The World of Animism – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

The belief in spirits and their effect on our world appears in just about every culture. Christianity should replace this anti-Christian worldview, but instead many Christians just incorporate it into their own belief system. Dr. Pat Zukeran contrasts these two belief systems.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Worldview of Animism

From Genesis to the present, the biblical worldview has clashed with the worldview of animism. Animism (or folk religion) is a religion that sees a spirit or spiritual force behind every event, and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.

In most parts of the world, animism blends in with formal religions. Among followers of the major religions lie many animistic beliefs and practices. Animistic beliefs actually dominate the world. Most Taiwanese believe in the Chinese folk religions. Most Hindus and Muslims in Central and Southeast Asia, and most Buddhists in China and Japan combine their religion with various animistic beliefs and practices. In many parts of the world, Christianity has not displaced the local folk religion but coexists beside it in an uneasy tension.

The animistic worldview contains both the observed or physical world and the unseen or spirit world. There is no sharp distinction between the two realities; what happens in one affects the other. The seen or physical world consists of what we can see, feel, and experience. It includes forces of nature

and physical beings. In the seen world the earth plays a prominent role because it is viewed as a living entity and is often worshiped as Mother Earth. Nature is believed to be alive. Hills, caves, mountains, and lakes are often revered as sacred places. Animals may be embodiments of spirits. Many are worshiped as sacred, such as the cow and monkey in India.

Plants can also contain spirits and some are worshiped. Forests are seen as places where the spirits dwell. Trees like oaks, cedars, and ash are worshiped in Europe. In many parts of the world, there exist numerous subhuman beings that are supposed to live in lakes, forests, and caves. For example, in Europe they include mythical beings like trolls, gnomes, and fairies.

The unseen world of animism begins with the understanding of "mana," or the life force that permeates the entire universe. This power is impersonal and not worshiped. This sacred power concentrates more heavily in the deities, sacred people, places, or objects. This mana rules over all creation and is not controlled by the gods or man.

Also part of the unseen world is the Supreme God. Following him are a host of lesser gods who dwell in particular regions. Following the gods are the spirits, who often dwell in nature and are confined to a specific area. Then there are the spirits of the ancestors who continue to play a role with the living.

There also exist unseen forces that include supernatural powers like fate, cosmic moral order, the evil eye, magic, and witchcraft. There are also impersonal energy forces in objects that give the objects power. These objects are believed to give a person power to do good or evil.

In the Bible, God transforms the animistic views of Israel into a biblical view. He teaches them that the other gods are not gods at all (Isaiah 43:10). He condemns the use of magic,

witchcraft, and divination. He shows that suffering is not the result of the spirits or the gods but His sovereign act of bringing people back to Himself.

Themes in Animism

Do you ever wonder why some Christians worship their ancestors? It derives from the first of several themes within the ancient religion of animism. The first of the themes is a community-centered life. The ancestors, the living, and the unborn are the center of existence. The clan life is the most important entity because an individual has meaning only in the context of a community.

The second theme is the role of the spirit world. Humans live in a world surrounded by supernatural beings and forces, most of which are hostile to humans. The worlds of the seen and the unseen are interconnected. For this reason, people spend their time seeking to appease the gods, the spirits, and the ancestors with offerings or bribes. Extreme care is taken to maintain the harmony between the two worlds. Since all created things are connected, a simple act like eating a fruit from the wrong tree may bring disaster.

Third is the focus on the present. The primary concern is with the here and now. People seek to deal with success and failure, power and knowledge needed to control life.

Fourth is the focus on power. People view themselves as constantly struggling against spirits, other humans, and supernatural forces. Everything that happens can be explained by powers at war. The goal is to attain power to control the forces around them.

Fifth is pragmatism. Animists are not interested in academic understanding of spiritual and scientific truth but in securing good, meaningful life and protection from evil. The test of a folk religion is, “does it work?” To achieve their

goals, most people will turn to several methods that may be contradictory in hopes that one will work. I was once speaking to a Chinese woman who was suffering from lung cancer. Although she attended church and prayed to the Lord for healing, she also visited the Chinese Buddhist temple seeking prayers for healing from the priests. For those in animistic cultures, in times of need people will beseech aid from various religions or gods to find a method that works.

