

Ecclesiology And Angelology

The doctrine of the church and the doctrine of angels are separate studies in theory but in practice often overlap. The church is that heaven-bound society visible and present on earth, while angels are celestial beings whose home is not of this terrestrial orb. What is the nature then of their interaction? It is a tug-of-war of sorts: the church with her angelic allies versus the power of hell with all its cohorts. An exciting match up to be sure, yet we have been guaranteed the victory through our Victor, Jesus Christ! Taking a closer look at the participants of this battle will be the task at hand. This will involve identifying and explaining the characteristics of the church, and the work of angels, both heavenly and demonic.

The characteristics of the church as displayed in the New Testament are manifold and deserving of a voluminous work. Therefore, in this narrower study we shall concern ourselves with three characteristics that could be considered major signature marks in ecclesiology: fellowship, ordinances, and power.

Fellowship is the first and most basic element to the church. We are God's people, his children. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord. We have an innate connection. We have, and should have, above all else fellowship (Greek: *koinonia*). Jesus himself said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13: 35). In the early days the church didn't have a lot of theologians, apologists, para-church ministries, or tele-evangelists—but they did have a lot of love. In fact, they valued one another so much that the book of Acts tells us: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (2: 44, 45).

Ordinances are another defining mark of the church. Catholics have seven of them, most Protestants have two; but in the realm of biblical theology a good case can only be made for the latter figure, namely, water baptism and communion. The first mention of the church baptizing (assuming that the official beginning of the church was Pentecost) is in Acts 2: 41 at the conclusion of Peter's Pentecost sermon, it reads: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." This is an amazing passage of Scripture when you stop to think that churches today are scampering around putting on big events and trying to be "seeker sensitive," all for the purpose of increasing church attendance—but there you have good ol' Peter preaching a convicting, no-holds-barred message and what happens? A mega church is born, 3,000 people, all in one day! So much for modern day church growth principles! Anyways, the church went on baptizing, and it was recognized as a public declaration that a person really was what they claimed to be, a Christian. It also symbolized noble and transforming events: death to self, atonement, new birth, and resurrection power. Baptism was and still is today a common denominator in Christendom.

Capping off the characteristics distinct to the church is power. Without power the church would be nothing more than a philosophy, worldview, or Judaic heresy. But with it the church becomes God's elect. We become his hands and feet, ready to do his awesome bidding. It is because of power that souls are saved, lives are sanctified, and bondages are sundered. Praise God that the church has power! It separates us from mere religion. What does the Buddhist have to offer the paralyzed boy? What does the Muslim possess that may bring the suicidal joy unspeakable? What does the Hindu own that unlocks the storehouse of heaven's might? Nothing! Why? It is because they lack power. They do not have the power that undergirds kingdom business. Paul writes, "For the kingdom of God is not a

matter of talk but of power" (1 Cor. 4: 20). Mere religion has talk... God's church has power. Let the distinction be known and shown.

Next, let us fix our gaze on the unseen world of angels and how their work relates to the church. We will begin with courtesy and allow the losers to go first. Demons are beings of the angelic order that forfeited their first state of holiness and heavenliness through active rebellion against God. Therefore, their hatred for every God-lover is fierce. They are the enemy of the Christian. Their work is frantic and sundry: they propagate false doctrine (1 Tim. 4: 1), they attempt to bring confusion and chaos to mission work (Acts 16: 16-18), they lay traps for those in church leadership (1 Tim. 3: 7), and they scheme against God's faithful (Eph. 6: 11). With this massive offensive launched we should be extremely relieved that Christ is the head of the church and not we ourselves; imagine how quickly defeat would come if we were at the helm! Of course, Christ has an army as well. These warriors are engaged in combat on the church's behalf. While we're having our potlucks, they're standing guard. While we're having our bake sales, they're keeping the church from burning down. While we're having our "bored" meetings, they're still awake. They are God's angels, commissioned to that peculiar and curious task of watching over a people in transformation—a society founded by Christ, the church. Job description particulars include: to protect (Ps. 34: 7), to deliver from danger and death (Acts 12: 7), and to reveal God's plans for the purpose of his glory (Acts 27: 23, 24). How great it will be to meet, and even know personally, these steadfast servants of God when we arrive in heaven. I'm sure they'll have plenty of exciting stories to tell of our near misses and of their timely rescues!

As was stated in the beginning of this work, ecclesiology and angelology are separate studies that, very fortunately for us, overlap when needed. I am certain that if we knew just how often they did intersect, we would hardly be able to function in our routine, day-to-day lives. The sheer excitement of it all would probably shorten our longevity by 40 years! (assuming an instant cardiac arrest would not occur). And so, I suppose that in our finiteness it is easiest to perceive the two teachings as somewhat disjoined. But when we get to heaven, and wherever the theologians congregate therein, ecclesiology and angelology will surely be remembered, in actuality, as hand in glove.