

Spurgeon on Angels: The Baptist Connection

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Spurgeon served as a minister of the gospel in the context of the Baptist denomination in England. Until Spurgeon was fourteen years old, he had not even heard of a people called “Baptists.” When he did hear of them, the report was not favorable. Whether his parents believed that Baptists were bad people, he could not recall, but he noted, “I certainly did think so; and I cannot help feeling that, somewhere or other I must have heard some calumnies against them, or else how should I have that opinion?”¹

Baptists arose within the context of ecclesiological discussion of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in English Puritanism. These discussions created a distinct movement that advocated a complete separation from Anglicanism, with the goal of congregationalist polity and purity in membership. Within that framework, some adopted the principle that

purity of congregational church life could only be established and maintained through the baptism of believers only. Two streams developed in this context, an Arminian group soon known as General Baptists that can be traced to the influence of John Smyth in 1609, and a Calvinist group soon known as Particular Baptists which emerged in several congregations from within and independent paedobaptist congregation. Both of these groups suffered together, went to prison together, and were alike harassed in their attempts to worship. Their humble attempts to confess, preach, and worship in believing congregations were periodically, and sometimes with brutal aggression, interrupted under the power of a variety of laws that sought to eliminate independency and establish an absolute unity of church and state.

The theological position of both groups was clearly described in confessions of faith, most notably the Orthodox Confession of the General Baptists (1660) and the Second London Confession of the Particular Baptists (1677; renewed 1689). Both confessions, to the degree that their respective theological positions would allow it, owed much of their order, doctrinal formulation, and actual wording to the Westminster Confession of Faith. General Baptists suffered theological decline under the influence of Socinianism and Quakerism while Particular Baptists, remaining confessionally orthodox, fell into hyper-Calvinism in several of their associations. The General Baptists experienced some degree of revival and formed a New Connection in 1770 under the influence of Dan Taylor. Due to the conscientiously pursued theological pilgrimage of Andrew Fuller (d. 1815) and the global evangelistic compassion of William Carey (d. 1834, the year of Spurgeon's birth) the grip of hyper-Calvinism was broken among the Particular Baptists. They became leaders both in homeland evangelism and foreign missions. In the wake of these changes, Baptists found themselves divided into Old Connection, New Connection, Strict Baptists, Gospel Standard Baptists, and Baptist Union Baptists.

Spurgeon's Baptist convictions arose in conversation with an Anglican tutor when Spurgeon attended school at Maidstone. Spurgeon was reared under the powerful influence of two devoted Congregational ministers, his father and his grandfather, who practiced and argued doctrinally for infant baptism. In school at Maidstone, the teacher, while working through the Anglican catechism, learned that Spurgeon's father and grandfather were independent ministers and that Spurgeon had been baptized by his

grandfather, in a parlor, as an infant, and without sponsors. Since his grandfather performed the ceremony, it did not bother Spurgeon since “all infants ought to be baptized,” so he had learned. Seizing the opportunity to pick what he thought was low-hanging fruit, the clergyman-teacher sought to convince Spurgeon that his baptism was false but that of the Church of England was true. The Congregationalists baptize infants without sponsors to profess their faith vicariously, while Anglicans baptize infants with sponsors who pledge their faith for them and also denounce the devil and all his ways. After a week of study, Spurgeon concluded that neither his nor the Anglican’s doctrine was consistent with the New Testament (NT). He stated his conclusion to his teacher, with the additional application that he had already been baptized once wrongly, and he would “wait next time till I am fit for it.” At that moment he resolved “that if ever Divine grace should work a change in me, I would be baptized.”² Spurgeon’s eventual conversion in 1850 led to his baptism in the river Lark and, according to his testimony, a loss of all shyness in speaking the gospel.

When attending school in Cambridge, Spurgeon became a member of a Baptist church formerly served by Robert Robinson, author of “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” As a participant in a lay preachers’ association, Spurgeon soon became pastor of a Baptist church at Waterbeach when he was sixteen years old. The news of this boy preacher and the transformation of the town through his preaching soon made rounds among the churches of the Baptist community. After two and one-half years there, Spurgeon moved to London to become pastor of the New Park Street Baptist Church.

