

Of the Confirmation of the Elect Angels, and the Fall of the Non-Elect.

by John Gill

The sermon discusses the confirmation of the elect angels and the fall of the non-elect angels, highlighting the sin of pride, envy, and unbelief as the causes of their fall.

Scripture: Colossians 1:16

Topics: "Angelic Confirmation", "The Fall of Angels"

Description

John Gill discusses the confirmation of the elect angels and the fall of the non-elect angels, emphasizing that the elect were confirmed in holiness and happiness by God's will, while the non-elect fell due to pride, envy, and unbelief. He explains that the good angels are immutably fixed in their obedience and enjoy God's presence, while the fallen angels, having sinned, are now in a state of despair and awaiting eternal punishment. Gill highlights that the fall of the angels serves as a warning against pride and disobedience, illustrating the consequences of turning away from God.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 3--Chapter 5

OF THE CONFIRMATION OF THE ELECT ANGELS,

AND THE FALL OF THE NON-ELECT.

Having considered at large the doctrines of creation and providence; I proceed to observe the first and principal events of providence relating to angels and men; and shall begin with the angels, the first of rational creatures that were created, and in whom the providence of God first took place; and whereas there was a distinction made between them, of elect and non-elect, as has been shown in a preceding chapter. I shall take notice, 1. Of the confirmation of the elect angels; for as God chose them to a state of holiness and happiness; as soon as he created them, he confirmed them in that state; the providence of God was not only concerned in the preservation and sustentation of them in their being when created (Col. 1:16,17), but in the government of them, which are the two parts and branches of providence.

Now the government of rational creatures is in a moral way, by giving a law to them, as the rule of their obedience; and such a law was given to angels, not of a positive nature, similar to what was given to Adam, forbidding him on pain of death, to eat of the fruit of a certain tree, as a trial of his obedience to the whole will of God; since we read of no such law, or like it, given to angels; nor a law in the form of a covenant, as to men, since the angels do not appear to have had any federal head, they standing singly and alone, and each for themselves; nor do we ever read of good angels keeping covenant; nor of the evil angels being charged with the breach of covenant; but it was a law implanted in their nature, concreated with them in like manner, as the law of nature was inscribed on Adam's heart, some remains of which are to be observed in his fallen posterity, and even among the Gentiles (Rom. 2:14,15), which is the same in substance with the moral law written; and with which angels are concerned, so far as the precepts of it are suitable to spiritual substances; for such of them, and so much of them, as relate to the body, and to corporeal actions, cannot agree with angels, who are incorporeal; as the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth commands: but such as relate to the fear and worship of God in a spiritual manner; to love to God, and love to fellow creatures; these are binding on angels, and are perfectly obeyed by the good angels; and in this their perfect obedience and holiness, are they immutably confirmed, from the moment of their creation; for this their confirmation is not owing to any merits of theirs, through the good use of the freedom of their wills: some have fancied that they were first in a state of probation, and having stood some time in their obedience, through the power of their free will, merited confirmation in that state from God, but a creature, even of the highest rank, can merit nothing at the hand of God; for "Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?" (Rom. 11:35).

The obedience of angels was due to God, and could merit nothing of him; nor was their confirmation owing to the merits of Christ. Christ is a Mediator between God and men; but not between God and angels; for though he may be allowed to be a medium of conservation of angels; yet not a Mediator of peace and reconciliation, which they needed not; he is not a Saviour and Redeemer of them; he merited nothing for them by his incarnation, sufferings, and death; these were not on their account; hence the angels say, "Unto you is born this day (not unto us) a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11; Heb. 2:14,16,17).

But their confirmation is owing to the free favour and good will of God, choosing them to a state of holiness and happiness; and to his putting them under the care and charge of Christ, as the Head of all principality and power (1 Tim. 5:21; Col. 2:10). Now in this state of constant obedience and perfect holiness, they are immutably fixed by the will of God, and have from their creation continued in it, and ever will; as appears by their enjoyment of the presence of God perpetually; they always behold the face of God in heaven; they never left their habitation, but have always resided in heaven, where they were first placed; hence called the "angels of heaven" (Matthew 18:10; 24:36), and by their constant and perfect obedience to the will of God, and which is made the pattern of obedience to it in men; or we are directed to pray that it might be like it; "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven"; that is, by the angels there (Matthew 6:10), and by the consummate happiness of the saints at the resurrection being like to theirs; which supposes them to have continued in their original state, and that the saints will be like unto them, not only in the immortality of their bodies, but in perfect holiness and impeccability, as perfectly holy as they, and no more subject to sin than they are (Luke 20:36), and by what is said of them with relation to the second coming of Christ, and their estate to all eternity; as that he shall descend from heaven with his mighty angels; shall come, not only in his own, and in his Father's glory, but in the glory of the holy angels; that he will employ them in gathering in the elect from the four parts of the world; that he will then confess the names of his faithful followers before them; and that the wicked will be tormented with fire and brimstone in their presence; the smoke of whose torment shall ascend for ever and ever; and consequently the holy angels will be free from that

torment, and be happy for ever and ever; (see 2 Thess. 1:7; Luke 9:26; Matthew 24:31; Rev. 3:5; 14:10, 11). 2.

