

Satanism or Christianity?

Bible truth about the occult

THE question can be simply put. Should we believe in a supreme and all-powerful Being who is the essence of goodness ó a God who is so interested and concerned for His creatures that He sent His Son to be the saviour of mankind; or should we place our trust in a supernatural power of wickedness and darkness ó the basis of occult beliefs? Only one other possibility has ever been considered, and that has been a belief that man can determine his own destiny and solve the world's problems.

Despite the great strides made by mankind in the technical world ó or perhaps even because of them ó man's inability to solve the one problem that afflicts every human being has caused him to search elsewhere for answers. Man's great problem is his certain destiny. The great advances made in the last century-and-a-half have shown that it is not just death that needs removing from the earth; the effects of mortality are equally serious. People are now living much longer than they used to. Yet who really wants to live an extra five or ten years if they bring no improved quality of life?

In years gone by religion would have given mankind the opportunity to discover satisfactory answers to this universal problem. But society today has relegated religion to a very low position. Religion is the butt of comedians' jokes, and religious leaders rarely comment on anything other than sociological issues. This situation has occurred for a number of reasons. Primarily it has come about because the authority of God's revelation of Himself and His purpose has been forsaken. Men have failed to denounce as 'sin' behaviour which is contrary to His law. Self-indulgent thought has been elevated by the producers and consumers of technology, and religious principles are scorned. Unthinkingly, Karl Marx's comment about religion has been widely accepted; he called it 'the opium of the people'.

If religion has become a no-go area for many people, where else can they turn? Some deliberately push into the back of their minds the reality of life and its unanswered questions and make the desire for entertainment act as a buffer against searching enquiries about man's destiny. But the claims of believers in the occult have provided for others an outlet for their frustration. The purpose of this booklet is to examine these claims and to measure them against those made in the Bible. Are they serious claims, demanding careful attention? Or are they just another form of entertainment ó a type of escapism where the need to go to extremes is like a drug addict requiring ever stronger and more frequent doses?

A source of authority

As with all difficult questions the true answer can only be found from an authoritative source. In matters affecting man and his worship, and enquiries about his eternal destiny, only one authority has been confirmed by the passage of time, and that is the Bible ó the word of God Himself. It is sincerely to be regretted that this word of authority, while not failing in itself, has not been well represented by those who claim to uphold it. Many people, for example, will claim that religion has failed. But if religion has failed to provide answers only two conclusions can be drawn. Either the answers cannot be found in a religious faith, or those who are in leading religious positions are not making these answers widely available. There is no middle course. The same is true for belief in the occult. Either it really offers answers,

or it is an elaborate sham or a mirage, confusing those who place their trust in it. There are no half measures.

Definitions

But can occult beliefs offer any real solutions to the difficulties posed by illness and death, by a growing population and reducing natural resources? Let us first look at what the terms Satanism and the Occult describe. According to dictionary definitions, occult is the wider term. It is applied to all sciences involving the knowledge or use of the supernatural, like astrology, magic, or witchcraft. Satanism is a more specific definition, and is used to refer to the worship of Satan, who is alleged to be the supreme evil spirit.

Without wishing to make too much of the words themselves, for we wish primarily to examine the claims made by adherents to these beliefs, the derivation of the term 'occult' is interesting and significant for our enquiry. It is based on the Latin word meaning 'to hide'. The occult therefore deals with those things which are kept secret or hidden, shrouded in darkness, or beyond the range of ordinary knowledge. Because they involve hidden or secret things occult practices are sometimes called the *Black Arts*.

The terms themselves therefore involve a range of varying beliefs and practices, and any explanation of them can only cover generalities. Not all believers in the supernatural will believe all of the following, but it is a genuine attempt to show what occultic beliefs involve.

The primary belief is in a strong power or force of wickedness. Often this is personalised, either into one demonic being called Satan, Lucifer, or the Devil or into a whole hierarchy of evil spirits through which the world and its inhabitants are controlled. As the supreme power in the earth, it must be obeyed or appeased. To defy it is to court disaster, and dread warnings are given of what may befall anyone who opposes it. The worship of the Devil by Satanists has therefore been likened to the worship of God, though as we shall see, the analogy is not really helpful. God does not ask to be appeased to stop Him unleashing His judgements on an unsuspecting world, yet this attitude is adopted by those involved in the Black Arts towards the ungodly supernatural power which they believe exists. All sorts of different means are used to show that they are 'in tune' with wicked forces, which they trust will then work in their favour; *for* them, and not against them.

