

Worshipping Angels – the error.

Here is how the New Testament handles the topic (we quote the NIV because that is where this teaching comes from:

1. Context of 'False Humility':

Colossians 2:18 (NIV): "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind."

- This verse explicitly warns against a specific type of false spirituality that elevates angels into objects of devotion.

The Hierarchy of Christ Over Angels:

Hebrews 1:4 (NIV): "So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs."

Hebrews 1:6-7 (NIV): "And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him. In speaking of the angels he says, 'He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.'"

Hebrews 1:13–14 (NIV): "To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

- The writer of Hebrews systematically quotes the Old Testament to prove that angels are subordinate servants, while Jesus is the sovereign Lord who receives angel worship.

The Proper Order of Authority:

1 Peter 3:22 (NIV): "...who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."

1 Timothy 2:5 (NIV): "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus..."

- These verses establish that angels are subject to Jesus, and that humans do not need angels to mediate between them and God.

The New Testament directly addresses angel worship, warning believers that treating angels as objects of religious devotion or mediation is a dangerous error that detracts from Jesus Christ.

A Direct Warning Against Angel Worship

The most explicit warning against a cult of angels appears in Paul's letter to the Colossians. A false teaching had emerged in Colossae that encouraged people to engage in mystical rituals and the veneration of heavenly beings.

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The Supremacy of Christ Over Angels

The entire first chapter of the Book of Hebrews is dedicated to proving that Jesus is vastly superior to angels. The author establishes that angels are merely created servants, whereas Jesus is the Son of God who deserves their worship.

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Hebrews 1:6 (NIV): "And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'"

Hebrews 1:14 (NIV): "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

The Rebukes in Revelation

As mentioned earlier, the ultimate narrative boundary is set at the very end of the New Testament. John's instinctive urge to bow to his angelic guide is met with a sharp, immediate correction.

Revelation 19:10 & 22:9: "Don't do that! ... Worship God!"

Key Takeaway:

The New Testament framework views angels as real, powerful, and active servants of God, but strictly draws the line at worship or prayer directed to them. Because Jesus is the sole mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5), routing devotion through angels is viewed as a spiritual regression.

By the time Revelation was written, Christianity already spread to many pagan Gentile nations, practicing some form of polytheism or another, in which both the existence and the worship of many gods was a given; one relevant episode is depicted in the book of Acts:

Acts 14:11-15 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia:

"The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying:

Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein."

It is thus not for John's sake, but for that of his audience, that the angel draws attention to his innocent (and, in my opinion, legitimate) gesture of reverence.

The curtain of the Jerusalem temple was luxuriantly adorned with images of golden cherubs (Exodus 26:1), as was the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:18-21) thus, when pious Jews eventually entered the Temple, they would inevitably face that majestic curtain, and its sumptuous angelic imagery; as they would fall down on their faces, to worship God, they would logically do so facing said curtain, and its decorative artwork; similarly with Moses, bowed down on his face before the ark, as God would reveal Himself to him there, by appearing between its two cherubic statuettes (Exodus 25:22).

The apostle of Christ did nothing else in the celestial sphere, than what countless Hebrew priests and prophets and the pious faithful have been doing for millennia in its earthly counterpart, obeying the Torah's express directive.

But a large part of John's diverse audience wasn't necessarily intimately familiar with its monotheistic tenets, and its various cultic or ritual subtleties; to avoid any possible misunderstandings on behalf of his non-Jewish readership, the angel states things plainly, not just once, but twice; in other words, whenever due reverence is shown unto him by the otherwise unsuspecting apostle, repeatedly hammering the fine point down, for all to see and hear.

"I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus."(Revelation 19:10)

Christ came down from heaven to lift up His (and, implicitly, our) human nature at the right hand side of God the Father, through the ascension to heaven, following His resurrection from the dead - Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62, 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33, 5:31, 7:55-56; 1 Peter 3:22.

Thus, as when previously, before the incarnation, humans were indirectly worshipping angels, since their holy images were placed between them and the place where God dwelt, in the earthly temple or tabernacle, as shown above, so now, after His celestial ascension, angels, in turn, are indirectly worshipping humans, when bowing down to Him and the incarnate word, standing on His right hand side, beside the heavenly throne.

Thus, the dialogue between the two worlds, taking place in the quoted passage, is somewhat curious:

"on one hand, the human being is somewhat perplexed as to the angel's (to him, incomprehensible) reaction; on the other hand, the angel, in turn, stands somewhat perplexed by the human's (to him, deeply puzzling) action."

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This baffling or unsettling upheaval in well-worn norms and pre-established conventions is the direct consequence or aftereffect of Jesus' incarnation-and-ascension; indeed, it reflects a relatively similar exchange, between John and his cousin, as recorded in the synoptic gospels:

Matthew 3:13-15 *Then comes Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad Him, saying: I have need to be baptized of thee, and comes thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him: Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him.*

As then it was once utterly intolerable for the greatest Man born of a woman (Matthew 11:11, Luke 7:28) to witness the one who will eventually baptize mankind with heavenly fire, humbly coming to be baptized by him (*John the Baptist*) in earthly water.