The next remarkable event respecting angels, is the sin and fall of the non-elect angels. The heathens seem to have had some notion of the fall of the evil angels; for Plutarch speaks^[1] of demons or devils, as *qehlatoi* and *ouranopetei*, expelled by the gods, and fallen from heaven. The providence of God was equally concerned in the sustentation and conservation of them in their beings, as of the elect angels; and in which they are and will be everlastingly preserved. The same law also for the government of them, and as a rule of obedience, was given to them; or otherwise they could not be chargeable with sin, as they are; they are called the angels that sinned.

Now sin is a transgression of the law; where there is no law there is no transgression (2 Pet. 2:4; 1 John 3:4; Rom. 4:15). These angels, in their original estate of creation, were in a capacity of obeying the law that was given them; their will was inclined to it; and the bias of their mind was towards it; for they were created holy, just, and good; the estate they are now in, is not that in which they were made; it is expressly said of them, that they "kept not their first estate", and "abode not in the truth" (Jude 1:6; John 8:44), which supposes a better estate than what they are now in, and that they were originally in an estate of truth; that is, of integrity, righteousness, and holiness, though they did not abide in it, but fell from it; for being left to the freedom of their will, which was mutable, and is that folly and weakness which angels in their original state were chargeable with by God, and in comparison of him; they sinned and fell, to which fall of theirs our Lord has respect, when he says, "I beheld Satan, as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18), that is, suddenly, swiftly, and irresistibly, and which proves the existence of Christ before his incarnation; as that not only he was before Abraham, but before Adam; however, before the fall of Adam, for he was before the fall of the angels, he was present at it, and a witness of it.

Now concerning this, the following things may be inquired into. 2a. First, What was the sin of the angels, by which they fell? this cannot be said with precision, the scriptures being silent about it; yet it is generally supposed, and it is probable from the scriptures, that their sin was, 2a1. Pride; and which seems probable from (1 Tim. 3:6). Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil; being guilty of the same sin, he is in danger of the same condemnation; and usually so it is, as the wise man observes, that "pride goes before destruction; and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

And so it might before the fall of the angels, and be the cause of it. They might first begin with contemplating their own perfections and excellencies, which were very great; as their wisdom, knowledge, strength, &c. which might lead on to self-admiration, and issue in an over-weening opinion of themselves, so as to think more highly of themselves than they ought to have done; and to conclude, that creatures of such an high rank and class, as they were, ought not to be subject to a law, and therefore cast off the yoke of the law, and departed from their allegiance and obedience to God; hence one of the names of Satan is Belial, "without a yoke"; and the children of the devil are called sons of Belial; not being subject to the law of God (2 Cor. 6:15; 2 Sam. 23:6), upon which they seem to have affected deity; and having revolted from God, set up for gods themselves; and this may be thought to be confirmed from the manner in which they tempted our first parents to rebel against God; to do which they might hope to prevail with them, as it was the snare in which they themselves were taken; "Ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5), as also by all the methods they have since taken to get themselves worshipped as gods.

Satan has usurped to himself the title of the god of this world; and very early did he introduce into the world the worship of idols, and the offering of sacrifice to them; which to do is no other than to sacrifice to

devils (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Cor. 10:20), yea, he has prevailed upon the poor Indians, both Eastern and Western, to worship him openly as a devil; and nothing can be a greater instance of his pride, arrogance, and impudence, than the proposal he made to Christ, to give him all the kingdoms of this world, if he would but fall down and worship him (Matthew 4:9). 2a2.

