception of their reward of eternal life.⁴⁸

It sounds here almost as though the unfallen angels were receiving salvation because at this point they received "their reward of eternal life." Once again, Edwards sees the angelic relationship to God as analogous to the human.⁴⁹

Edwards considered the objection that the trial of the angels' obedience from the beginning of the world until the ascension of Christ may have lasted too long. Yet perhaps for "those mighty spirits" it was fitting that the trial should last much longer than it did for human beings.⁵⁰ Edwards admitted that the unfallen angels were not absolutely certain that they would not fall as Lucifer had until the time that they were confirmed. Yet, once Christ accomplished his work on earth, it was suitable that there should be a single community of humans and angels in a confirmed condition of beatitude:

Christ, since he appeared in the flesh, gathered together and united into one society, one family, one body, all the angels and saints in heaven and the church on earth. Now 'tis not to be supposed that part of this body are in a confirmed state, and part still in a state of probation. . . . [At the ascension] Christ is the head of the angels, and . . . the angels are united to him as part of his body.⁵¹

This means that Christ is not only “their head of government ... he is the head from whence they derive their good.”⁵²

The angels receive great benefit from Christ, and the sheer fact that the Son of God took on a creature nature—even a human one—is of great importance to the angels as fellow creatures:

And the angels enjoy very glorious benefits by Christ’s incarnation; ‘tis a glorious benefit to all creatures that love God, that God is become a creature ... The angels and saints make up but one family, through members of a different character; as in one royal house there is the queen, the children, the barons, etc. He is the head of all the rational creation; saints and angels are united in Christ, and have communion in him.⁵³

In describing the heavenly assembly of the glorified saints and the unfallen angels, Edwards emphasizes that they are spectators of God’s works—as becomes clear in the Book of Revelation: “When God gradually carries on the designs of grace in this world, by accomplishing glorious things in the church below, there is a new accession of joy and glory to the church in heaven. Thus the matter is represented in John’s Revelations.”⁵⁴

One might even say that the angels undergo “reconciliation” to God through the person and work of Christ, and this helps to explain their joy and exuberance at Christ’s birth:

When the angels rejoiced so much at the birth of Christ, they did not merely rejoice in the happiness of another that they were no wise partakers in, but doubtless saw glorious things that accrued to them by it. They desire to look into those things, admiring at the bounty of God to them as well as to us, in coming so near to them as to become a rational creature like themselves. Yea, there is a kind of reconciliation, that is procured thereby for the angels by Christ’s incarnation: for though there never was an alienation, yet there is a great distance between a God of infinite majesty and them; which would in some measure forbid that infinite enjoyment, and familiar fellowship, which so great love desires. But by God’s thus coming down to the creature, everything is entirely reconciled to the natural propensity of most dear love.⁵⁵

What Edwards describes here is a kind of metaphysical reconciliation of the

unfallen angels to God—though not a moral one involving guilt and forgiveness. Because of God’s drawing near to the creature in the incarnation, both humans and angels are drawn near to God in most dear love.

Initially, Edwards believes perseverance was an essential prerequisite for the confirmation of the angels. He seems to postpone this confirmation until the ascension of Christ back into heaven after his death and resurrection. According to Edwards, God reserved the angels in a “state of trial,” from the time of the angelic fall until the ascension of Christ. This lengthy period of, what is considered probation, guaranteed the angels had a comprehensive trial regarding their obedience before their final confirmation. Specifically, the angels were not confirmed until after they had viewed Christ in the flesh, for this was, Edwards believed, the greatest trial of obedience for the angels.⁵⁶ Edwards writes of the unfallen angels’ resistance of the great temptation that resulted in the fall of Lucifer and a multitude of other angels, which is examined in the next chapter:

The fall of the angels that fell, was a great establishment and confirmation to the angels that stood. They resisted a great temptation by which the rest fell, whatever that temptation was, and they resisted the enticement of the ringleaders which drew away multitudes; and the resisting and overcoming great temptation, naturally tends greatly to confirm in righteousness. And probably they had been engaged on God’s side, in resisting those that fell, when there was war, rebellion raised in heaven against God.⁵⁷

