

Shall we pray to our Guardian Angels?

The Bible tells us that there are guardian angels. If one of their functions is to protect Christians, can we directly solicit or petition them in our times of need?

1. Examine the background to the Apostle Paul's letters to the Galatians, 2 Corinthians and Colossians to understand the context of 2 Corinthians 11:14, Galatians 1:8, and Colossians 2:18. In what context does Paul refer to angels?

A common problem of the early church was doctrinal heresy. In these instances, Paul made a reference to angels.

2 Corinthians was in part written in response to a report from Titus who informed Paul that there were false teachers slandering Paul and challenging his authority. 2 Corinthians was written in the defense of his apostolic ministry. These "deceitful" teachers took pride in their Jewish heritage, placed a value on spiritual knowledge and experience, and preached "another Jesus" and "another Gospel." Against this heresy, Paul draws a comparison: if Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light, then his human agents of evil, these false teachers, can disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness.

In Galatia, false teachers were distorting the Gospel by preaching salvation by works of the Law. This perversion of the Gospel so concerned Paul that he denounced anyone including angels from heaven who promoted this heresy; they would be accursed. Paul felt that any human or angel who perverted this important doctrine of salvation by grace deserved the condemnation of eternal destruction.

Troubling the Colossian church was a mixture of Judaism and Gnostic mysticism. False teachers were teaching the importance of Jewish food regulation and festivals as part of salvation and that Jesus was a higher being but not God. Paul strongly refutes this doctrine by emphasizing the supremacy of Jesus. Jesus' atonement freed mankind from Mosaic legislation. Furthermore, the search of new spiritual experiences or worshipping angels was a reflection of false humility for it demonstrated human pride, which was the refusal to submit to the Gospel of Christ.

In these examples, Paul sees that the spiritual world can influence how we understand the Gospel, the person of Jesus Christ, and the authority of the apostles. Satan and his demons will use any means to blind people to the Gospel and hinder a Christian's usefulness and witness.

False teachers are all associated with deceit and deception and very often under the influence of fallen angels. Satan demonstrated his deceit by distorting God's word on two occasions: the temptation of Eve and the temptation of Christ.

For Christians today, it is vitally important to know the theology and doctrine expounded by the Bible. Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul used the Scriptures (in Paul's case, the Gospel) as the standard of truth and as the basis to refute any theology that was contrary to it (1 John 5:18-20).

2. While the Bible forbids the worship of angels (Rev 22:8-9; 19:10), is prayer a form of worship? Can one still be devoted to angels and pray and petition them for their help (examine Ps 103:20-21; 148:1-2; Rev 8:3-4)? To learn more about prayer, study John 9:31; 14:13-14; 16:23-26; Ephesians 2:17-19; 3:11-12; 1 Timothy 2:5; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 John 5:14-15.

Throughout the Old Testament, the examples of prayer were directed only towards God. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ came specifically to be the mediator and intercessor for man, and in their instructions on prayer, both Jesus and His apostles indicated that man can and should direct their petitions to God. The Bible never once encouraged humans to seek or petition any other spiritual being.

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Some have argued that since Psalm 103:20-21 and 148:1-2 contain invocations to angels, it means that human beings can personally pray to and petition angels. However this interpretation is not likely.

This interpretation failed to take into account the literary style and structure of these psalms. Psalm 103 is a psalm of praise that begins with the psalmist praising God in the singular and continuing to include the greater community of both people and angels. Psalm 148 is a wisdom psalm that moves from heaven to the people of the earth. Angels are mentioned for the poetic purpose of symbolizing created beings of the heavenly realms; the psalmist is calling on all created personal beings to praise the Lord.

In encouraging all created personal beings to praise the Lord, the psalmist is not suggesting that one can pray to angels with their personal petitions.

In just these two verses, the Psalmist clearly recognizes that holy angels act to carry out only God's commands with poetic parallelism:

“... who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word!”

“You who serve Him, doing His will.”

Other biblical evidence that some use to support the practice of praying to angels includes Revelation 8:3-4. In this instance, the passage is interpreted as an example of a holy angel offering the prayers of Christians on earth and interceding on their behalf. This is a challenging passage to understand, but within the context of the Bible, this interpretation supporting the praying to angels is not likely.

Revelation 8:3-4 comes at an important junction when the seventh seal has just been opened and the contents of the scroll will be read. The trumpet judgments are about to occur; with the smoke of the incense and prayers of the tribulation saints, God's wrath is temporarily halted

This was no ordinary time, and it was not likely that these were ordinary prayers. Six seals had been opened and they represented events prior to the outpouring of God's judgment contained within the scroll. These events included: war and conquest, famine, death, and natural catastrophes such as earthquakes.

A similar situation can be seen in the Old Testament Numbers 16 where a group of Israelites, facing God's judgment, prayed and petitioned Him while the censers were lit with incense (Num 16:22). Shortly after, God rendered His judgment. Notice that the people prayed directly to God not to any other intermediary (i.e. Moses).

Worship is defined as the reverent devotion to God where this reverence is expressed in ceremonies and rituals. While the New Testament does not define the specific procedures of a worship service, several elements appear regularly in the worship practices of the early church. They are prayer, which was a leading element, praises and hymns, Bible studies, prophecy, and tithing. (1)

So while some advocates of praying to angels attempt to draw distinctions between worship and prayer to avoid the sin of worshipping angels, they cannot explain away the strong role that prayer played in the first century church worship service. In the context of the first century church, prayer is indeed a part of and a form of worship.

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3. To what extent do unfallen and fallen angels exhibit free will? Examine Hebrews 1:14.

In Hebrews 1:14, the translated term “ministering” comes from the Greek term “leitourgikos,” which means “relating to the performance of service.” While holy angels serve Christians, they do so when specifically sent by God to fulfill His plan or purpose.

In their seeming response to the prayers of mankind, unfallen or holy angels are actually sent by God to respond if the Christian’s prayer is according to God’s will or pleasure. Thus the free will exhibited by unfallen angels is that they simply choose to submit to God’s leading. There are no biblical examples where an unfallen or holy angel acted on their own free will to minister to a Believer apart from and independent of God or His will.

Consistent with this is the fact that holy angels encourage the worship of God, the only One worthy of worship, and discourage everything else.

The only angels that have clearly exhibited free will independent of God are fallen angels who promote evil. Satan is a prime example of this along with biblical examples with his demons. In the instances in which the Bible records angels exerting a will apart from God, human beings have been harmed or were given false theological guidance or heretical doctrine.

The practice of praying to holy angels or saints in heaven for one’s personal petitions is a controversial issue. It does not seem to have any clear biblical evidence to support it and certainly none within the context of the whole Bible. There are naturally inherent dangers in such a practice, among them whether the petitioner has the ability to discern a response as holy or demonic. It may be worthwhile noting that Joseph Smith, who founded Mormonism, claimed that an angel named Moroni led him to the golden plates containing the Book of Mormon. As another example, Muhammad, who founded Islam, claimed that he received the Qur’an directly from the angel named Gabriel.

Reference:

1. Youngblood RF, Bruce FF, and Harrison RK eds., *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers (1995).

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