Some have thought that envy was the sin of the devils, by which they fell; led thereunto by a saying in the Apocryphal book of Wisdom, "Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it." (Wisdom 2:24) and, indeed, envy and pride are inseparable; a proud man is always envious at others; he cannot bear that any should be above him, or even equal to him: the apostle joins these sins together (Jam. 4:5,6), the angels might envy the superior power and excellencies of God himself, and therefore withdrew from him, as not bearing his superiority over them, envying that he should be above them, and higher than they; if there was any superior rank and class of angels above these, since some are called dominions, thrones, principalities, and powers, they might be the object of their envy, and be displeased that they were not of the same, or of a superior class; however, it seems highly probable, that they envied the state and happiness man,[2] and therefore contrived his fall and ruin; as that he should be made after the image and likeness of God, which is never said of them, however like to God angels may be; and that man should be the lord of the whole world, and all the creatures put in subjection to him; which they might think more properly belonged to them.

And especially they might be envious at the Son of God, who they might understand, would in time assume human nature; though the end and design of it they might not know; and that in that nature he should sit at the right hand of God, which they were not admitted to; and that he should in that nature be the Head of all principality and power; and that angels, authorities, and powers, should be subject to him in it. Now this they could not brook and bear, that the human nature should be advanced above that of theirs; and therefore broke away from God in envy, wrath, and malice; and hence there has been from the beginning, a continued enmity and opposition by the devil, to Christ, the seed of the woman, that should bruise the head of the serpent; hence Satan always sought to oppose Christ in his person and offices, and to lead men into errors and mistakes about them; denying him in one or other of his natures, and depreciating him in his offices; and hence he set up antichrist, whose coming was after the working of Satan; and whose doctrines are doctrines of devils, and diametrically opposite to the glory of Christ. 2a3.

Unbelief may also be taken into the account of the sin of the angels; they must disbelieve the eternal power of God, and his truth and faithfulness to his word, or they would not have dared to have sinned against him; and as the apostasy of our first parents began with that, and disregard unto, and a disbelief of the threatening word of God; it may be reasonably thought, that something of the same kind led on to the rebellion and fall of the angels; indeed, their sin seems to be a complication of iniquity, of pride, envy, and unbelief. 2b.

Secondly, There are several questions commonly asked, relative to the fall of angels; to which a short answer may be returned; as, 2b1. How and by what means they came to fall? they had no tempter; there were no creatures in being capable of tempting them to sin; not irrational creatures, who could have no influence on them; and if man was then created, as it is a question whether he was or not; and if he was, he had no disposition to anything of this kind; but, on the other hand, his fall was through the temptation of an evil angel; there was none but God to tempt them, and he tempts none, neither angel nor man (Jam. 1:13,14), and this indeed was the case, as before observed; the angels were left to their own free will, which was mutable, and so of themselves, and not through any temptation without them, sinned and fell; this is always spoken of as their own voluntary act and deed, without any force or persuasion used with

them; they kept not their first estate, left their habitation, and abode not in the truth.

It is very probable, that one of them, famous above the rest for his wisdom and strength, might begin the apostasy; and being in high esteem for his excellent qualifications, he gave the lead, and others followed his example; hence we read of the prince of devils, and of the prince of the power of the air, or of the posse of devils in it, and of the devil and his angels (Matthew 12:24; 25:41; Eph 2:2). 2b2. It is sometimes asked, When the angels fell? to which it may be answered, Not before the sixth day of the creation: as it is probable they might be created on the first day, when the heavens, their habitation, was made, and light was formed; so they continued in their first estate, during the six days of the creation; for on the sixth day, when all the creatures were made, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good"; not only when made, but to this time had continued so.

Now if the angels had sinned before, this could not have been said; and yet they must have fallen before Adam fell, because it was the serpent, or the devil in the serpent, either in a real one, or in the form of one, that beguiled Eve, and so was the cause and means of the fall of man. But however, certain it is, that the fall of the angels was very early; since the devil is called, "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44), a destroyer of mankind, either from the beginning of the world, that is, quickly after it was made; or from the beginning of his creation, not long after he began to be; or from the beginning of man's creation, who abode not long in his happy state, but soon fell from it, through the temptation of the devil. 2b3.

This question is sometimes put, What number of the angels fell? This cannot be said with any precision; some have thought that as many fell as stood; grounding it on a passage in (Ezek. 41:18), where it is said, that on the wall of the temple were carved, with cherubim and palm trees, a palm tree between a cherub and a cherub; by cherubim they understand angels, and by palm trees good men, said to flourish like the palm tree; and who are supposed to fill up the places of fallen angels; and so conclude the same number fell as stood; but as such a sense of the text cannot easily be established, it is insufficient to build such a notion upon.

Others have thought, that not so many fell as stood; since evil angels are never said to be innumerable, as the good angels are (Heb. 12:22). And which they also gather from the words of Elisha to his servant; "Fear not; for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them"; and the servant's eyes were presently opened, and he saw the "mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about"; that is, angels in such forms (2 Kings 6:16,17), but then the comparison is not between good and bad angels; but between the good angels and the Syrian host.