Sixth is transformation and transportation. Things may not be what they appear to be. Spirits can take the form of animals or plants. Shamans in a trance believe they can travel to distant places and bring harm to an enemy. They also believe they can travel to the spirit world, find information, or retrieve lost souls.

Seventh, animism takes a holistic view of life. The obsession with invoking good luck and avoiding bad luck involves every aspect of life—from what you eat, to where you place furniture (such the current feng shui fad), to how you sleep. In Al Hambra, Los Angeles where there is a large population of Chinese, houses with the number "4" in the address do not sell. The number four, pronounced "shee" in Chinese, is the first letter in the word for death, so the number is considered very unlucky.{1}

Eighth is particularism. People are tied to their land. Each community has its own set of gods and spirits. The gods gave the people their land, and that is where the ancestors reside. In battles, victories and defeats are attributed to the power of the territorial gods.

Finally, fear plays a major role. In a world full of spirits, omens, and spells, life is rarely secure. Many see the world as a hostile and dangerous place filled with spirits and forces antagonistic to people. Seemingly mundane activities such as moving the wrong rock can bring potential disaster. People turn to their ancestors, gods and spirits for

protection.

The focus of the Christian life, in contrast, is the relationship believers have with God. God's relationship with mankind is based on grace and love. Since God is gracious, He does not need to be constantly appeased by believers. His laws are clearly revealed to us in the Bible. When we disobey, we may suffer the consequences of our sin or experience His discipline, which is always motivated by His love and intended to bring us to a right relationship with Him. In times of difficulty, we do not fear His wrath but He invites us to draw even closer to Him. 1 John 4:16-18 says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear . . ." Although believers encounter tragedy and suffering, we do not live in fear but in faith, trusting in the character of God.

Gods in Animism

It may surprise you that most animistic religions teach that there exists one Supreme Being. He is often described as omniscient, eternal, beneficent, omnipotent and righteous. He is the creator, the moral lawgiver, punishes those who do evil, and blesses those who do good.

However, this being has distanced himself from man and cannot be known personally. Legends abound that he was once near but was angered with man and removed himself. He left men to their own devices and used lesser gods and spirits to do His will and serve as His ambassadors.

Therefore, most of the worship goes to the lesser gods and spirits who are in direct contact with humans. Anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt studied numerous cultures and concluded that man's first religion was monotheism, which then corrupted into

polytheism.{2} This would concur with Paul's timeline of man's rejection of God that he lays out in Romans 1.

An example comes from the folk religion of China. Long before Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, the Chinese worshiped Shang Ti, the Lord of heaven. He alone was worshiped until the Zhou dynasty, which began in 1000 B.C. From then on, only the emperor was allowed to pay homage to Shang Ti, and the knowledge of Shang Ti among the common people was lost. The worship-starved Chinese eventually embraced the religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism that provided spiritual knowledge and worship.{3} Numerous stories like these abound throughout the world. In Korea, the supreme God is called Hananim. The Gedeo people of Ethiopia call Him Magano. Missionaries use this belief of a high God to point people to the God of the Bible.

Following the Supreme God is a host of lesser gods. These beings mediate between man and the Supreme Being, but must first be paid homage. Gods possess specific powers and are localized to a geographical area. The gods inhabit places such as rivers, mountains, forests, oceans, etc. Some gods exercise power over human affairs (business, marriage, death, etc.) other gods exercise powers over nature (storms, rain, etc.) Among the Hawaiians, Lono is the god of the oceans and controls the clouds and storms. Pele, the fire goddess, dwells in the volcanoes. Many still honor these gods in Hawaii today.

The biblical worldview teaches that a personal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God governs the universe (Colossians 1:16-17). He alone rules creation and there are no other gods besides him (Isaiah 43:10). The God of the Bible is not distant from man, but mankind has distanced ourselves from God. God remains involved in the affairs of this world, constantly pursuing men and women to receive His gift of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Spirits and Ancestors

Do you ever wonder if there are spirits in forests or other dark places? Can the dead communicate with the living? Animism holds to a belief that numerous spirits exercise their power over places where they dwell, such as mountains, streams, and rivers. Spirits have never inhabited human bodies, and since they can be either good or evil they must constantly be appeased. For example, the South Sea islanders ask forgiveness of the trees they cut down for canoes so that the spirits of the trees will not harm them.{4}

There also exist legendary half-divine beings. Some are humans who became gods. Some gods are thought to have become human. For example, the pharaoh of Egypt and the emperor of Japan were believed to be descendants of the sun god. Many teach these beings had supernatural birth and did not die, but vanished into the sky. Many are believed to have taught humans valuable skills like making fire, canoes, houses, planting fruits, etc.