A lot of these practices bear striking similarities, at least outwardly, to religious devotions. At the centre of the religious life of believers in Christ is the communion meal, when they share together bread and wine symbols of Christ's body and blood in memory of his victory over sin and death. Many believers in the occult hold services where real blood is offered and drunk as a mark of the 'fellowship' existing between the congregation and the ungodly powers, the blood having first been taken from a 'living sacrifice'

Comparisons with religious worship

As sacrifices and ritual in occult worship shadow similar practices connected with religious worship, belief in the supernatural and in the power of evil has become itself a religion of the worship of a superior being. But instead of the belief and worship of a God who is essentially good, the supernatural being in occult worship is utterly and completely malevolent. Because of the great differences between the objects of worship of believers in God and believers in the occult, the effect upon them is also completely different. True belief in a God who cares

for the people of His creation, and who is concerned about their eternal destiny, develops love, trust and confidence in those who worship Him. By contrast, worship of a supposedly evil power issues from fear: fear of the consequences of failing to give honour and respect; and fear of the punishments that will be directed at anyone denying the existence of that power.

It is sometimes suggested that belief in the supernatural is not inconsistent with believing in the God who created the world and sent His Son for the salvation of mankind. There is, so it is said, both a power for good and a power of evil, and man must decide which he chooses to worship. Even some of those who claim to worship God alone also recognise an ungodly power of wickedness from which they believe they have been delivered. They believe also that there are evil spirits which can possess innocent people against their will, and that they need removing ó or exorcising ó to allow the individual to serve God wholeheartedly. We must therefore find an answer to the following question:

Is there more than one Supreme Being?

This is fundamental to our enquiry, and we need to be sure of the answer. Yet without looking at any of the evidence, the answer is apparent by carefully considering the question. Unless there is somehow an equal sharing of power, there can only be one *Supreme* being: the word does not allow a place for any challengers. Yet many people do believe that a great power struggle between two equally matched opponents has been continuing throughout man's history; between a god of light and the powers of darkness. This idea can be found in the religions and customs on every continent and in every age. The view is so widespread that most ideologies include it in their own philosophies. But the existence of the belief ó even the antiquity and extent of the belief ó cannot be used to prove the truth of the idea. That remains open to question and examination.

Followers of the occult may claim to believe in this struggle between good and evil, but by their worship of a supernatural *evil* force they make wickedness supreme, not good, nor an equal sharing between the two qualities. Applying the test of the scriptures, we find that the Bible allows no room for this concept. Indeed there is a simple and straightforward statement found first in the Old Testament and repeated by the Lord Jesus Christ in the New which denies the idea of a divine contest between gods of good and evil. When he was asked which was the most important commandment in the Jewish law, Jesus prefaced his answer by saying:

“The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one”
(Mark 12:29)

The law to which he referred went on to say that God recognises no rival: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Not that God was recognising the power of other gods and asking His children to follow only Him, for elsewhere He calls these other deities “no-gods” (e.g. Isaiah 37:19). He was in fact instructing His people that they should worship Him wholeheartedly because there is no other God; there is no other Supreme Being claiming the devotion of human hearts. To worship anything else is thus a denial of the authority and majesty of the One God, the “Lord of heaven and earth”, as the Apostle Paul described Him to a company of Greek philosophers who believed in a whole panoply of deities vying with each other to receive the worship of mankind (Acts 17:24).

A warning against involvement

Wholly in harmony with this important principle about the supremacy of God, He specifically forbade the nation of Israel, His specially selected witnesses among the nations of the earth, to get involved with any of those who indulged in satanic or occult practices:

“When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or one who practises witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you í for these nations, which you will dispossess, listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.”
(Deuteronomy 18:9-14)

In this important passage various practices are brought together, all of them alien to the worship of God. They have one thing in common, and that is a denial of the supremacy of God who created all things. One of the most heinous and repugnant practices it is possible to imagine heads the list: sacrificing one’s own child by burning him on a bonfire. Only a depraved mind could conceive of such an inhuman act, and only a warped or desperate person could actually carry it out. Yet, if reports are to be believed, child sacrifice is not something only to be found in the history books: it is still practised. Some reports even suggest that it is on the increase.