The origin of his church extended back to the seventeenth century. Some of the most productive persons in Baptist life had served the church as pastor. Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), who began his ministry as a General Baptist and served as a pastor of a General Baptist church in Southwark, became a Calvinist around 1672. Several of the members of that church joined him to form a church at Goat Yard, Horsleydown. Another church broke from Keach’s when he introduced congregational singing as a regulated part of corporate worship. His son-in-law, Benjamin Stinton joined him as a co-pastor in 1697. Keach died in 1704 and Stinton stayed as pastor until his death in 1719. The church split when the men refused to allow the women to vote for the new pastor in 1720. The faction that split had called John Gill as pastor and returned to meet in the Goat Yard meeting house. Gill died in

1771 after fifty-one years of ministry and was succeeded by John Rippon in 1773. The church moved to New Park Street in 1833 and Rippon died in 1836. Rippon was followed by Joseph Angus as pastor through 1841 when James Smith succeeded him for ten years. William Walters came in 1851, served for a couple of years, and was succeeded by the nineteen year old Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

He came into London Particular Baptist life at a time when there was amicable fellowship among the Baptist churches, but elements of doctrinal flattening, even decline, were rising to the surface. There was a drive toward unity between General and Particular Baptists which involved changes in the practice of communion toward a greater openness and also frequent pulpit exchange between the two groups. This means that the Calvinism espoused was beginning to marginalize some of the distinctive soteriological points of doctrine. A greater emphasis was being placed on the common ecclesiological affirmations of believer's baptism, regenerate church membership, liberty of conscience, and the right of private interpretation. Spurgeon's clear and bold articulation of the doctrines of grace as constituting the gospel, his criticism of Arminianism immediately made him the target of rapt attention and tasteless, vindictive criticism. Throughout his ministry, Spurgeon would note the increase of this decline and how it began to engulf some of the central doctrines of orthodoxy and the inspiration of Scripture. Though he had attempted to establish fellowship with sound believers of wide confessional traditions, his conscience would not permit him to compromise those elements of vital truth upon which the glory of God and the eternal destiny of sinners rested. When he initiated a public stand against this noticeable decline, he began, in 1887, what became known as the "Downgrade Controversy." This dominated the final four and one-half years of his ministry.

PREACHING ABOUT ANGELS

Spurgeon believed that, according to Hebrews 12:22, angels exist in such abundance that humans have no categories by which to calculate their numbers. They are great in multitude, an "innumerable company of angels." From the original number of angels God created, a host fell following the lead of a beautiful angel whose intellect exceeded that of all the other creatures. Satan "occupied a very high place in the hierarchy of angels before he fell; and we

know that those mighty beings are endowed with vast intellectual powers, far surpassing any that has ever been given to beings in the human mould.”³ Other angels, called elect angels, were kept from rebellion and confirmed finally by the mediatorial work of Christ. These elect angels exist in such abundance because their purpose includes an inexhaustible combination of activities consisting of wonder, worship, and work. They wonder at the transcendent wisdom of God and his unsearchable glory in the execution of his purposes. They worship endlessly for they are consistently in the presence of the Triune God’s impenetrable holiness, the very essence of inexhaustible beauty. They work and consistently do his bidding within the fabric of his covenant of redemption serving the mission of the Savior and aiding the elect for whom he died.

Having isolated Spurgeon’s theology of angels to these three areas, this paper will explore first his understanding of the work of angels, then the worship in which angels engage, and then their intellectual absorption that produces wonder.

