

What about Death, Ghosts, and Spiritualists?

Foundational to those who promote the paranormal, is that their beliefs are based upon experience, either theirs or someone else's. They rarely seem to defer to a higher, more authoritative source than themselves. However, the Christian puts little trust in personal experience, particularly in regard to spiritual matters that demand supreme authority. Rather, believers entrust themselves to God's authoritative Word (The Bible); *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Psalm 119:105). As the apostle Paul affirmed to Timothy; *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). *"But solid food (of the Word) is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil"* (Hebrews 5:14).

The Apostle Paul wrote that, *"He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him"* (Colossians 1:15-16). Put simply, Jesus Christ is creator God of all that exists, including all spiritual entities that do not associate themselves with God. This being the case, we should entrust our evaluation of all spiritual matters to the words of the supreme ruler, and not to any lesser identities who are nothing more than created beings.

As those who have chosen to believe the Sovereign Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate ruler of all that exists in every realm, we prioritise His truth over personal experience. By that we mean, if confronted with a personal experience that is difficult to understand, or in conflict with God's Word, we default our beliefs and behaviour to God's truth. Personal experience has no authority over Scripture (God's Word). This is because the Christian understands that *"the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). When we look at ourselves, we realise our capacity to be easily deceived and lead away from God's truth by our personal feelings and emotional perception of experiences.

Therefore, we choose to *"trust in the LORD with all your [our] heart, and do not lean on your [our] own understanding."* We do not want to be *"wise in your [our] own eyes"* rather, we *"fear the LORD, and turn away from evil."* (Proverbs 3:5-7). The significance of Solomon's council is this, we particularly do not want to participate in evil beliefs, evil speech, or evil behaviour. We reverence the Lord's wisdom far above our ways of thinking. The Lord states it this way; *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isaiah 55:8-9).

As believers in Jesus Christ, our attitude in daily living is that *"we walk by faith, not by sight"* (2 Corinthians 5:7). This is because we recognise that *"whatever does not proceed from faith is sin"* (Romans 14:23). With this in mind, let's consider what the Bible says about death in general, death for Christians, death for non-Christians, Satan, speaking with spirits, and security in Christ.

1) Death in General

Life is not a dress rehearsal; it's not a practice run. We all participate in this indisputable and unchangeable reality; we only get one crack at life on earth. There are no rewind or replay options, no restart buttons, no soul sleep, and no recycling or reincarnation. God declares in Hebrews 9:27 that *"man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."* Referring to the mortality of life, King Solomon summarises; *"dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it"* (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

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A few points from Solomon:

- ✓ The spirit of a person is totally and only under God's control
- ✓ No other external spiritual identity or power source has any influence following death
- ✓ The body returns to the earth (decomposition), and the spirit leaves both the body and the earth
- ✓ The spirit only departs the body once, and it cannot return

2) Death For Christians

The apostle Paul speaks to the matter of living and dying in 2 Corinthians 5:4-8, where he speaks in the form of a metaphor, of our earthly body being a tent which we live in. He continues the metaphor, speaking of clothing ourselves with life, either this mortal life or the eternal life that follows physical death. *“For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened - not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord”* [Heaven] (2 Corinthians 5:4-8).

Paul notes the following:

- ✓ True life, eternal life, is God given spiritual life which commandeers us when this mortal body expires
- ✓ God placed His Holy Spirit within the believer at the moment of salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14), for the purpose of guaranteeing the translation of the believer from this mortal condition to the eternal spiritual reality.
- ✓ Believers obtain good, meaningful, and beneficial courage from persevering in the faith of Christ from this truth. Living in the assurance of this truth inspires greater faith and stimulates an ever-increasing desire to be transitioned to our eternal spiritual home with the Lord.
- ✓ For those gifted with saving faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), Heaven is our true and eternal home. As citizens of Heaven, the only appropriate place of residence once released from this earthly mortality is Heaven (Philippians 3:30-21).

With this in mind, we understand why the Psalmist wrote; *“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints”* (Psalms 116:15). Death is the calling of God's children to come to their eternal home to be with their God.