This great temptation that drew Lucifer and other angels to fall created a great divide in heaven, causing some angels to be on one side and some on the other. Because of the opposition of some to the fall, these “naturally tended to confirm their friendship to God.”⁵⁸ These unfallen angels saw the wrath of God unleashed upon those who rebelled and through this

learned more highly to prize God’s favor, by seeing the dreadfulness of his displeasure; they now saw more of the beauty of holiness, now they had the deformity of sin to compare it with ... [But] When their time of probation was at [an] end, and they had the reward of certain confirmation by having eternal life absolutely made certain to them, is uncertain.⁵⁹

He employs some speculative language in writing that it looked “exceeding probable” to him, “that whenever this was done (the confirmation of the unfallen angels), it was through the Son of God; that he was the immediate dispenser of this reward, and that they received it of the Father through him.”⁶⁰ Edwards continues to flesh out his argument by pointing to the ascension of Christ as the time of the confirmation of all unfallen angels. In addition, he gives five reasons as to why he views this as the period of their confirmation:

1. It was Jesus Christ in the human nature that was despised and rejected by the rebelling angels; it was congruous therefore, that it should be Jesus Christ in the human nature that should confirm them that stood.
2. It was also congruous that their confirmation should be deferred till that time; that before they were confirmed, they might have a thorough trial of their obedience in that particular wherein the rebelling angels were guilty, viz. in their submission to Jesus Christ in the human nature. It was congruous therefore, that their confirmation should be deferred, till they had actually submitted to Christ in man’s nature as their King; as they had opportunity to do when Christ in man’s nature ascended into heaven. And,
3. It seems very congruous that this should be reserved to be part of Christ’s exaltation. We often read of Christ’s being set over the angels, when he ascended and sat at the right hand [of God]; and that then he was made head of all principality and power, that then all things were put under his feet, that then God the Father said, “Let all the angels of God worship him” [Hebrews 1:6]. It was very congruous that Christ should have this honor immediately, after such great humiliation and sufferings. And,
4. It was fit that the angels should be confirmed after they had seen Christ in the flesh, for this was the greatest trial of the angels’ obedience that ever was. If the other angels rebelled only at its being foretold that such an one in man’s nature should rule over them, if that was so great a trial that so many angels fell in it; how great a trial was [it] when they saw a poor, obscure, despised, afflicted man, and when they had just seen [him] so mocked and spit upon, and crucified and put to death, like a vile malefactor! This was a great trial to those thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, those mighty glorious and exalted spirits, whether or no they would submit to such an one for their sovereign Lord and King.
5. It was very fit that God should honor the day of the ascension and glorious exaltation of his Son, which was a day of such joy to Christ, with joining with it

such an occasion of joy to the angels, as the reception of their reward of eternal life; that when Christ rejoices, who had lately endured so much sorrow, the heavenly hosts might rejoice with him.

6. The angels are now confirmed, and hence have been since Christ's ascension; for Christ, since he appeared in the flesh, gathered together and united into one society, one family, one body, all the angels and saints in heaven and the church on earth. Now 'tis not to be supposed that part of this body are in a confirmed state, and part still in a state of probation.⁶¹

This work of confirmation is undoubtedly accomplished by Christ. Edwards notes, "We learn by Scripture: that Christ is the head of the angels, and that the angels are united to him as part of his body. Which holds forth, that he is not only their head of government, but their head of communication; he is the head from whence they derive their good."⁶²