The Work of Angels

This vast multitude of the heavenly servants of God are on the side of believers. Spurgeon pointed out that angels “have often been messengers of God’s will to the sons of men,” and in so doing “have never shown any reluctance.”⁴ The opposite, in fact is true. Their joy has been great “to bear God’s tidings down from heaven to earth,” a task seen in various stages throughout redemptive history from the entrance to Eden to the Apocalypse of John. Angels consist of a “great army of the Lord of hosts,” largely unseen in everyday life “forces that are not discernible’ except when they take on a visible form or “by the eye of faith.”⁵

Though sinless, “their sympathy even with fallen men, with men who have grievously sinned and gone astray, is shown by the fact that they ‘rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.’” Though they are spirits of pure intelligence unhindered by the clogs of space and matter, “they have sympathy with us in this poor heavy laden bark, tossed with tempest and not comforted.”⁶

There is a guard of angels that always surrounds every believer. Spurgeon surmised that It may be that every star is a world, “thronged with the servants of God, who are willing and ready to dart like flames of fire upon Jehovah’s errands of love.” Should the forces available in one world be insufficient for

the protection of a saint, “he has but to speak or will, and myriads of spirits from the far-off regions of space would come thronging forward to guard the children of their king.”⁷ An angel appeared to Joseph to give “assurance that Mary had not sinned” for God “would not leave the honour of the chosen virgin-mother without protection.” When the Angel told Joseph to flee into Egypt, Spurgeon remarked, “Angels were busy in those days, for they had special charge of their Royal Master.” And when informed it was safe to return to Israel, Spurgeon exclaimed, “Angels again! Yes, and they are busy still around ‘the beloved of the Lord.’”⁸

They are all filled with power. Spurgeon reminded his hearers of the devastation caused by the insects that are at the command of Jehovah, saying that “none can resist them, and nothing can escape them ... If such be the case with insects, what must be the power of angels?”⁹

All these angels work in order, for it is God’s host, and the host is made up of beings which march or fly, according to the order of command. Every angel works within his proper order even as nature itself is arrayed according to its given purpose and power. None even contemplates that rebellion would produce a happier or more useful state of being. These unfallen intelligent agents do not “mutiny against divine decrees, but find their joy in rendering loving homage to their God.” Their perfect happiness arises from their perfect consecration. Angels under the command of God and in service to men are “full of delight, because completely absorbed in doing the will of the Most High.”¹⁰

Not only are they ordered according to God’s decrees, but they are all “punctual to the divine command.” To Jacob they were there in the very moment when he needed assurance (Gen 32: 1, 2). “When God means to deliver you, beloved, in the hour of danger,” Spurgeon applied the narrative, “you will find the appointed force ready for your succour. God’s messengers are neither behind nor before in their time; they will meet us to the inch and to the second in the time of need.” Given such a host of obedient powerful ones at the command of God, and called to be our guardians, let us proceed without fear.

Because so many of these heavenly helpers appeared to Jacob at a time of fear and dread, we conclude that angels are sent to meet the needs of one individual saint, no matter what his flaws, for he is beloved of God. “Squadrons of angels marched to meet that one lone man.” Spurgeon found delight in

considering that “the angels should be willing, and even eager, troops of them, to meet one man.” Only gross misperception could produce that vain humility and “worshipping of angels which Paul so strongly condemns. Worshipping them seems far out of the question; the truth lies rather the other way, for they do us suit and service.” Surely one can see this is true when Scripture asserts, “Are they not ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that are the heirs of salvation?” God has said, first to the Only-Begotten, and then to every believer in Christ, “they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” As we are the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty, these ministering ones have the same charge concerning us.¹¹

Spurgeon also noted that “these forces, though in themselves invisible to the natural senses, are manifest to faith at certain times.” In the company of Laban, Jacob, “the heir of the promises was becoming a man of the world.” The security was stifling and joy was in the present, not in the promise. Jacob left and took up a tent-life. He had to become one who was seeking a city. The loss of companions and apparent stability, even in the shadow of the churlish Laban, was more than compensated by the “innumerable company of angels” that ministered to him. Spurgeon quoted, “Verily, I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children or lands, for my sake, but he shall receive and hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.” The brotherhood of angels compensates in an exorbitant way for any loss of earthly companions and so-called stable society.