Important in animism is the remembrance of the ancestors. Animism teaches that people possess immortal souls. At death the soul is free to wander near the grave, travel the earth, or enter the world of the spirits. The spirits of the ancestors participate in the daily lives of family members. Neglecting to honor them has severe consequences. Souls of the departed who did not live fulfilled lives or died tragic deaths become ghosts. Ghosts search for bodies to inhabit and often bring harm.

At death, one enters the realm of the ancestors who maintain a relationship with the family. Ancestors remain deeply interested in the family they began. They care for, protect, and punish those who seek to do harm.

Ancestors are revered for several reasons. First, as the founders of the family, they remain interested in the care of

the family. Second, they have answered the question of what follows death, so they can help the living through dreams, necromancers, and visions. Third, some have accomplished great achievements, which must be celebrated. Fourth, animists believe they protect the family. Fifth, they function as mediators between God and the family.

One’s happiness in the afterlife depends on the care given by one’s descendants. Anyone banished from a family or tribe in essence becomes extinct with no one to remember or care for them.

As Christians, we agree with the animists that there is an immaterial soul that exists beyond the grave. We also place the family as a high priority. One of the Ten Commandments is for children to honor their father and mother. However, no departed souls remain on earth. According to Hebrews 9:27 upon death, one is immediately in heaven or hell. Secondly, the dead do not have contact with the living. In Luke 16, the rich man who was suffering in hell sought a way to communicate with his living family to warn them of their fate. However, he was not able to communicate in any way nor could the living communicate with him. Christians celebrate and honor the memory of our loved ones, but we do not worship them nor seek to appease their spirits. We wait with joy and anticipation in knowing we will be united again in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Basic Practices in Animism

In animism there are numerous taboos or prohibitions. Prohibitions are made to preserve the harmony between the spiritual world and physical world. Places or people where the life force is concentrated are protected. Myriads of taboos exist and violation of them can result in cursing of a community and must be atoned for by sacrifices.

Second, there are sacred places. Sacred places of worship

exist to commune with the spiritual world. These are places where sacred power is concentrated. In Haiti there is a sacred tree where a pact with the devil was signed over 200 years ago by the animistic witch doctors. These witch doctors were most displeased when Christian pastors recently prayed over the tree and successfully commanded the spirits to leave it.

Third, there are sacred things. A whole host of objects possess power and are potentially dangerous. Stones are often believed to possess sacred power. This is one reason you can easily find crystal jewelry and other semi-precious stones for sale in catalogs and stores. Certain plants and insects are believed to be sacred and taboo. Carved images are believed to possess the spirit of divinities.

Fourth, there are sacred actions. Worship includes sacrifices of animals or plants to the deities. The priests or shamans perform the sacred rites. Omens play an essential role; this is the origin of saying “God bless you” after someone sneezes, to protect the spirits from jumping into the suddenly vulnerable person. Signs in the heavens and certain reptiles or animals encountered in a day (such as a black cat crossing one’s path portending bad luck) may predict one’s future.

Fifth, there are sacred words. There are many oaths, curses, and blessings. The spells of both white and black witchcraft are sacred words. Words are charged with sacred power if uttered by a priest. Such words possess the sacred power, mana.

Sixth, there are sacred persons. Witches use their powers for good and evil. They can use their powers to protect communities from enemies. They can use their power to communicate with the gods and spirits. In most societies, witchcraft and sorcery are most feared. Witches are believed to travel great distances in short periods, kill at a distance, and master demons. Witches have supernatural powers to inflict harm on others. They can cast spells on others.

They can inject foreign bodies into a victim, causing illness. Witches have the ability to communicate with dead spirits. Many societies believe they can transform themselves into animals.

Then there is the shaman or the medicine man. He can cure sicknesses. He directs sacrificial rites and escorts souls to the other world. At times he can leave his body and observe events from a distance. He is born into the family or earns the job by passing tests and rituals. There is also the sacred king. Then there are sub-humans such as trolls and water spirits. Finally there are "little people," such as leprechauns.

Seventh, there are sacred rituals that must be performed regularly. The head of the family performs some; others require the expertise of the priests.