3) Death For Non-Christians

However, an unbeliever, one who disbelieves in the Lord Jesus Christ, their spirit does not go to heaven, but is involuntarily confined to a place of great suffering awaiting the final judgement of all mankind (Revelation 20:11-15).

Luke records Jesus speaking to a group of Pharisees in Luke 16:19-31, where Jesus tells of a rich man and a beggar by the name of Lazarus. Notice, this is NOT a parable. Jesus doesn't introduce this story as a metaphor; rather, He speaks of it as being factual. Both men die. The rich man finds himself in the torment of Hades, while Lazarus is found in Heaven, spoken of as being with Abraham. Here, Dr Luke records the dialogue between the rich man and Abraham.

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Of particular interest is Luke 16:26, where Abraham informs the rich man who is suffering torment; *“between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us”*.

Of particular interest:

- ~ Both the rich man and Lazarus had no doubt they had died and entered the afterlife. They were both self-aware and realised their location
- ~ Once dead, both their eternal destinies were sealed. Nothing could change their destinies. They had no second chance, no possibility of negotiation, no reincarnation
- ~ Once dead, they both could not stay on earth as ghosts
- ~ The dead and the living could not contact each other:
 - A visitation to earth (in this case, to warn the rich man’s five brothers), was not possible
 - Nor could anyone else go back to earth on their behalf
 - The righteous dead, and the wicked dead, are separated. The wicked are in torment, while the righteous are with the Lord.
 - The other side of this mortal life is not equally wonderful for all people. Hades (Hell), and Heaven are opposites in every way.

The apostle Peter explains God holding the unrighteous in a temporary state of punishment while they wait for the final day of ultimate judgment and condemnation. God knows how *“to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment”* (2 Peter 2:9).

Peter’s point is this:

- ~ Following death, the unrighteous dead do NOT remain on, or around the earth. Nor do they have access to earth in any form!
- ~ The unrighteous dead are being held involuntarily, awaiting final judgement
- ~ The unrighteous dead are presently experiencing punishment without relief or escape
- ~ This is not a place where those who have died enjoy a state of grace, undergoing limited torment to expiate their sins (purgatory).
- ~ There are no more opportunities of grace offered to the unrighteous. From this point onwards, they experience the right, fair, and appropriate reward for their unbelief and unrighteous living.

Matthew records Jesus telling of His coming judgment upon all mankind in Matthew 25:31-46. Here, Jesus speaks of Himself as “the King” who separates the righteous people from the unrighteous. Notice what the King says to the group of unrighteous people who have been placed on His left; *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’* (Matthew 25:41). This is *“the day of judgment”* Peter speaks of in 2 Peter 2:9 that the unrighteous have been waiting for.

Matthew’s point is this:

- ~ Following death, the unrighteous dead are NOT free to roam as they please. Nor are they free to choose their ultimate and final destination.
- ~ King Jesus, being the sovereign judge, appoints the destination of the unrighteous. This is the final declaration of irreversible judgment against those who disbelieve in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord (Revelation 20:11-15).

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- ~ The unrighteous, which have lived their lives in disinterest and disbelief in Jesus as Lord, shall be sent away from Jesus presence for ever.
- ~ The unrighteous are destined for, and shall share the place of punishment originally designed for *“the devil and his angels”*.
- ~ The final destination of the unrighteous is a place of eternal fire. There is no coming and going. There is no respite or relief from the never ending torment. There is no party being enjoyed by all their friends.
- ~ There is no half-way state or condition. They are either in the place of fire, or not. There is no intermediate location or state of existence. Again, this is not a place where those who have died enjoy grace, undergoing limited torment to expiate their sins (purgatory).
- ~ This is the end result, the ultimate destination of despair, without hope and without God.

4) Satan

It's all too easy to naively accept the words of others who speak from personal experience, rather than accepting the authoritative Word of God. Likewise, it's easy to forget that Satan represents and supports all things that are false, anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-Bible. To a group of Jews, Jesus explained that the devil *“was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies”* (John 8:44).