In a moment of dread, Jacob lost sight of the company of angels that had come to accompany him. So might we at times, for like him, we are weak and given to magnify our distress and minimize the promise of power that is on our side. At the point of the greatest dread, however, these companions will not leave us; we glory not in them nor in their presence, but we glory only in God and in the reality of heaven’s being the place of his undiminished beauty. On the way there, however, he shows us that we do indeed have the company of glorious beings, an “innumerable company of angels.” Spurgeon contemplated that moment.

The angels of God and the God of angels, both come to meet the spirits of the blessed in the solemn article of death. Have we not ourselves heard of divine

revelings from dying lips? Have we not heard the testimony so often, too, that it could not have been an invention and a deception? Have not many loved ones given us assurance of a glorious revelation which they never saw before? Is there not a giving of new sight when the eyes are closing? Yes, O heir of glory, the shining ones shall come to meet you on the river's brink, and you shall be ushered into the presence of the Eternal by those bright courtiers of heaven, who on either side shall be a company of dear companions when the darkness is passing, and the glory is streaming over you. Be of good cheer: if you see not the hosts of God now you shall see them hereafter, when the Jordan shall be reached, and you cross over to the promised land."¹²

Angels in Their Worship

As Spurgeon meditated on the appearance and activities of the Seraphim in Isaiah, he pointed to them as a model of Christian service. The work that angels were appointed to do, they did promptly and with gladness for the atmosphere they breathed, the source of their life was worship. "There were they, waiting to know his pleasure, on the wing ready for any errand, and adoring while they waited." These two things summarized his understanding of unvarnished Christian service. We worship and we are ready for errand. Our desire consists simply of His pleasure. We wait on him and his command. While we wait, we adore. In fact, because we adore, we wait. No impatience intrudes on the pleasure of adoration, and adoration prompts immediate and energetic obedience.

Spurgeon remarked, looking at the text, "They dwell near the Lord, and even so should we; he is their centre and their bliss, even so should he be ours." Noting a connection between Psalm 104:4, Hebrews 1:7 and this text, Spurgeon observed, "These courtiers of the great king were creatures of fire, ablaze with ardour; all flowing and shining they worship him," and added, "Jehovah, who is a consuming fire, can only fitly be served by those who are on fire, whether they be angels or men." There is no room for lukewarmness in service of the great and holy God, for such awkward and incommensurate hesitation will be spewed out or burned up. "If we become lethargic and soulless we shall not be counted worthy to be employed on divine errands." Like John the Baptist, we should pray that God will make us a "burning and shining light."¹³

Reflecting on the appearance of these heavenly beings with six wings—it is a vision and thus filled with symbolism—we reflect that God’s servants are full of motion, full of life. “Some that I know,” Spurgeon reminded his people, “who profess to serve the Lord seem to have no wing at all, but are stolid and inactive, more like a sloth than the seraph, having more weight than wing.”¹⁴ These seraphim were ready to fly at the Lord’s bidding, while they waited they were in motion—already flying while hovering near the throne anticipating a command that would effect some necessary element of the covenantal purpose of God. They were “ready to fly upon the Lord’s business with a mighty swiftness.” Their readiness shows how pure spirits regard the service of God and should not tolerate in themselves a lingering or loitering spirit.¹⁵

But while flying and ready with six wings, they also show “prudence and discretion.” From them we learn that “we shall serve God best when we are most deeply reverend and humbled in his presence.” Two wings were on the ready for flight, but four were involved in humble submission and adoration. Their readiness for service does not make them flippant or agitated, but content to hover in the divine presence with “humble shamefacedness and awe.” Their perfect symmetry must serve as a standard for us, “the union of worship with work in due proportions.” They cannot even gaze upon the “dazzling brightness of Jehovah’s throne,” while they “adore with veiled countenance.” From their posture, we learn that “veneration must be in larger proportion than vigour, adoration must exceed activity.” “The covering of the face,” Spurgeon contended, “is as needful as the flight.”¹⁶