Eighth, there is the practice of magic and divination. The art of casting spells and communicating with the spirit world are reserved for the priests.

The Christian must be aware when his practices are influenced by animism. Often many feel that saying "amen" or wearing a cross brings protection. Others use sacred stones or believe performing a ritual will bring them fortune. A Christian has direct access to God through Christ and does not need to rely on another person of a sacred office. Also, Christians have all we need in Christ and do not need powers from the spiritual realm. Christ has given us all we need to overcome.

Overcoming Animism

As our study has revealed, fear is the overriding disposition among those in animistic religions. There are several reasons for this. First, one is never really sure if a taboo has been broken and the gods, the spirits, or the ancestors have been angered. Should one of these beings become angered, they may

inflict horrific punishments. In Hawaii, there are several frightening stories about the night marchers, the spirits of ancient warriors who march along a sacred path each night. It is believed that some people have been killed because they were in the path of the night marchers.

A second reason for the prevalence of fear is that animism includes some of the most feared practices known to man. Sorcery, magic and voodoo are some of the ancient arts that strike terror in the hearts of people. It is a frightening thing to know that a priest or witch has placed a curse upon you.

Throughout the Bible and even today, believers continually encounter animistic practices and thinking. In times of crisis, many young Christians will pray to God, but also seek help from their animistic religion.

Among Christians, animistic beliefs will be displaced only when Christians transform their minds with God's word and free themselves from the life of fear in animism. Transformation takes place when Christians understand the Bible explains the true nature of the universe. First, in contrast to the many temperamental gods in animism, the Bible teaches that there is only one God. Isaiah 43:10 states, "'You are my witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.'" There is no pantheon of gods—only the one true God, and all others are false gods.

Second, in the Bible God forbids the animistic practices of witchcraft, necromancy, magic, and worship of foreign spirits. Deuteronomy 18:10 commands, "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination, sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who consults the dead." Those who practice these arts are entertaining spirits who are opposed to God and

seek the destruction of all people.

Third, Christians do not need to live in fear of hostile spirit beings and spells. Christ, who loves His people, has triumphed over all. Colossians 2:15 says that He "disarmed the powers and authorities, [making] a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

Christ has brought into submission all authorities under His rule. Not only that, nothing enters into our life until it first filters through His loving hand. God's hand of protection shelters His people. David wrote in the Psalms, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God whom I trust'" (Ps. 91:1). When tragedy strikes, Christians understand that its purpose is not to punish believers, but to teach us new things about God and ourselves, refining our character to make us more like Him. Christians can be freed from a life of fear and find joy in a life of faith in Christ.

Notes

1. Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1999), 157.
2. Norman Anderson. *The World's Religion*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's Publishing, 1991), 38.
3. Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts*. (Ventura, CA.: Regal Press, 1984), 62-70.
4. Hiebert, 55-56.

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Don't Wish Me Luck

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A Christian high school in the Chicago area displayed a disturbing message for one of their teams on their marquee: "Good luck in the State Finals!" I knew they were wishing them well, but unwittingly, the message writer had bought into an unbiblical worldview.

There is no such thing as luck!

The concept of luck is an animistic belief, which is the core of folk religion worldwide: a belief in the unseen world that is populated by various kinds of spirits such as the spirits of the dead (ghosts) and nature spirits, as well as unseen supernatural forces: fate, the "evil eye," magic, witchcraft, impersonal energy forces ("chi") . . . and luck.

People think of good luck as a supernatural force that has to be attracted, or coaxed ("Come on, double sixes!"), or somehow manipulated to work for us. And bad luck is an unseen negative

force that we need to protect ourselves from. So people put their trust in sacred or magical objects and actions in hope of manipulating this supposed force of luck.

When I was young, I wore a "miraculous medal" on my watch, a charm that I believed would keep me safe. I see rosaries hanging from rear view mirrors for the same purpose. Then there are magic/sacred items thought to bring luck: a rabbit's foot, a horseshoe, a four-leaf clover. Lots of people scheduled weddings and other events on November 11 of this year (11-11-11) in the belief it would bring them luck. (One woman on the Dr. Phil show was planning to marry for the eleventh time on 11-11-11 because she thought it would bring her luck after ten bad marriages! Wisely, Dr. Phil told her she didn't need luck, she needed pre-marriage counseling.)