Edwards raises some objections to the suggestion that the angels were kept until the ascension of Christ before they were confirmed. The first objection he raises is the length of time from the period of the angelic rebellion until the ascension of Christ. His answer suggests that this length of time was in fact a trial the angels were forced to endure.⁶³ Second, building on the length of time, Edwards raises the objection that

the angels could not enjoy that quiet and undisturbed happiness for all that while, if they were all the time unconfirmed, and did not certainly know that they should not fall ... There was no occasion for any disresting fears. For they never could be guilty of rebellion without knowing, when they were going to commit it, that it was rebellion, and that thereby they should forfeit eternal life and expose themselves to wrath, by the tenor of God's covenant. And they could not fall, but it must be their voluntary act; and they had perfect freedom of mind from any lust, and had been sufficiently warned and greatly confirmed when the angels fell: so that there was a great probability that they should not fall, though God had not yet declared and promised absolutely that they should not. They were not absolutely certain of it; this was an occasion of joy reserved for that joyful and glorious day of Christ's ascension.⁶⁴

Edwards suggests that the unfallen angels, from the angelic rebellion until the ascension of Christ, were in trial and unconfirmed for eternal joy. In fact, they were not certain that they would not too fall like their fellow creatures had

done at the insurrection of Lucifer and his minions. This trial of uncertainty was the “occasion of joy” that God “reserved” for that “glorious day of Christ’s ascension.”⁶⁵ Here is another aspect of glory and joy reserved for Christ at his enthronement at the time of the ascension; namely, the confirmation of the angels, who would rejoice greatly that they were confirmed for eternal joy in the presence of God and their King, Jesus Christ.

Offering pastoral application of this theological truth, Edwards recognizes that God has been gracious toward angels and men in Christ being “the tree of life in the heavenly paradise,” who is also the tree “to all the inhabitants of that paradise.”⁶⁶ In addition, Edwards highlights the manifold wisdom of God who demonstrates that the “dispensations of providence in Christ’s incarnation, death, and exaltation” are the means through which glorious and wonderful ends “are accomplished by the same events in heaven, earth, and hell.”⁶⁷ Edwards pulls that single thread of redemptive history showing how God’s wisdom and works accomplish marvelous wonders in that tri-world narrative of which he is so interested. Edwards also demonstrates how “the affairs of the church on earth and of the blessed assembly of heaven are linked together.”⁶⁸ He writes,

When the joyful times of the gospel begin on earth, which begin with Christ’s exaltation, then joyful times begin also in heaven amongst the angels there, and by the same means. When we have such a glorious occasion given us to rejoice, they have an occasion given them. So long as the church continued under a legal dispensation, so long the angels continued under law; for since their confirmation, the angels are not under law, as is evident by what I have said in my note on Galatians 5:18.⁶⁹ So doubtless at the same time, there was a great addition to the happiness of the separate spirits of the saints, as the resurrection of many of them with Christ’s resurrection is an argument. And in the general, when God gradually carries on the designs of grace in this world, by accomplishing glorious things in the church below, there is a new accession of joy and glory to the church in heaven.⁷⁰

Affirming this with Scripture, Edwards points to Colossians 1:16-20, “that it was the design of the Father that his Son should have the preeminence in all things, not only with respect to men, but with respect to angels, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers.”⁷¹ He argues from these verses that if Christ has the preeminence with respect to angels, that he created them,

that they consist by him, that he is the dispenser of God's benefits to them, that they have all fullness in him, then why should he also not be the one to give them eternal life? It is God's will, Edwards writes, that the Son "in all things should have preeminence, and that all fullness should dwell in him," and therefore, "by him he reconciles all things to him[self], whether they be things in heaven or things on earth."⁷² If this preeminence extends to the world of men, Edwards argues that it also extends to the world of angels: "By him the angels also are brought to their confirmed union with him."⁷³ It was the design of the Father that Christ should in "all things" dwell in preeminence, in respect to both angels as well as humanity, and that angels and humans should possess their fullness only in him. Therefore, if men have their fullness in Christ, Edwards states, "I don't see how it can be otherwise, than they should have their reward and eternal life and blessedness in him."⁷⁴ Another text employed by Edwards is 1 Corinthians 8:6, which says that all things are of God the Father, and all things by Jesus Christ. He writes,

God gave the angels their being by Jesus Christ; and I don't see why this would not be another instance of all things being by him, that he gives them their eternal life by Jesus Christ. This is one instance of men's being by him, and is intended in those words that follow, "and we by him."⁷⁵

God gives to his Son all things and over all things the Son has preeminence, including both angels and men, granting eternal life.

