

Angels

From John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 49-50.

Hebrews 1:10-14

10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail."

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

Until I make, etc. As there are never lacking enemies to oppose Christ's kingdom, it seems not to be beyond the reach of danger, especially as they who attempt to overthrow it possess great power, have recourse to various artifices, and also make all their attacks with furious violence. Doubtless, were we to regard things as they appear, the kingdom of Christ would seem often to be on the verge of ruin. But the promise, that Christ shall never be thrust from His seat, takes away from us every fear; for He will lay prostrate all His enemies. These two things, then, ought to be borne in mind—that the kingdom of Christ shall never in this world be at rest, but that there will be many enemies by whom it will be disturbed; and secondly, that whatever its enemies may do, they shall never prevail, for the session [seating] of Christ at God's right hand will not be for a time, but to the end of the world, and that on this account all who will not submit to His authority shall be laid prostrate and trodden under His feet.

If any one asks, whether Christ's kingdom shall come to an end, when all His enemies shall be subdued; I give this answer—that His kingdom shall be perpetual, and yet in such a way as Paul intimates in 1 Corinthians 15:25; for we are to take this view—that God who is not known to us in Christ will then appear to us as He is in Himself. And yet Christ will never cease to be the head of men and of angels; nor will there be any diminution of His honor. But the solution of this question must be sought from that passage.

14. Are they not all, etc. That the comparison might appear more clearly, he now mentions what the condition of **angels** is. For calling them **spirits**, he denotes their eminence; for in this respect they are superior to corporal creatures. But the office which he immediately mentions reduces them to their own rank, as it is that which is the reverse of dominion; and this he still more distinctly states, when he says, that **they are sent to minister**. The first word means the same, as though he had said, that they were officials; but to *minister* imports what is more humble and abject. The service which God allots to angels is indeed honorable; but **the very fact that they serve shows that they are far inferior to Christ, who is the Lord of all**.

If any one objects and says that Christ is also called in many places both a servant and a minister, not only to God, but also to men, the reply may be readily given; His being a servant was not owing to his nature, but to a voluntary humility, as Paul testifies, (Philippians 2:7); and at the same time His sovereignty remained to His nature; but

angels, on the other hand, **were created for this end—that they might serve, and to minister is what belongs to their condition.** The difference then is great; for what is natural to them is, as it were, adventitious or accidental to Christ, because He took our flesh; and what necessarily belongs to them, He of His own accord undertook. Besides, Christ is a minister in such a way, that though He is in our flesh nothing is diminished from the majesty of His dominion.

From this passage **the faithful** receive no small consolation; for they hear that **celestial hosts are assigned to them as ministers, in order to secure their salvation.** It is indeed no common pledge of God's love towards us, that they are continually engaged in our behalf. Hence also proceeds a singular confirmation to our faith, that our salvation being defended by such guardians, is beyond the reach of danger. **Well then has God provided for our infirmities by giving us such assistants to oppose Satan, and to put forth their power in every way to defend us!**

But this benefit He grants especially to His chosen people; hence that angels may minister to us, we must be the members of Christ. Yet some testimonies of Scripture may on the other hand be adduced, to show that angels are sometimes sent forth for the sake of the reprobate; for mention is made by Daniel of the angels of the Persians and the Greeks (Daniel 10:20). But to this I answer, that they were in such a way assisted by angels, that the Lord might thus promote the salvation of His own people; for their success and their victories had always a reference to the benefit of the Church. This is certain, that as we have been banished by sin from God's kingdom, we can have no communion with angels except through the reconciliation made by Christ; and this we may see by the ladder shown in a vision to the patriarch Jacob.