The idea of luck as a force to be wielded, much like "The Force" in Star Wars, plays no part in a biblical view of life and reality. But lots of people believe in it anyway, because the majority of people, including Christians, do not think biblically. They are captive to the false ideas of the surrounding culture, one of which is animism.

Animism is a degradation of a true understanding of reality, which has been revealed by God in His word: that God has created things we can see, which are temporal, and things we can't see, which are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). The unseen spiritual dimension contains both good and evil spirits—angels and demons—as well as the souls of people who have died and now exist either in heaven or in hell. They do not wander around looking for rest. The evil spirits—demons—do have limited power, mainly lies, schemes and deceptions. But God's power is always greater.

If you're looking for favor and blessing, don't hope for luck. Look to the God of grace. He is the source of favor and blessing. And His power is the strongest in the universe, which is why trustful dependence on Him is the best way to tap

into that power. Not trying to manipulate it—but asking for it in humility and trust.

Which is why I say, don't wish me luck. It doesn't exist.

Ask for God's blessing instead.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/dont_wish_me_luck

"What About the Witch of Endor Calling Up Samuel's Spirit?"

I just read the Animism article. It states that Christianity specifically teaches against the existence of ghosts (spirits of dead people) in the world, and that dead people cannot communicate with the living and vice versa. What about the passage in I Samuel 28 with Saul and the witch of Endor? She calls up Samuel's spirit to communicate with Saul.

The incidence in 1 Samuel 28 is one of two exceptions to the "no crossing over" boundaries in scripture, both highly supernatural miracles. The witch of Endor had no power to truly conjure up the spirits of dead people; that's why she screamed in terror when Samuel actually appeared. It was God at work, not the witch or even the departed prophet responding to the summons. Samuel gave the word of the Lord to Saul, and his prophecy was fulfilled shortly thereafter.

The other miracle was when Moses and Elijah appeared along with a transfigured Christ to Peter, James and John (Matt.

17). The disciples did not summon the spirits of these dead saints; they were sent by the Father (probably to encourage the Lord Jesus).

The fact that there are two biblical exceptions, both of which required divine intervention to send departed spirits into this world, does not affect the truth that there is a "great gulf fixed" between the living and the dead (Luke 16:26). That's the point of miracles: they are God-powered exceptions.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

The World of the Occult : A Christian Worldview Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran explains why Christians need to be wise and discerning concerning the occult, both recognizing its power and danger, and not going overboard either.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Occult Overview

In a popular TV show, the heroine calls upon spirits, spells, and magic to defeat demonic beings. In another show, teen-age witches use their white magic to defeat evil warlocks and spirits. Such popular shows deal with the world of the occult. The occult has thrived since the beginning of civilization.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the prophets of God confronted the problem of the occult.

The term *occult* is derived from the Latin word “occultus,” which means to cover up, hide, or those things which are hidden or secret. A brief definition of the occult is the practice of attaining supernatural knowledge or powers apart from the God of the Bible. Through these practices occultists seek to influence the present or future circumstances, of their lives or the lives of others.

Why is there such an interest in the occult? Experts point to several factors. The first is disillusionment with the church and organized religion. The second factor is curiosity. There is an attraction to the occult that appeals to our interest in the unseen. Many begin with “harmless” dabbling, but this can often lead to more. Third, there is the quest for power. People want control over the future, spirits, or over other individuals.

There are three primary categories of the occult world: divination, magick, and spiritism. Divination is the attempt to foretell the future and thereby shape our lives accordingly. The divination arts include astrology, zodiac charts, crystal balls, tarot cards, palm reading, psychics, numerology, and horoscopes.

The second category is magick or paganism. Those in magick attempt to control the present by ceremonies, charms, and spells. The magick arts include witchcraft, white magic, black magic, sorcery, Satanism, black mass, and witch doctors.

Then there is spiritism. Those involved in spiritism attempt to communicate with the dead and receive information or help from them. Spiritism involves ouija boards, sances, necromancy, and ghosts.