The angels were judged and rewarded at the ascension of Christ. However, they do not arrive at their full reward until after the day of judgment, "as the devils don't on their punishment, and as the saints don't receive their complete reward on their first being with their ascended Savior and with the angels."⁷⁶ Edwards argues that all who are in Christ are in a confirmed state of holiness and happiness, which first began at his ascension and extends to the present. Edwards writes, "The saints, when they first go to be with Christ in glory, are then judged; and their reward is adjudged to them and bestowed upon them in degree, as it was with the angels at Christ's ascension," but, Edwards points out, "they shall be judged again and more fully rewarded at the day of judgment, and so it shall be also with the angels."⁷⁷ The final day of the judgment of God will be universal for all men, angels, and devils. Regarding the saints, Edwards says that they will be judged again

at that final tribunal “not because their state is not already determined, but to make God’s righteousness in their justification manifest before the whole universe convened, and for their more public honor,” he adds the same is true for the unfallen angels.⁷⁸

Edwards paints a portrait of this day as one of both celebration and lament. Celebration for those who in Christ and lament for those in rebellion against him. The reason saints and angels will appear before the final seat of judgment, Edwards explains, is to make an open show before the assembled cosmos of the glory of Christ in them as the ones rescued by his love and grace and now “his joy and crown.”⁷⁹ This day “will be a day wherein Christ and his saints and angles rejoice together in a most glorious [manner]; and from henceforth will they rejoice together in their most consummate joy, before the Father, forever.”⁸⁰

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1. Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies No. 515,” in *WJE*, vol. 18, *The Miscellanies*, 501–832, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 60.
 2. Mark Noll, *American’s God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 22.
 3. Noll, *American’s God*, 22–23.
 4. Jonathan Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in *WJE*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 792.
 5. Noll, *American’s God*, 23.
 6. *Ibid.*
 7. Karl Rahner writes, “Angelology ... can only ultimately be understood as an inner element of Christology.” Karl Rahner, ed., “Angels,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (ed. Karl Rahner; New York: Crossroad, 1982), 6.
 8. Keck explains, “The three events of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels ... constitute the essential point of departure for understanding the angels.” David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16.
 9. Jonathan Edwards, “No. 1: Sermon One March 1739,” in *WJE*, vol. 9, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (ed. John F. Wilson; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 116.
 10. Edwards, “No. 1: Sermon One March 1739,” in *WJE*, 9:116–17.
 11. Harry Stout, “Preface to the Period,” in Jonathan Edwards, *WJE*, vol. 22, *Sermons and Discourses, 1739–1742* (ed. Harry S. Stout; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 11.
 12. Stout explains, “The most obvious difference was the sheer length of the series. Earlier sermon series, save for Charity and Its Fruits, encompassed only three or four sermons. In his 1739 series, Edwards strove for something more comprehensive and complex than could be contained in a few sermons. Moreover, each of these sermons was structurally incomplete—a Doctrine without an Application, or an Application without a Use. Entire preaching units functioned as mere parts of a traditional sermon rather than as self-contained entities complete unto themselves. Thus, text and doctrine were explicated in Sermon 1, “reasons” in the form of historical epochs from the fall to incarnation in Sermons 2 through 20, an Application in Sermons 21 through 25, and an “Improvement” in Sermons 29 and 30.” (Stout, “Preface to the Period,” in *WJE*, 22:11).
 13. Stout, “Preface to the Period,” in *WJE*, 22:13.
 14. Edwards, “No. 1: Sermon One March 1739,” in *WJE*, 9:118–19.
 15. Edwards, “The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth,” in *WJE*, 22:93.