In addition, though unfallen creatures, they recognize still their creaturely state even in their created beauty and privileged calling. “The seraph remembers that even though sinless, he is yet a creature, and therefore he conceals himself in token of his nothingness and unworthiness in the presence of the thrice holy one.” Referring to the contrast between Mary and Martha and the comment of Jesus, Spurgeon made application, “As Mary at Jesus’ feet was preferred to Martha and her much serving, so must sacred reverence take the first place, and energetic service follow in due course.” We are thus ready for every good word and work, filled with divine enthusiasm, the special gift and work of the Holy Spirit. At the same time winged with sacred energy, the Spirit will make us “humble in mind, removing from us all vain curiosity.” With such help, “we shall not attempt to gaze with uncovered eye on the

great Incomprehensible, and taking away all unhallowed presumption, so that we use no proud bravado, but cover our feet in the solemn presence of the Holy One.”¹⁷

We learn also from these heavenly creatures that worship never ends, exaltation of the Lord of hosts never leaves the mind or the mouth. From them came forth a “perpetual song” that lauded his intrinsic attributes, his perfect power and right to command, his purpose of creation to manifest his glory. The angelic beings in their song teach us to find no fault in his dispensations. He is holy in creation, providence, and redemption. In constant worship and adoration, they harbored no doubt of his goodness and worthiness. Taking their intuitive propensity for worship as the very atmosphere within which all other responses developed and from which every duty was performed, Spurgeon prayed that such a sense of divine holiness would settle on his congregation. “If thou wilt do this,” Spurgeon implored the Lord as he preached, “we shall be a tabernacle full of worshippers first, and of workers afterwards, and shall cheerfully adore thee and labour for thee.”¹⁸

The angels also sing, not only of his holiness, but of his strength and authority. As Lord of hosts, Jehovah not only has “legions of angels to do his bidding,” but everything else in all creation. The whole earth is full of his glory, for he has made the earth to be a display of his legitimate authority over all things. “Hosts of intelligences wait his call; all forces of nature, animate and inanimate, march at his command; from the crash of thunder to the flight of an insect all things are at his beck. Hosts of birds migrate at his direction, hosts of fishes swarm the sea at his call, hosts of locusts and caterpillars devour the fields at his order.” The angels, as creatures of the highest intelligence and purest combination of affections and will, see well how all other things beneath them are commandeered by the Lord to serve his holy purpose and serve his great cause of redemption.¹⁹

Though angels have no part in the atoning sacrifice in the sense of being cleansed from guilt, perhaps they are not totally unaffected by redemption. Spurgeon believed that by Christ’s mediation, it is possible that “confirmed them in their holiness, so that by no means shall they ever be tempted or led into sin in the future.”²⁰ In addition, through this creature, redeemed and made holy, the number of their former fellow angels who had fallen would be completed. A creature combining spirit and matter should “occupy the place which fallen angels had left vacant.”²¹

Spurgeon believed that, in spite of their apparently superior position in creation, the angels would in the end be subservient to redeemed men. In Christ, redeemed men will have all things placed under their feet, including those unfallen heavenly creatures. Redeemed sinners shall serve him with an adoration that far excels that of any other being. “Angels cannot love so much as we shall, for they have never tasted redeeming grace and dying love.”²² This wonder of redeeming fallen creatures constitutes another aspect of Spurgeon’s theology of angels.

The Wonder of Angels

Even with these effects, however, the entire matter of redemption is a wonder to angels. Commenting on 1 Peter 1:12, Spurgeon observed that “this divine revelation is of great interest to the holy angels before the throne of God; they stand gazing down as if they were trying to understand the wondrous mystery of redemption, and the great and glorious gospel of the grace of God.”²³ In a sermon on Ephesians 3:10, Spurgeon sought to tease out the ways in which the church manifests the “manifold wisdom of God” to the “principalities and powers in heavenly places.” For Spurgeon, that nomenclature referred doubtless to the angels. Through the church, that is, “the divine counsel and conduct in forming and perfecting the church,” angels may be instructed in the redemptive wisdom of God in a way “as they have never learned it before.” It is instructive that at both ends of the historic event that constituted redemption, angels are mentioned. At its head, Jesus was made “a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death,” and at its consummation Jesus has been set at the right hand of the Father “in the heavenly places far above all principality and power, and might and dominion.”²⁴

