

Christians and the Occult

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. The concept evokes many different kinds of images.
 - 1. From the amusing Sorcerer's Apprentice of Disney,
 - 2. To the ludicrous imagery of Anton LeVay of the church of Satan,
 - 3. To the disturbing conduct of Satanists,
 - 4. To the entertaining antics of Harry Potter and Constantine,
 - 5. To the eerily odd customs of the Wiccan religion,
 - 6. Images of the dark arts have evolved over the years into forms attractive to contemporary culture.
 - 7. It is not possible to list, let alone discuss all of the permutations of the dark arts that have been developed by humankind since the beginning. We will limit ourselves to a few illustrations and keep our focus on what the word of God teaches for professed believers.
- B. This matter has troubled me a great deal since my childhood. I had misguidedly believed that practitioners of the dark arts actually had supernatural powers, and I set out to learn more and face it head-on.
 - 1. I soon learned there were two types of sorcery:
 - a. The authentic kind where actual demon possession was involved; limited to the five great periods of miraculous activity in the Bible - Acts 19:13-16; Matt. 8:28-32
 - 1) This does not frighten me, as the Lord has brought to an end this kind of power of the Adversary.
 - b. The kind that is fraudulent involving the use of mind, mood, and consciousness altering drugs and deceitful tricks; designed to ensnare and control people - 1Sam. 28:7-14; Acts 8:9-19
 - 1) This frightens me because such persons are quite successful in overcoming and harmfully manipulating the weak, and quite often modestly successful in deceiving the strong.
 - 2. We live in the time of the second; however, there is great danger in this kind; it can have spiritually destructive effects.
 - a. People can get lost in it, commit all manner of sin in it, lead others into sin, and abandon God by default.
 - b. I had applied myself to study it and to possibly write a book on it; I saw enough of it to destroy my interest in it and to fear learning too much about the power of deceit.
- C. Sorcery is sin in the Bible - Gal. 5:19-20; Rev. 9:21, 18:23
 - 1. Note the frequent association of sorcery and deceit.
- D. What are the dark arts? Why is it sinful? What does it have to do with me?

I. WHAT IS SORCERY?

- A. "Sorcery: Magic; enchantment; witchcraft; wizardry; thaumaturgy; divination by the assistance of spirits, or the power of commanding evil spirits." (Webster's)

1. Sorcery is the exercise of the dark arts or other forms of supernatural insight or ability apart from the sanction of God.
 2. Magic tricks, which generally involve illusion but not the religiosity, are not under discussion here (although they can be part of the deception of contemporary dark arts).
 3. What is under consideration is anything involving claims of the use of supernatural forces: voodoo, magic spells, witchcraft in any form, tarot card reading, psychic readings, séances, astrological readings including horoscopes.
- B. Why is this important? Some people consider such things to be at worst a superstitious carry over from a more ignorant past; others view it as a more or less harmless pastime.

II. WHY IS SORCERY WRONG?

- A. From the beginning, God established that He is the spiritual power to whom people should turn - Ex. 20:3-5, 34:14; Col. 2:6-10
- B. There is only one God and therefore only one supreme power in the universe
- C. Yet, there are spiritual forces of darkness - Eph. 6:12
 1. Satan can appear as an angel of light - 2Cor. 11:14
 2. Satan is called the god of this world - 2Cor. 4:4
- D. The Bible implies that spiritual forces of darkness have had power.
 1. Ex. 7:11-12, 22, 8:7 - The sorcerers in Pharaoh's palace were able to turn their staffs into snakes, turn the Nile to blood, and brought forth a plague of frogs by their secret arts.
 2. However, they were not able to create a plague of lice, and declared such to be the finger of God - Ex. 8:16-19
 3. This indicates a difference between what they were doing and what God was doing; they recognized real power when they saw it as opposed to the deceit they were practicing.
 4. 1Samuel 28:7-20 - the witch of Endor conjures up the soul of Samuel for Saul, and appears shocked that it worked.
 5. Acts 19:18-19 - burning of books of magic arts as repentance can be repentance from the sin of deceit as well as doing the will of Satan.
- E. Dark arts do represent a concern and a threat, and should not be taken as lightly as they often are.
 1. Whether it is the case that the Adversary actually had supernatural gifts he was able to grant to his followers during the periods of miraculous activity in the Bible.
 - a. If this is the case, understand that it would never have been as great as God's power, i.e. the demons subject to Christ.
 2. Or, if it is simply the case that the powers were based on deceit and drugs alone, and that is consistent with the scriptures.
 3. Or, if it is the case that God permitted the use of such powers as an opportunity to manifest His own power over them.
 4. Regardless of which is true, these things must be understood:
 - a. That in every case, the practice of the dark arts is always a sin,

- b. The practice of the dark arts is an affront to God and His power,
 - c. The practice of the dark arts always does harm to the practitioner and those deceived by him.
- F. The Bible makes it clear that our trust and confidence is to be in God alone.
 - 1. Heb. 11:6; Rom. 1:16-17; Acts 26:18; 1Thes. 1:9-10
 - 2. If our trust and confidence is in God, we have no reason to turn to forces of darkness, real or imagined.
- G. Eph. 6:10-13
 - 1. Why would we turn to that which is against what is good and holy?
 - 2. Why seek psychics when we can pray to God?
 - 3. Why look to stars for guidance when we can look to the Creator?
 - 4. Why tinker with witchcraft when we can do good and obtain eternal life?
 - 5. How can we fight on the Lord's side while meddling with darkness?

