



# "The Angels Weep and the Demons Dance"

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:1-2).*

One of my graduate school professors would often deplore a particularly sad state of affairs in Christianity with the lament, "the angels weep and the demons dance."

In C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape is an upper-level functionary in the complex bureaucracy of hell, and his nephew, Wormwood, is a little demon given the assignment of recruiting people for hell.

At one point Lewis has Screwtape saying to Wormwood, "You will find that the church is fertile soil. One of the best places to find recruits for hell is the church."

Lewis' Screwtape even has specific advice for Wormwood:

"Keep them bickering over programs, procedures, money, organization, personal hurts, misgivings. Keep them bickering. Whatever you do, don't let them see the banners wave, because if they ever see the banners wave, we've lost them forever."

Do you remember the story about the man who was walking through the streets of a big city looking for a lost coin? His attention was drawn to the dirty sidewalks and the filthy gutters, and it seemed that in very short order hundreds of others joined him in looking down.

Pandemonium ensued as pedestrians failed to pay attention to their own progress and that of others. People walking on sidewalks and across streets were inadvertently bumped and jostled, traffic was snarled, all because of one person's intense downward gaze.

I suppose the story can be told with one man looking up, into the heavens—but that's not our normal human predisposition is it?

What kind of "news" greets you via the tabloids sold at the supermarket check-out stand? Inspirational, edifying, uplifting? The old journalistic adage is still true, "if it bleeds, it leads."

Our attention seems to automatically default to low places. As people of faith, as children of God, where is the center of our attention? Is the focus of our attention upwards, toward eternity, or are we mesmerized with the corruptible? What occupies our time and energies—what do we spend our time talking about and debating?

## In-house Bickering

Here's a partial list of in-house bickering which I believe causes the angels to weep and the demons to dance:

- **The Rapture.** "It's going to happen. Get right or get left. If you don't believe it now, you will when you watch us all ascend, and you will then suffer the consequences of your lack of belief when you get yours in the tribulation."

- **Politics.** "If you don't vote Republican, you are either a temporarily deranged Christian, or at worst probably an anti-God *Demoncrat*."

- **Baptism.** "The only way to be baptized is to be a mature adult, to be fully immersed under water, in the name of Jesus. If you weren't baptized like that, then your baptism is not valid, and if you want to join our church you'll need to be re-baptized in our church by our pastors."

- **Lord's Supper/Communion.** "There is only one way to participate in the Lord's Supper. It must be taken once a month, it must be grape juice (never wine), it must be unleavened bread and it must be received in our church, not somewhere else."

- **Evangelism.** "You must 'witness' and you must give others your 'testimony.' If you don't, then how will the church grow? If you don't evangelize you are a lazy, perhaps Laodecian Christian."

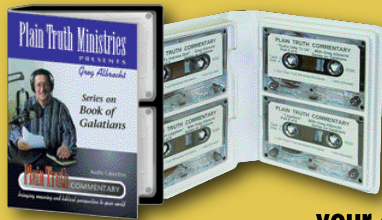
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## commentary

If this is an example (and it is) of the regard some in Christendom give to fellow Christians, what is the opinion some have about those who don't share our faith?

You know the answer—I won't elaborate.

The hostility some in Christendom openly demonstrate to "the world" is just another occasion for the angels to weep and the demons to dance.

Have you looked up recently to see the banners of Jesus wave? Jesus talked about the impact of his sacrificial death on a cross, and what it would accomplish.

"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:31-23).

Two things about the cross of Christ:

1) The cross of Christ drives out C. S. Lewis' Screwtape, his nephew, Wormwood, and all of the other demonic powers of hell once and for all.

They are still corrupting and perverting, but their time is limited, and the outcome of history is certain. They lose.

2) The cross of Christ causes us to look to the heavens. Jesus was lifted up so that we would look up and be drawn to him, away from our petty jealousies, vanity and pride.

Jesus was lifted up so that we would experience a spiritual, vertical, personal relationship with God.

Religion is almost exclusively a horizontal enterprise—with a focus on the importance of our exertion and effort in the here and now. Religion is all about what humans can do to please and appease God.

Christianity, however, is about a vertical relationship with God. Christianity is about God coming down to us out of the heavens, in the person of Jesus, doing for us what we can never do for ourselves. Christianity is all about

Jesus, who was lifted up so that our hearts and minds would be on "things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:2).

Some propose, in yet another earth-related in-house squabble among Christians, that the great anthem, "Onward Christian Soldiers," be homogenized so that it is not so war-like...or deleted from our worship altogether.

At the risk of offending the politically-correct among us,

**Religion is almost exclusively a horizontal enterprise, with a focus on the importance of our exertion and effort in the here and now. Religion is all about what humans can do to please and appease God. Christianity, however, is about a vertical relationship with God.**

permit me to note, along with C.S. Lewis, the hymn's emphasis on the cross of Christ and on his banners that fly above us.

Here's the first verse, in case your part of the body of Christ has censored it:

*Onward Christian soldiers,  
Marching as to war,  
With the cross of Jesus, going on before.*

*Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;*

*Forward into battle,  
See His banners go....*

Set your heart and mind on things above. Be Christ-centered. Set aside dissension and pride. Focus on our Lord and Master.

May all that we do be *because of him* and *for him*, devoted to *him* and centered in *him*.

Amen. □

—Greg Albrecht

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