Spurgeon believed that angels, like men, are capable of unending growth in knowledge and that the effects of redemption would provide the raw material for expansion in knowledge throughout eternity. After an exposition of all the things that angels learned about God as they observed creation in its multifarious dimensions, he proposed that “with all the facility of observation, it seems that the angels have some parts of the wisdom of God to learn, and some lessons of heavenly science to study which creation cannot unfold to their view, to be ascertained and certified by them only through the transcendent work of redemption which the Lord has carried on in his church.”²⁵

Particularly, in the church, because of its complete indebtedness to God's eternal redemptive purpose, the principalities and power learn dimensions of the wisdom of God unavailable in any other format. Spurgeon believed that the angels looked at the matter of redemption and the calling and sanctifying of the church "step by step" and thus "acquired an insight into this manifold wisdom." He saw the angels above the mercy seat with wings outspread and peering down upon the golden lid as indicative of their wonder and holy inquisitiveness as to how the holy God would indeed forgive the fallen sons of men.²⁶

Though there is such a thing as sinful speculation and unholy inquisitiveness, the investigation of facts and objective reality in a step by step manner constitutes the way in which rational beings explore the wonders of revelation. "Certainly," Spurgeon noted, "among the children of men there is much pleasure in the getting of knowledge; the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold." Since the desire for knowledge is a good thing, the means of obtaining it is to be celebrated. Spurgeon continued, "As we gradually break up fresh ground, decipher that which is obscure, sift out analogies, solve difficulties, and follow out the tracks of history in one continuous line, our enjoyment rises to enthusiasm." So it is with the minds and the learning of angels. Many things are to be absorbed as the *ipse dixit* of divine revelation; some may be discerned through observation and synthesis. "Do you not think," Spurgeon asked, "that the angels perceived the manifold wisdom of God *now that they began to understand what man was and what man is?*" The angels, as intelligent communicating spirits, had observed the creation of matter and brute life, but a creature composed complexly of dust, spirit, intelligence, and bearing the image of the creator—a marvel of wisdom this was. But that such a creature would sin and then be redeemed and "exalted into a nearness of connection and intimacy of communion with the Great Father of Spirits"—this was infinitely "wise working."²⁷ That divine wisdom would be discerned particularly through the church.

The manner of this restoration was more mysterious still and shrouded in mystery. The restoration of the complex creature to fellowship is astounding, but the manner of it is a matter of infinite wonder. Restoration shines, but personal union is an explosion of infinite brightness. That the creator would become one person with the complex, and fallen, creature to accomplish this restoration could never have been foreseen or designed by any created

intelligence or wisdom but must be the secret of power and wisdom stored in eternity. As the purpose of God was opened piece by piece to these messengers of the coming events, Spurgeon does not view angelic questions and wonder as a matter of evil speculation but as natural intelligent inquisitiveness in the face of an indecipherable mystery. “Even while the mystery was unexplained,” Spurgeon remarked, “it was not for pure angelic minds to doubt; still their thoughts must have been full of marvel, and startling questions must have occurred to them.”²⁸

Then after proposing a series of questions that might occur to angelic minds about this startling union of God and man, Spurgeon reaffirmed, “It is therefore that the church becomes as a museum which angels may visit with ever expanding interest and ever-increasing delight.” How the incarnation, as proposed by deity, would lead to invincible humility for men rather than irrepressible pride startled the angels. “I talk of these things,” Spurgeon confessed, “feebly and superficially, but I am persuaded that this is a subject which angels can think of with enchantment, and as they think it over they see transparent proofs of the manifold wisdom of God.”²⁹