The world of the occult not only brings a false message, but a dangerous one as well. Experiences with the occult drive us

away from God and bring us into contact with the demonic realm. Jesus said the Devil is “a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44) In dealing with the demonic, you cannot expect them to deal in truth. The Devil and his legion only seek to “steal, kill, and destroy.” (John 10:10) For this reason, Deuteronomy 18 labels the practices of witchcraft, sorcery, divination, and necromancy as detestable to the Lord. It was these practices that brought judgment on the Canaanites and expelled them from the land. God did not want such teachings to infiltrate any culture. The church must not only present the danger of the occult, but the message of life and victory found in Jesus Christ over the principalities of darkness.

Dangers of the Occult

“What’s wrong with joining the Vampire Club or attending a sance?” your child may ask. For some, exposure to the occult via fantasy games, the media, or music may lead to greater involvement in a dangerous world.

The primary danger of the occult is that it is a path away from God that can bring us into contact with the demonic realm. The demonic forces seek to deceive and destroy individuals. Therefore, contact with the demonic breeds numerous problems.

First, cult experts and psychologists have documented the connection between occult involvement and psychological and emotional disorders. Participants spend numerous hours studying, practicing, and playing games that involve conjuring demons, sacrificing creatures in cruel rituals, controlling sinister forces, and casting spells to disable and kill their enemies. This can affect a person’s spiritual, mental, and emotional state.

Second, there is the danger of spirit possession. The occult arts often require one to empty one’s mind and invite foreign

spirits to control his or her intellect and body. For example, in operating a ouija board, participants are asked to empty their minds to allow other forces to guide them as they attempt to attain messages. In other games, participants are encouraged to call upon a spirit being to help guide them. These techniques open the door for spirit possession.

Third, there is the danger of violence to oneself and others. Many cases of violence and suicides are connected to the occult. Dr. Thomas Redecki, a psychiatrist and chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence, has given expert testimony at a number of murder trials that were connected to fantasy role-playing games. He states, “I’ve found multiple instances of attitudes, values and perceptions of reality that were strongly influenced by an immersion in these games. When someone spends 15 to 30 hours a week dreaming of how to go out and kill your opponents and steal treasure, it’s not surprising that the desire to act it out in real life occurs.”{1}

Real cases include the famous black occultist Aleister Crowley. He ended up in an insane asylum for six months after attempting to conjure up the Devil. Not only that, his children died and his wives went insane or drank themselves to death.{2} In Florida, a group of three teenagers were charged with bludgeoning to death the parents of a fourth girl in their group. These teenagers were involved in the fantasy role-playing game *Vampire*.{3}

There is no benefit that comes from dabbling in the occult. God’s Word tells us to avoid the occult because it can be addicting and harmful. Instead, Philippians 4 says to spend our time dwelling on what is true, noble, right, pure, admirable, and praiseworthy. What we focus on affects our actions and outlook on life. Therefore, we should dwell on what builds the mind, body, and spirit.

Investigating Occult Phenomena

Can seers foretell future events? Can mediums really talk to the dead? How do you explain psychic phenomenon? Dealing with the occult calls for a balanced approach. The biblical worldview acknowledges both the physical and spiritual realms. There are physical beings but also spiritual beings of good and evil. We cannot ignore the supernatural, but we should not be obsessed with it either. C.S. Lewis commented, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."{4} Lewis' call, as well as ours, is for a balanced approach.

There are numerous claims of supernatural occurrences in the occult world. However, not all occult phenomena should be attributed to the supernatural. There have been cases where people have quickly attributed unexplained events to the demonic, only to later discover other natural explanations. This often causes embarrassment and hurts the individual or group's credibility. We must be careful to investigate all possible explanations.

Most occult phenomena are mere trickery. Techniques such as sleight of hand, physical or mechanical deception, luck or mathematical probability, and body reading can explain many accounts. For example, Jewish psychic Uri Geller was believed to have supernatural powers such as the ability to move or bend objects from a distance with his mind. He even managed to fool scientists with his feats. However, his alleged powers were eventually shown to be false when magician James Randi performed the same feats, exposing the charlatan's tricks.

Other phenomena can be attributed to psychological factors. For example, someone demonstrating many personalities and speaking in different voices may have a multiple personality

disorder that should be treated with medication. Unusual changes in personality or the fear of objects or names may be due to some kind of chemical imbalance. One should be careful and investigate these possibilities before concluding occult powers at work or demon possession.

The fourth explanation can be attributed to our sin nature. James 1:14 states, “but each one is tempted when, by his own desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” Too often Christians are quick to attribute bad habits and conflicts to the demonic and fail to take responsibility for their actions. For example, addiction to pornography is the result of yielding to our sin nature, not necessarily satanic activity.