Others fancy that a third part of the angels fell; this they take from (Rev. 12:4), where the dragon is said to draw with his tail the third part of the stars of heaven; but by the stars are not meant angels, but such who bore the character of the ministers of the word, who in that book are called stars (Rev. 1:20), whom Satan, through his influence, prevailed upon to drop their character, and desert their office. However, it is certain, that not a few of the angels, but many of them, fell; even as many as to form a kingdom, with a prince at the head of it; and there were so many that possessed one man, as to be called a legion, which consisted of some hundreds; for when the devil in him was asked his name, he answered, "My name is legion, for we are many"; yea, it seems there are various kinds and sorts of them; for when the disciples asked Christ the reason why they could not cast out a certain devil, our Lord, among other things, says, "this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 12:24,26; 17:19-21; Mark 5:9). 2c.

Thirdly, The state and condition into which the angels were brought by sin, may next be considered. They were originally angels of light; full of light, knowledge, and understanding; but by sinning are become angels of darkness; and are called the power of darkness, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, blind, and blinding others (Col. 1:13; Eph. 6:12; 2 Cor. 4:4), for whatever light and knowledge of natural things they retain, and which may be increased by long observation and experience; or whatever notional knowledge they have of evangelic truth, they have no spiritual and experimental knowledge; not the light of faith; nor rejoicing of hope; nor heat of love; no light of spiritual joy and gladness; but all black despair.

They were once pure and holy creatures; but through their sin and fall, became impure and unholy; and therefore called "unclean spirits"; who delight in the impurities of sin; and take pleasure in drawing men into them, to the commission of them; the devil is called emphatically and eminently, "the wicked one", being notoriously and superlatively wicked; even wickedness itself (Matthew 10:1; 13:38; 1 John 3:12; 5:18). Once they were lovers of God, and of their fellow creatures; but now at enmity to God, and all that is good; and spiteful and malicious to mankind.

Satan is called emphatically the enemy, the enemy of God and of Christ, and of all good men; desirous of doing all the harm and mischief to them he can, or gets leave to do; the case of Job abundantly proves this; whose substance, family, and health, by permission, he destroyed; and would have taken away his life, could he have obtained leave: and as also the possessions of men by him, in the times of Christ show; to the torment of their bodies, and the distraction of their minds; and, indeed, he is always going about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

These fallen angels, who were once in a guiltless state, are now in the most desperate circumstances; are in chains of darkness and black despair, under irremissible guilt; no pardon for them, nor hope of it for evermore; which leads on to observe, 2d. Fourthly, Their punishment; and which is both of loss and sense; they have lost the favour and presence of God, and they sensibly feel his wrath and indignation on them. Sinning, they were hurled out of heaven, and deprived of their blissful state they left; being forced to leave their habitation there; nor will their place be any more found there; the apostle Peter says, they were "cast down to hell" (2 Pet. 2:4), but where that is, it is not easy to say; very probably upon their ejection out of heaven, they fell down into the air, since Satan is said to be the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2).

Not that he has a power of moving the air, and of raising storms and tempests; but he is the ruler of the posse of devils that dwell in the air;[3] from whence, by divine permission, they descend and patrol; and rove about the earth, in chains, limited and restrained for the punishment of wicked men, and for the trial of the graces of good men; but as yet they do not seem to have their full punishment inflicted on them; or are not yet in full torment; as may be learnt from their words to Christ; "Art thou come hither to torment us before our time?" and are said to be "reserved unto judgment, and unto the judgment of the great day"; when their full sentence will be pronounced upon them, and be carried into execution (Matthew 8:29; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6), which they "believe and tremble" at (Jam. 2:19), and which punishment will be everlasting; there will be no end of it, no deliverance from it; it is called everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; the fire of divine wrath, which will never be quenched, but always burn without intermission, to all eternity; and a "lake of fire and brimstone", where the devil, with the beast and false prophet, will be "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Matthew 25:41; Rev. 20:10). ENDNOTES:

[1] De Vitando aere Al. p. 830.

[2] It is an ancient tradition of the heathens, that the evil demons envied good men, Plutarch. in Dio, p. 958.

[3] It was a notion of the Chaldeans, that the air is full of demons, Laert. Proem. ad Vit. Philos. p. 5. and of Pythagoras, ibid. Vit. Philosoph. l. 8. in Vita ejus; and of Plato, Apuleius de Deo Socratis; and of the Jews, so R. Joseph Ben Gekatilia in Shaare ora, fol. 4. 1.

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