On the other hand, believers in Jesus Christ are those who *“destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Therefore, any philosophical rationale that does not directly grow out of God's Word is rejected. However, Satan does not want you to think that way. He prefers you to accommodate all ways of thinking, all possibilities, and all alternatives. Paul tells it like this; *“the god of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”* (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan has no moral conscience restraining him from doing whatever he wants to deceive people within his God appointed boundaries. He enthusiastically makes every effort to dissuade people from accepting the reality of God, the gospel of God's Son - Jesus Christ, and the authority of God's Word.

In 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, Paul tells us that *“even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants (demons and spirits), also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness”*. Demons have the limited power to perform lying signs and wonders to deceive people in their disbelief of the one true God. It is therefore a small thing for an evil spirit to pretend to be the ghost of a dead person.

As Jesus reminded the Jews; the devil *“is a liar and the father of lies”* (John 8:44). He has no moral difficulty lying, cheating, and swindling people in his pursuit against his creator God. He does not hesitate for even a moment to prey upon people's grief, naivety, ignorance, and disbelief, as he lures them into any and every form of error that will lead them away from the one true God.

In his shrewd manipulation of mankind, Satan wrongly presents mediums as being of assistance in bridging the gap between mankind and the spirit world, or even God. Nothing could be further from the truth. As

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the apostle Paul stated; *“there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Timothy 2:5).

5) Speaking With Spirits

From the earliest times, the Lord has clearly instructed mankind to stay away from all interaction with the occult. We are not to engage the services of people who tell us that they will work on your behalf in attempting to communicate with the departed.

Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:31).

The Lord considers the sins of the occult serious enough to group them with those people who are willing to murder their own children in idolatrous sacrifices to false gods.

There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord... (Deuteronomy 18:10-12)

Medium = Someone who serves as an intermediary between the living and the dead

Necromancy = One who practices divination by conjuring up the dead. The practice of talking to the spirits of dead people

The arch enemy of God uses any and all methods at his disposal to side-track people from having their attention focused on the one true creator God and His Son Jesus Christ. Satan and his helpers use what appears to be convincing and legitimate means to deceive people into thinking that there is another spiritual reality that God has not told us about. Mediums, spiritualists, ghosts etc. are NOT go-betweens for humans and God, or the after-life. Humans are to focus on communicating directly with God through His Son Jesus Christ, not through dead people.

6) Security in Christ

In His closing words to His disciples, Jesus reminded them that *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”* (Matthew 28:18). When we surrender our beliefs, and focus our dependant trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have surrendered to the highest power, the greatest authority that exists in all realms. The apostle Paul reiterates this truth when reminding the Philippian Christians that *“God has highly exalted him (Jesus) and bestowed on him (Jesus) the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:9-11). All spiritual beings, along with all their earthly assistants shall one day bow and verbally acknowledge the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the one true Lord of Lords.

Jesus instructed His disciples in Jn 10:27-29 concerning His sovereign relationship with those who believe in Him; *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* Once given eternal life by the Lord, we are safe! Although some may attempt to shake us with foreign ideas and thoughts that produce the feelings of insecurity and doubt, God’s Word stands firm, we are safe and secure in Christ!

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When scary, unexplainable experiences, or even suffering, happens to the believer, we know that nothing has happened outside of God's will; *"Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good"* (1 Peter 4:19). The child of God continues to persevere in walking the life of faith, trusting the Lord to resolve any peculiar experiences in His way and in His timing.

Should a Christian be lured into wrong activity concerning mediums and ghosts etc. they are able to get alongside of other faithful believers for support. It's here that the wayward believer can *"confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working"* (James 5:16). They are then able to *"draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water"* (Hebrews 10:22).

There is no mystical incantations to be had, no demanding of demons, no commanding God what He must do, no magic formula, no sacred locations or positions for prayer, no ceremony that needs to be worked through, no uniquely blessed oils or liquids to be doused in. The only action needed is simple confession of sin, should there be any, submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, followed by obedient living.

James, Jesus younger half-brother, summarized life when suffering this way; *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you"* (James 4:7-10). James' point is this; the most effective way to resist the devil is by submitting to God!

Any believer going through peculiar times of testing should particularly *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"* (Colossians 3:16-17). Holy living, a mind focused on God's Word, and behaviour with speech that is Christ centred, are all central to a Christian experiencing Christ's victory in life.

Lincoln Forlong (24th August 2016)