Before ascribing events and difficulties to the demonic realm, we must first determine if it is consistent with demonic activity as described in the Bible and cannot be explained naturally. Then we can consider the possibility that it is demonic.

Witnessing to Those in the Occult

What should you do if you discover a friend or child involved in the occult? In witnessing to occultists, we must understand that they view Christians as intolerant and mean-spirited. They feel misunderstood, and quick condemnation often causes the person to retreat and delve further into the occult. Many people enter occult organizations because the church and their peers have rejected them. So, in witnessing, we must remember to be firm, but loving and sensitive as well.

I remember one situation at a Six Flags amusement park. While waiting in line, two Christian men noticed a student wearing a shirt promoting a band with clear connections to the occult. In a very condescending manner they questioned the young boy as to why he would wear such a shirt. “I like their music,”

was the response. To which the men rebuked him harshly. Soon a short and heated argument ensued. The boy was left feeling angry and condemned while the two Christian men congratulated one another on a fine job of “witnessing.” Such incidents unfortunately are too common. The first step in witnessing is demonstrating gentleness and respect.

Second, do some research in the area so that you know what you are talking about. People in the occult do not view their activity as dangerous and consider others’ warnings as nave and misinformed. Therefore, being able to point to specific examples of concern goes a lot further than generalized accusations. If you are not able to find information, sit down and patiently listen to the person explain why and how he got involved. As you listen, ask questions that would cause the person to examine his beliefs. Listening always goes a long way in any kind of witnessing.

Third, point out the danger of addiction that can be the result of spending numerous amounts of time and money on occult activities. 1 Corinthians 6:12 warns us not to “be mastered by anything.” Addiction to the occult leads to bondage, but God’s truth sets us free.

Fourth, know what the Bible says about the occult. Point out that the nature of the Adversary is to deceive and destroy. God’s nature is truth and love. Dwelling on the false teachings of the occult can distort one’s view of reality. This message ultimately leads to ruin, while God’s truth leads to life. Share God’s message of love and demonstrate it in your actions.

Finally, present the message of life, truth, and hope found in Christ. The occult only offers a false message that brings destruction because the force behind it is the father of lies. The deception of the occult leads to bondage, but truth sets you free. In engaging the world of the occult, Christians need not be afraid for we have authority over the demonic through

Christ who triumphed over all powers and authorities by the cross. (Colossians 1:15)

Deliverance from the Occult

If you have been dabbling in the occult or know someone who wants to come out of it, what should you do? First, permanent deliverance and restoration begins with a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you have not trusted Christ, receiving Him as your Lord and Savior is the first step. When this happens, you are set free from the Kingdom of Darkness and are now under the authority of the Kingdom of Light. 1 Peter 2:9 states that it is Christ who "called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Second, recognize and confess your sin of involvement in the occult. Then accept God's forgiveness by faith. 1 John 1:9 states, 'If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Third, remove all occult objects. This example was set for us in Acts 19:19-20. Those who had come to Christ burned their objects publicly. Having occult items around such as game boards, cards, and statues may provide a source of temptation to return. Removing all such objects helps avoid facing that temptation and dealing with memories.

Fourth, break off all medium contacts and occult associations. Spirit guides and friends in the occult will encourage you to abandon your trust in Christ and return to participating in the occult. One must courageously trust that Christ will protect you from demonic retaliation and provide new friends who will encourage you in the Lord.

Fifth, if you are finding the transition difficult, seek a Christian counselor with knowledge in this area. Only a Christian counselor understands that healing comes when we deal with not only the physical, mental, and emotional aspect,

but the spiritual as well.

Sixth, join a fellowship of Christians who will pray and care for you. Also, strive to grow in your new walk with Jesus Christ. You have been filling your mind with the teachings of the occult and now you must, as Paul says in Romans 12, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This comes by filling your mind with God’s truth and fellowshipping with Him.

In seeking deliverance from the occult, we cannot stop halfway. We must be committed to turning from our sin and following Christ with all our heart. Believers must heed Paul’s exhortation to put on the spiritual armor of God. In Ephesians 6, Paul reminds us that, “Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Only Christians who come in the authority of Christ can engage the world of the occult and those protected by His armor can resist the Adversary and be delivered from the occult.

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