And as we look down the rest of the list it has to be admitted that it is fully up to date. All these things are found in our modern world. Not only is it true that voodoo is still practised in the Caribbean, and that witchdoctors still wield frightening power in many African countries, this list describes practices carried out today in countries of the Western world also, countries which pride themselves on their civilisation and freedom from superstition. The age of tolerance, where everyone is allowed to do virtually what they wish, actually makes the control of such revolting things very difficult to impose.

After describing child sacrifice, the passage in Deuteronomy mentions the following practices:

Witchcraft: describes the use of magic arts in order to try and influence the destiny of others.

Soothsayers: attempt to discover the unknown or future events by supernatural means, by invoking powers believed to control the future destiny of individuals.

Interpreting omens: is better known to us as the interest in astrological forecasting, or reading the stars.

Sorcerers: use various means to bewitch and deceive their fellow men, claiming that they have special powers. One who *conjures* spells is called a *witch* or a *wizard*.

Mediums: claim to pass and receive messages sent between the living and the dead.

Spiritists: are also concerned with messages from the dead, They get involved in the whole range of spiritualist practices ó tarot cards, ouija boards, automatic writing, etc.

Calling up the dead: most believers in the occult feel that it is possible to communicate with the dead. When the Bible was translated into English in the 17th century, the word -necromancyø was used to describe all the different practices used to obtain messages from the dead. The most extreme form of this belief actually uses dead bodies, mostly of animals, but sometimes of humans, to make forecasts about living people.

An example of how men indulged in this forecasting is given in Ezekielø prophecy where the king of Babylon is shown trying to discover whether he should attack Jerusalem: would an assault prove favourable, or should he attack the Ammonites first?

õThe king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads (one to Jerusalem, one to Rabbah, the capital of Ammon), to use divination: he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver í ö (Ezekiel 21:21)

By dropping a bundle of arrows to see where they pointed, by questioning his idols and by examining the liver taken from a sacrificed animal he thought he would be guided in the most propitious way. How could these things have any eloquence? How could they tell him the true answer? No wonder God instructed His people to have nothing to do with them.

One of the important things to be noticed from this catalogue of occult practices is that there are some which are indulged in casually by many in our modern world. Their pursuit is not confined to undeveloped countries where belief in the supernatural is sometimes blamed on lack of education, nor can they be relegated just to the history books. It is not possible to brush them aside as being the province only of a small minority, or as being utterly harmless. The fear engendered by occult and satanist groups is known to hold many people in a trap of terror. Even the apparently harmless interest in -the starsø where astrological forecasts claim to describe the pattern of future events in an individualø life, is potentially dangerous. The destiny of man is in Godø hands, and is not controlled by the stars, or anything else.

Where then did the idea of a rival power come from? For someone who believes in an ungodly and supernatural power of evil it provides the answer to why there is so much wickedness and evil in the world. The blame is thus placed outside man; he is not held responsible for any of the worldø ills. And in any case, so it is alleged, this life is only a preparation for entry into the spirit world.

The origin of evil?

Ideas like this lead us to ask some fundamental questions about mankind. God created mankind and his environment, and His description of manø estate must be the judgement upon all other theories, wherever they arise.

Is it true, for example, as believers in the occult allege, that ungodly evil powers are responsible for all the wickedness evident in the world? The Bible utterly renounces this idea. Instead, it explains that the responsibility rests fairly and squarely with man. Consider the following passages:

õThe Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continuallyö (Genesis 6:5)

“The heart (of man) is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

“Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” (Matthew 15:19)

Man cannot shrug off this responsibility by blaming something outside himself. If no one is looking, the temptation is strong to try and “get away with” a wrong act that will benefit ourselves, rather than struggle to do something for someone else at great personal cost. This temptation is from within and arises unprovoked. Jesus explained that when evil thoughts are allowed free rein they can lead to violence and murder, and that uncontrolled desires lead to theft and adultery (Matthew 5:21-28). Yes, the Bible is right: man’s wickedness is great in the earth.

Sin and death

But God did not leave mankind floundering in its own wicked ways without also revealing how this came about, or without explaining the great plan He has for saving the world from the distresses man has brought upon it. When God first created the world there was no wickedness and no evil; everything was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Only when the first man and woman made the choice to disobey God’s command and do things for their own pleasure rather than His did mortality become a fixed principle in their natures. Prior to their active denial of the Creator, Adam and Eve had the prospect of an unlimited and idyllic life. But these hopes were dashed when, because of disobedience, they were driven from the Garden of Eden, and condemned to a certain death as mortality took its toll.