So here, it is likewise equally insufferable for the angel to see man, whom he now worships daily in heaven (Hebrews 1:6), to fall down before him, as if he, the angel, would (still) stand in need of reverence and admiration of him (man), rather than the other way around, thereby generating,

All of a sudden, all manner of confusion to both persons involved, because the former was simply following a well-established, divinely instituted, ancestral custom; whereas the other was already painfully aware that now the rules have dramatically changed, being turned on their head, upside-down, by the Revelation of the Messiah.

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Terminology:

Here is the outline of usage according to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon;

1. to kiss the hand to (towards) one, in token of reverence
2. among the Orientals, esp. the Persians, to fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence
3. in the NT by kneeling or prostration to do homage (to one) or make obeisance, whether in order to express respect or to make supplication
 - a. used of homage shown to men and beings of superior rank:
 - i. to the Jewish high priests
 - ii. to God
 - iii. to Christ
 - iv. to heavenly beings
 - v. to demons

As you can see, the word does not primarily mean "to worship". It can be used with reference to worshipping God or worshipping others like they're God (and there's a difference between worshipping God and worshipping other people as if they're God). But its primary meaning is not worship.

So, in a summary of what Strong's and Thayer's say, **προσκυνέω** essentially means to express reverence, adoration, or profound respect through different actions such as prostration or kneeling.

The intensity of the adoration or reverence you are directing towards an individual may vary greatly depending on the situation (e.g. who that individual is, how you regard them, etc.). That is, **προσκυνέω** does not have the same meaning in all possible situations where it is used.

For example;

Matthew 2:2 "...saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship [**προσκυνέω**] him."

Matthew 2:8 "And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship [**προσκυνέω**] him."

Matthew 2:11 "And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped [**προσκυνέω**] him. Then, opening their treasures they offered him gifts gold and frankincense and myrrh."

Now, did the three wise men want to *προσκυνέω* baby Jesus in the same way they would *προσκυνέω* God? I can say with absolute certainty that the answer is no! Why? Because the three wise men didn't know that Jesus was God, so how could they worship him as though he is God?

On top of that, King Herod told the three wise men that he wanted to worship the baby too(i.e. that he wanted to worship him in the same manner the three wise men wanted to). Did Herod know that the baby was God? What did both Herod and the three wise men know about the baby? According to Matthew 2:2, that he was the king of the Jews.

Herod and the three wise men didn't know that the baby was God, so they couldn't have worshipped him as though he was God(Obviously, Herod didn't want to do any of that, but from the perspective of the wise men he did); but they did know he was the king of the Jews, so when they say they wanted to *προσκυνέω* the baby, what they meant was that they wanted to pay homage to the baby as the king of Jews, as a sign of reverence and adoration, not that they wanted to show reverence/adoration to the baby as if he was God Himself.

Now that we know how the word *προσκυνέω* can be used, let's move on to the subject of worshipping angels. In addition to Revelation 19:9-10, John *προσκυνέω* the angel once more in Revelation 22:8-9. It looks like John hadn't learned his lesson;

Revelation 22:8-9 "I John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship [*προσκυνέω*] at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, 9 but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship [*προσκυνέω*] God."

Here John does the very same thing he did in Revelation 19:9-10. And here the angel tells the very same thing he told before; to not worship him, for he is but a fellow servant of John and his brothers.

John was an imperfect human, and the angel was a perfect spirit being. Humans are themselves inferior to angels.

Hebrews 2:7 "You made him a little lower than the angels; You crowned him with glory and honor;"

Despite being slightly inferior to angels, we humans are not permitted to worship angels... Or anyone else for that matter.

Acts 10:25-26 "When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped [*προσκυνέω*] him. But Peter lifted him up, saying "Stand up; I too am a man."

What Peter did to Cornelius was very similar to what John did to the angel, though not the exact same. The angel reacted a little more intensely. Perhaps the kind of *προσκυνέω* John was giving the angel was more intense than what Cornelius was giving to Peter. After all, John did it twice in a row! In each instance, however, they made the person worshipping them get up and quit doing so. Peter's reason was that he too, along with Cornelius, is a man, and thus Cornelius should not adore or revere Paul in a manner that should lead him to fall on his feet to Peter. The angel's reason was that he was a fellow servant of John, thus he urged John to worship God instead of him.

Of course, we could easily infer that worship is not allowed to human beings by acknowledging that we are not allowed to worship angels who themselves are superior to human beings as per

Hebrews 2:7. If we are not allowed to worship those higher than us, it would be absurd to think that we are allowed to worship those equal to us(as Peter said to Cornelius, he too is just a man).

This should furthermore serve as a lesson for us. If Peter treated Cornelius as his equal, being a man, not considering himself worthy of any sort of adoration or reverence, then we should carry such a mindset as well. We should always remain humble, and never let people adore us too much for the things we do or say, as though we have some special power in and of ourselves.

Not that we shouldn't accept compliments or have people look up to us as role models(being a role model, someone who follows God's commandments, is always optimal); just that we shouldn't allow people to get carried away in their perception of us, never accepting special treatment (i.e. bowing at the feet of someone) as though we're somehow superior beings.

Instead, we should always remember to remain humble and modest, pointing to Christ as King, Lord, and Savior of humanity, as well as to God, crediting Him for giving us His power and grace, that which truly empowers us to accomplish all we can.

In conclusion, we are not permitted to worship angels or humans; likewise, neither is permitted to accept worship from humans.