16. Ibid., 22:99.
17. Ibid., 22:91.
18. Edwards, "Children Ought to Love the Lord Jesus Christ Above All," in *WJE*, 22:172.
19. Ibid., 22:178.
20. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 555," in *WJE*, 18:99.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. ii," in *WJE*, vol. 13, *The Miscellanies, a–500* (ed. Thomas A. Schafer; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 271. xford, Oxford University Press, 2011),
26. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. ii," in *WJE*, 13:271.
27. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 103," in *WJE*, 13:271.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 1098," in *WJE*, vol. 20, *The Miscellanies, 833–1152* (ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 485.
31. See the following sermons—listed with text, doctrine, and approximate dates of delivery: Canticles (Song of Songs) 8:1, "The incarnation of Jesus Christ was a thing greatly longed for by the church," summer–fall 1729; Job 33:6–7, "Tis a most desirable thing in our circumstances, to have a Mediator between God and us in our own nature, one that is flesh, that is formed out of the clay as we are," fall 1730–spring 1731; Isa 53:10, "That Christ should see sinners converted and saved, was part of the reward that God promised him for his sufferings," August 1731–December 1732; Rev 5:12, "Christ was worthy of his exaltation upon the account of his being slain," August 1731–December 1732; Ps 110:2, "Christ will rule in the midst of his enemies," May 1733. See also Jonathan Edwards, "Section Title," in *WJE*, vol. 15, *Notes on Scripture*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (1998), 298–302, for a detailed typological interpretation of David's brining of the ark to Jerusalem as a picture of Christ's ascension.
32. Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 287.
33. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 442," in *WJE*, 13:490.
34. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 937," in *WJE*, 20:197.
35. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 555," in *WJE*, 18:100.
36. Edwards, "Sermon Twenty-One," in *WJE*, 9:504–5.
37. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 664b," in *WJE*, 18:202.
38. Ibid., 18:206.
39. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 618," in *WJE*, 18:151.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 833," in *WJE*, 20:48.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 515," in *WJE*, 18:59.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. See Ava Chamberlain's comments on the analogies between humans and angels in Ava Chamberlain, "Editor's Introduction," in *WJE*, 18:20–23.
50. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 515," in *WJE*, 18:60.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 120," in *WJE*, 13:284.
54. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 515," in *WJE*, 18:62.
55. Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 120," in *WJE*, 13:285. Cf. *WJE*, 13:232–33; *WJE*, 13:480–81. Edwards used a number of interesting exegetical arguments to support his idea that angels and humans are "of the same family." He pointed out that in Rev 22:9 an angel says to John that he is "of thy brethren." Edwards, "Miscellanies, No. 555," in *WJE*, 18:100. Though this is only a passing reference, it is one case

in Scripture where human beings and angels are spoken of together as “brethren.” On this same theme, Edwards also cites Eph 1:10, where God will “gather together in one all things in Christ,” and Col 1:20, where God will “reconcile all things unto himself ... whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” See too the sermon on 1 Tim 2:5, “Jesus Christ is the Great Mediator and Head of Union,” in Michael D. McMullen, ed., *The Glory and Honor of God: Volume 2 of the Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (Nashville: B&H, 2004), 311-26.

56. Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 515,” in *WJE*, 18:58.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, 18:59-60.
62. *Ibid.*, 18:60.
63. *Ibid.*, 18:59.
64. *Ibid.*, 18:60.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*, 18:61.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*
69. The “Blank Bible” note on Gal 5:18 is a cross-reference to “Notes on Scripture,” no. 196. All references to “Notes on Scripture” designate the four-volume series of “Scripture” notebooks compiled by Edwards over the course of his ministry. For the text of no. 196, see Jonathan Edwards, *WJE*, vol. 15, *Notes on Scripture*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (1998), 108-15.
70. Edwards, in *WJE*, 18:61.
71. *Ibid.*, 18:106.
72. Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 570,” in *WJE*, 18:106.
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*
76. Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 664b,” in *WJE*, 18:209.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*
79. *Ibid.*, 18:210.
80. *Ibid.*