

We're No Angels—And Never Will Be

In spite of what you may have heard, human beings do not become angels after we die.

Maybe that's obvious to you (as I hope it is), but it doesn't seem to be obvious to some people. A lot of people, in fact. Lately, I've been hearing and reading it over and over again. Instead of saying someone has "died," it has become rather common for people to say that the deceased "has become an angel."

Perhaps that phrase has been adopted because it sounds more upbeat and noble than "died." Or perhaps it's because people have been drawing their theology from Hollywood rather than Scripture. Sorry, in spite of what you may have learned from the 1946 Christmas movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," every time a bell rings, an angel does NOT get its wings.

And Clarence could not have been buried in those clothes, because human beings do not and never will become angels. That's not possible. Human beings and angels are two very different things.

Angels are creatures, created by God at some time during the six days of creation. Angels are spirits. They have no physical bodies except in rare instances when they temporarily take on human form to perform their duties as "ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14; cf. Genesis 18:2 and 19:1ff.). Angels are neither male nor female, and they don't "earn their wings."

Human beings are also creatures, created by God (Genesis 1:26-27). Each of us has a physical body, either male or female, and an invisible soul. When we die, body and soul are separated. The body is (usually) buried, while the soul of one who believes in Christ is "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8), and the soul of the unbeliever is in torment (Luke 16:23).

Why does all this matter?

It matters because of who our Savior is. Jesus, the Son of God, was born in Bethlehem in body-and-soul, to rescue us body-and-soul sinners from the curse of sin. He made Himself known in human flesh, healing and restoring human flesh, so that human flesh could rise from the dead on the Last Day and live forever with God. He came to save the whole person, not just the soul but body-and-soul, for eternity.

It matters because God also values this physical creation in which we live, so much so that Jesus came to rescue creation, too. For the creation suffers under the curse of sin, and longs to be "set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). That means this creation is worth our care and attention until Jesus comes again.

It matters because God's promise of the resurrection of the body establishes our hope and our eternal destination. When we stand beside the casket or the grave of a loved one who has died in the faith, He wipes away our tears with His glorious promise that, for believers, death is only temporary. We shall be reunited, body-and-soul, with our loved ones who have died in the faith in the Resurrection at the Last Day, and from that time on we will never know such sorrow again.

It matters because this common, sentimental expression is quietly stealing all that away from us. The idea that the dead "become angels" allows people to believe that our bodies are not important, only our souls matter. According to that way of thinking, we can do whatever we want with our bodies, and with the world around us—even violate God's Law and destroy His creation—because none of it matters.

But it does matter. But Jesus made Himself known in human flesh, body-and-soul, because we matter. He died so that our bodies could be raised to life again and we could be whole, body and soul, for eternity with God.

Become angels? We've got something better than that. We're children of God!