III. DRUGS ARE OFTEN PART OF THE DARK ARTS

- A. The Greek word for sorcery provides additional insight into the nature of sorcery in Bible times.
 - 1. Gal. 5:20 - Greek pharmakeia (from which we derive the word pharmacy) - "the use or the administering of drugs; poisoning; sorcery, magical arts." (Thayer)
 - 2. "Medication (pharmacy), i.e. magic (literally or figuratively), sorcery, witchcraft." (Strongs)
 - 3. "Witchcraft - farmakeia, from farmakon, a drug or poison; because in all spells and enchantments, whether true or false, drugs were employed. As a drug, it might either be the means of removing an evil, or inflicting one; it is derived from feron akov, bringing ease, or feron acov, bringing pain. So spells and incantations were used sometimes for the restoration of the health; at others, for the destruction of an enemy. Sometimes, these farmaka were used to procure love; at other times, to produce hatred." (Clarke's Commentary)
 - 4. "Pretending to witchcraft. The apostle does not vouch for the actual existence of witchcraft; but he says that what was known as such was a proof of the corrupt nature of man, and was one of the fruits of it. No one can doubt it. It was a system of imposture and falsehood throughout; and nothing is a better demonstration of the depravity of the human heart than an extended and systematized attempt to impose on mankind. The word which is here used, (farmakeia, whence our word pharmacy, from farmakon: a medicine, poison, magic potion,) means, properly, the preparing and giving of medicine. Then it means also poisoning, and also magic art, or enchantment; because in savage nations, pharmacy or medicine consisted much in magical incantations. Thence it means sorcery or enchantment, and it is so used uniformly in the New Testament. It refers to the black arts, or to pretensions to witchcraft, and the numerous delusions which have grown out of it, as a striking illustration of the corrupt and depraved nature of man." (Barnes Notes)
- B. Does this mean that using medicine is sinful?
 - 1. 1Tim. 5:23; Col. 4:14
 - 2. Some drugs are consumed not for medical benefit but for recreational purposes: Most use of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, PCP,

methamphetamines, crystal methadone, LSD, ecstasy, opium, and abuse of prescription medications.

3. Similarly, these and other drugs are still being used by some practitioners of the dark arts to enhance the deceit (voodoo; séances).

VI. KING SAUL AND THE WITCH

A. 1Sam. 28:7-10 "So Saul disguised himself."

1. Why? Fear, shame, deceit, no good reason... To hide his sin!

B. The nature of his nocturnal journey:

1. Witch is at Endor, Saul is at Gilboa, and the Philistine army at Shunem, right in between.
2. Imagine how stealthy he would have to be, the risks he was taking to sin with this witch to avoid going God's way.

C. Nature of his request:

1. "Divine for me by a familiar spirit." - Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27
2. She reminds him that King Saul conducted a massive campaign against witchcraft, and lives were at risk.
 - a. May have even had friends and associates who were killed.
3. Saul takes an oath in God's name that she would be unharmed.
 - a. Had descended to the point of rejecting the good he had done in the past.
4. Folks today who refuse to obey God still depend on Him in more ways than they realize.
 - a. Saul had to use God's name to convince this witch.
 - b. God's name convinced this witch.
5. Saul wanted a shortcut out of the trouble generated by his sin.
 - a. I can understand why he wanted to talk to Samuel.

Clarke had this to say about Samuel: "He was incorrupt; he received no man's bribe; he had no pension from the state; he enriched none of his relatives from the public purse; he left no private debts to be discharged by his country. He was among the Hebrews what Aristides is said to have been among the Greeks, so poor at his death, that he did not leave property enough to bury him. Justice was duly and impartially administered, and oppression and wrong had no existence. If there ever was a heaven born minister, it was Samuel, in whose public and private conduct there was no blemish."

7. Saul should have started with God. He knew his sin, and cried, "God has departed from me."

8. This is the lot of everyone who leaves God, discovers that their lives have become out of control, and long for a way to fix it without God.

Conclusion:

- A. The use of drugs to enhance the experience is against the law - Rom. 13:1-7
- B. Those who practice the dark arts cannot go to heaven - Gal. 5:19-21
- C. The practice of the dark arts is both defiance and denial of God's goodness and power to provide for His children - Matt. 6:21-24
- D. In all things let us put our trust in God and Him alone - Matt. 6:33; 1Peter 2:24