Further, as the angels considered that this conjunction of the Son of God with human nature for the purpose of redemption and, in such a way, the divine proclamation to the serpent in Eden was to be consummated, their sphere of understanding and adoring God’s wisdom expanded. That God’s eternal plan would produce the plainly counter-intuitive reality that the greatest dishonor to the triune God was to be the source of his greatest manifestation of wisdom transcends any refinements of reasoning. “The wisdom of God is clearly seen by angels in this, that though *God was dishonoured in this world by sin, that sin has redounded to his greater honour.*” Spurgeon referenced Augustine’s *felix culpa*, calling it “Happy thought.”³⁰

As these gradually disclosed revelations began to open in time and the angel announced and observed the conception in the virgin, and announced to shepherds “Good news of great joy, which shall be to all the people,” this coming to pass of events that had been predestinated, caused the angels to burst their bands of invisibility in praise. An entire multitude joined the announcing angel with a chorus that recognized more of the glory of God than hitherto they had observed, “Glory to God in the highest.” The “swell of music, how grand! The cadence of those simple words, how charming!” The angels discovered something of the wisdom of God “when they saw

that God thus tabernacled among men.” And how they accompanied him, ministered to him, strengthened him, heard him teach, saw him condescend to men of low estate, and dwell with sinlessness and identifying compassion on fallen sod “struck them with wonder.”³¹

Above all this, however, was the reality that all this wisdom, power, and glory was awaiting a greater display of the divine attributes in the griefs, torments, and dying of the Son of God. “The doctrine of substitution is a marvel which, if God had never revealed, none of us could by any possibility have discovered.”³² That he should stoop to die as a substitute “must have appeared utterly incomprehensible.”³³ His utterance, “It is finished,” opened another door of wonder and instruction to them and “perhaps they saw more clearly than before, how Christ by suffering put an end to our sufferings, and by being made a curse for us made us the righteousness of God in him.”³⁴

Another dimension of pondering depth was pressed on their minds “during the three days slumber” but their observation of the resurrection, their removal of the great stone, and their first word of the good news, “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” brought them from pondering depths to wondering heights.³⁵

Their announcing was not done, however, and the marvel of these events would yet achieve an advanced glory even in the denouement. Within days they saw him add to his rising from the dead his rising from the earth, and again they announce, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; that the king of glory may come in.” They met him and rode with him seeing him having finished his time of suffering now announced as the “Lord mighty in battle.”³⁶

In the application of this work and the actually bringing together of the people for whom the Savior died, the angels had more to observe, more to ponder, and more expansion of knowledge to add to their reasons for praise. In the multiplicity of ways in which the Holy Spirit brings people to salvation, a virtual kaleidoscope of inexhaustible patterns of beauty, the angels observe the particularity of each call to salvation. Borrowing from Jonathan Edwards’s concept of conversions being “very various yet bearing a great analogy,” Spurgeon noted that “in calling sinners to Christ, there is a singleness of purpose but no uniformity of means.”³⁷ Spurgeon saw evidence of God’s wisdom in the date, place, and means by which every soul is brought to Christ, and “angels will, no doubt, be able to perceive in every

conversion some singular marks of beautiful originality proceeding from the inexhaustible Artist of Grace, the Holy Spirit.”

So it is with every continuing work of the Spirit in conformity to the likeness of Christ, in perseverance under trial, and in fortitude under persecution so that “angels have almost envied them the ability of serving God in that sphere of suffering, and the possibility of bearing in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus.” So complete is the work and operating in conformity with such inexhaustible divine purpose that “in all the saints, through the history of their vocation and the development of their sanctification, angels can discern the manifold wisdom of God.”³⁸

And in the church of God itself, the “angels acquire increased knowledge.” There is no blissful ignorance in this case, for “knowledge increases the joy of the angels, ... because it makes them take a greater delight in God when they see how wise and gracious he is.” Angels “will be enriched by the society of the saints in heaven.” They love heaven and their happiness is increased by seeing other creatures having inexpressible joy in the glory of heaven. The incarnation did not only bring humanity into near fellowship with God but had the effect of bringing creaturehood itself closer. Angels, as unfallen creatures, also are promoted by the union of the Creator with the creature. Spurgeon remarked that “angels by inference seem to me interested in the honour that Jehovah has put on his works—the endowed works of his own formation.”³⁹

