

What Angels Want to Know

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Angels.

They have been through the whole sorry process—the rise of Lucifer’s rebellion and his spectacular fall. They know the real issues involved. They have seen what evil is capable of. And while they’re glad for God’s forgiveness, what they really want to know is whether there has been change—from hostility to friendship, from law-breaking to law-keeping, from hatred of God to love for God. For without that substantial transformation, how would they want to have anyone around who might be a contender for Satan II?

They have learned what self-centered rebellion means. They have seen for themselves the results of evil. They know how sin began, and what it led to in the end. They are not about to go through the whole experience again. So they have legitimate concerns about the stability and security of the universe.

And to be told “Oh, I forgave them,” is not enough. What angels want to know is whether those accepted back into God’s family have been changed, whether they have a new heart—meaning a different way of thinking that rejects all evil ideas and actions.

Demonstration

When Lucifer first began his challenge to God, the angels could not see where this might lead. Perhaps Lucifer had some legitimate concerns, they may have wondered. Whatever the case, God had to let the situation play out. Since he was the target of the accusations, he could only proceed by a process of demonstration. He could not simply claim that he was right and Lucifer was wrong.

But now the angels, the whole universe, have seen the appalling results of Lucifer’s attacks on God and his government. It’s clear that this was no “liberation” but enslavement to sin and self. God—his character of goodness, truth, and right—has been demonstrated for all to see.

So why would you want to ever go through this again? That’s why the angels are right to ask if sinners are really transformed, whether their thoughts are in harmony with the way God runs the universe. For if not, then the whole vicious cycle could begin all over again. They are not interested in being part of some sin sequel.

Transformation

See why it’s so important to avoid ideas that suggest righteousness has only been “imputed” to someone, or that their sins have been “covered”—as in “covered up”? If it’s not *really* true that a

sinner has been totally *changed*, then the problem still remains: how can sin be permitted in God's kingdom? To misunderstand some Bible texts to suggest that God has proclaimed guilty rebels as not only forgiven but actually "good" is, in a sense, to make God into a liar. For if these sinners are only "counted" as righteous, if they only receive "imputed righteousness" then are they really changed? Metaphors for what God does—covering with the robe of righteousness, covering a multitude of sins, the Father not seeing us but Jesus—must not be equated with covering up sin. Our sinful thoughts and actions must be gone, our natures must be changed, our minds must be healed and restored so that the taint and inclination to sin are no longer there. This is what is meant by the healing transformation of our minds: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2 NIV. This is more than simply being forgiven without any consequent change of heart—this is a complete transformation of our minds and our natures. For "we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory." 2 Cor. 3:18 NIV.

That's what the angels—and everyone else, including you and me—want to know: is this person really changed? How have they been transformed? Do they totally reject their former evil ways? Do they agree with God that right is right and wrong is wrong? Most of all, would they ever want to go down some dangerous route of rebellion ever again?

For no one wants to see the curse arise a second time, and God says it won't (). Why not? Because God forbids it? No: because absolutely *nobody* will ever try that again, since everybody knows what it leads to. After all these millennia of sin, who would want to go there ever again?

Safe

That's why the angels' question is so important. The issue is not whether we've been forgiven, but whether we are *safe*! You can be forgiven, but not change—we all know that, for we've done this so many times ourselves. We go to God, ask for forgiveness, and then repeatedly commit the same sin. Are we forgiven? Yes. Are we changed? No—or at least, only gradually. So while forgiveness—the "not guilty" verdict—is important to us since we think we are in legal trouble with God, the more important issue is "are we changed?" Or maybe better still, "have we been healed?"

If someone is sick, we don't ask the family if they have been forgiven. We ask if they are getting better, whether they have been healed. The same in God's family. The other family members are not asking if we've been forgiven, but if we are now truly *well*. For they don't want this "sin infection" coming their way—they would prefer that we remain in isolation, quarantined here on earth!

Now this change in perception also should affect us. While we certainly do want to go to God and ask forgiveness, he wants to do much more than that. He wants us to come to him and ask for healing, to be changed from being guilty rebels into trustworthy friends. He wants us to admit

our sin-sickness, and accept his healing salvation. For at heart, salvation means not only being rescued from sin but being healed from sin.

Saved?

Imagine. You've fallen into a canal and you're drowning. You scream at the top of your lungs, "Save me!" Some kind soul sees your fatal situation—that if they don't help, you're going to die. So they jump in, at risk to themselves, and swim over to you. By now you've taken in so much water you're unconscious. So with a great deal of effort they haul you out of the water, and you lay there on the grassy bank.

Are you saved? Yes, you're out of the canal. You have been rescued from the deathly waters of sin. But you will still die there unless action is taken. You may be rescued but you're not healed. Your savior pumps the water from your lungs, gives you the kiss of life. Coughing and spluttering, you "come back to life." You are not only rescued, but healed.

This is why God goes to such great lengths to explain that nothing less than total transformation is needed. You need to be "born again." You need a heart transplant: a new heart. A heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. The word for repentance in the New Testament means "change of mind." A totally new and radical way of thinking.

Our images of salvation as "being washed" implies that we just need some cleaning up. Seeing sin as dirt or stain implies that we're OK deep down. The truth is that we are totally sinful, rotten to the core. The transformation we need is from the inside out, not merely some change in behavior, some outward observance. "What counts is whether we have been transformed into a new creation." Galatians 6:15 NLT.

Now *that's* what the angels want to know. Have we been re-created? Have we been re-born? Have we been renewed? For them, that's the condition of acceptance—for without such an assurance, how could the universe be safe from us in our sinful state?

Good questions, appropriate questions. The great good news is that God does heal us, he does change us, he does make us new. Not just our bodies at the resurrection, but our minds too, and this process begins here and now.

But only with our permission. Only as we ask to be changed from our sinful selves into loving friends of our gracious God. Only as we *want* to be like him—in the way we are, the way we act, and the way we think. So "Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think." Romans 12:2 NLT.

And then the angels will really be convinced!

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