Again, they increase in their grasp of the beauty of God. Whereas before, they revered the splendor of his impeccable purity and holiness, Spurgeon asked, “Is it not possible that even they who erst did veil their faces with their wings in the presence of the Almighty, because the brightness was excessive, may now stand with unveiled faces and worship God in Christ?” In his eternal essential brightness, no creature can see God but in Christ we may gaze, wonder, contemplate, and increase in the knowledge of God. In the enfleshment of the Son of God, John testified that “we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Indeed, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ in a way that gave new insight into and submission to the law that was given through Moses. Consequently, though “No one has seen God at any time,” at the appearance of Christ as the only person who could redeem sinners, “the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him” (John 1:14-18). Now, because the

angels have observed the entirety of the redemptive events (“seen by angels” 1 Tim 3:16), their own vision of God increases in accord with the attributes revealed in the unity of justice and condescending mercy. They too find their confession of the glory of God the Father as in submission to the exalted and enthroned Savior. By this event also, the angels learn a deeper gratitude that they were preserved from falling. When they contemplate the price of redeeming fallen humanity they increase in their knowledge of gratitude for that status of being elect angels, not in a sense of pharisaical pride that they are not like the others, but in the sense of absolute indebtedness.⁴⁰

From the ways in which angels apply their intellects to the study of the church and learn to discern the manifold wisdom of God, should not the church itself learn to study these matters with a deeper and even angelic interest? We should prize the gospel above all “price, emolument, or honour.” Further, we should study it “because no science is equal to the wisdom of God in Christ revealed in his church.” Since “angels desire to look into these things,” we should “apply every faculty ... to acquire increasing knowledge of that which angels love to study.” Since we are joining such an august and exalted group of intelligent beings in this study, we should “never fear again the sneer of the man who calls the gospel folly.” “Ah! Ye sceptics, sciolists, and scoffers,” Spurgeon taunted, “we can well afford to let you rail; but you can ill afford to rail when angels are awed into wonder, and so would you if there were anything angelic about your temper, or anything of right wisdom in your attainments”⁴¹

Finally, Spurgeon looked upon the angels’ occupation with the gospel and the church as an indication of the terror involved in the rejection of such a profound manifestation of saving wisdom. “If it amazes angels to see how God saves, it must be a terrible destruction from which he saves them. That destruction is coming upon you; its dark shadows have already begun to gather round you. How great your folly to refuse a salvation so wise, to reject a Saviour so attractive as Jesus!”⁴²

1. *Autobiography*, 1:45.

2. *Autobiography*, 1: 34, 35.

3. *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia*, 15 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1977), 14:70. Hereinafter SEE.

4. Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 19670), 16:302. Hereinafter MTP.

5. SEE 1:245.

6. MTP 16: 302.
7. SEE 1:245.
8. Charles Spurgeon, *Commentary on Matthew* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 6, 12, 14.
9. SEE 1:246.
10. SEE 1:246.
11. SEE 1:247.
12. SEE 1:249.
13. SEE 11:95, 96.
14. SEE 11: 96.
15. SEE 11: 96.
16. SEE 11: 96.
17. SEE 11:96.
18. SEE 11:100.
19. SEE 11:97.
20. MTP 16: 301.
21. MTP 16: 304.
22. MTP 20:442.
23. SEE 13:303.
24. MTP 16:301.
25. MTP 16: 303.
26. MTP 16: 303.
27. MTP 16: 304, 305.
28. MTP 16:305.
29. MTP 16:306.
30. MTP 16: 306.
31. MTP 16:307.
32. MTP 16:306.
33. MTP 16:307.
34. MTP 16: 307, 308.
35. MTP 16:308.
36. MTP 16:308
37. MTP 16:308.
38. MTP 16: 309.
39. MTP 16:310.
40. MTP 16:310, 311.
41. MTP 16:311.
42. MTP 16:312.