Their descendants inherited the same situation: mortal bodies, a defiled earth and, through their leaning towards sin, constant temptation. No man or woman has been free from these, the result being that the world has become full of wickedness. And all men and women die: there is no exception.

The amazing thing is that we all carry on as if this were not true; as if life will always continue. Against all the evidence mankind believes that there is some sort of immortality – if not for the body, then at least an immortality of the essential personality, often described as the “soul”. It may be a lovely thought, but we would be deluding ourselves if we really believed it. The wise man’s statement concerning the situation of man at death is chilling, but deep down everyone knows it is true:

“The dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy, have now perished; never more will they have a share in anything done under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6)

The dead have no contact with the living, nor can the living contact the dead; for there is nothing there: “They die and return to their dust” (Psalm 104:29). This basic fact has serious implications for all who believe in a spirit world, and think that messages can pass from here to there and that answers can be received. Anyone placing his hopes in such a system is deluding himself. All that can be learned from the dead is that without the intervention of God death is final, and man is helpless. Yet how often, even from those who profess to be believers in God and students of His word, is the opposite impression given?

This lack of understanding and reverence for God and His word should cause us serious concern. God is not like men who can be mistaken. We cannot choose to believe some things He has revealed and reject others as we would do with a fallible human being. We have to accept everything, or reject Him totally. To deny what He has revealed about man's nature and destiny is to deny also His promises regarding man's salvation from sin and death. To believe that there is something in the world not of His making or contrary to what He has revealed limits His power and authority. Jesus claimed that "*all power* in heaven and earth was given him by his Father (Matthew 28:18). This would have been untrue if there is another who has all evil power under his control.

In a fascinating passage in Isaiah's prophecy God spoke to a Persian king who believed in equally powerful gods of good and evil, of light and darkness. As an explanation that Israel's God is Lord of all the earth, He said:

“I am the Lord, and there is no other; there is no God besides me. I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I the Lord do all these things.” (Isaiah 45:5-7)

The author of evil

If, as a consideration of other scriptures has shown, man is responsible for the wickedness which exists on the earth and cannot place the blame on anyone else, how can God claim to be the Creator of calamity, the Author of evil? The prophet Amos also said, “If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?” (Amos 3:6).

We need to understand clearly what this means. In the Bible sense, evil is the consequence of sin. It is not sin itself, nor even the cause of sin. Furthermore, God's response to sin has a twofold purpose: to expose sin for what it really is – disobedience of God's commands – and to cause the sinner to appreciate the benefits of complying with His will. The introduction into the world of thorns and thistles, of illness and suffering, of pain and death was, as we have seen, because of man's first sin when he transgressed God's law. Man was the moral offender, but the physical consequences were God's condemnation of his offence, designed also to be a constant reminder of his waywardness. Unlike the idea behind a supernatural force willing men and women to do wicked and sinful acts, God did not introduce these things as temptations designed to make man sin. God did not want man to die, He wants him to live! “God desires all men to be saved”, the Apostle Paul said (1 Timothy 2:4). Evil is present in the world, not to tempt men and women to defy God, but to remind them of how He views transgression and sin, and what they lead to – how they are the natural precursors to mortality and death. In addition to being a rightful punishment of disobedience, evil and calamity exist as spurs to better things: as an encouragement to good, and not wicked ways.

The author of peace

God is also the author of peace. Only from Him can man learn what he must do to be pleasing in His sight, and how he can resist temptation. Ultimately, God has promised that He will rid the world of everything associated with sin:

“There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain: for the former things (introduced because of man's first sin) have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)

This promise is bound up in the work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. His work reveals the falsity of all beliefs in a spirit or hidden world under the control of a being alien to the ways of God. In Deuteronomy, immediately following the passage which warns against involvement in the whole spectrum of occult practices because they are deceitful, Moses told the nation of Israel this further important truth:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” (Deuteronomy 18:15)

The nation was to have no contact with the defiling practices of the heathen peoples around, for God was promising to speak to them in a very special way, and to reveal Himself uniquely to them. He would send a prophet ó one who speaks forth His word, putting man into the context of his past, explaining his present circumstances, and opening up the possibilities of his future destiny.

Like his brethren

This Prophet is the Lord Jesus Christ. He was “made like his brethren” (Hebrews 2:17) in that he shared with them the same physical characteristics. He knew the same temptations that trouble men and women every day; he grew older and felt weariness and pain; and he died. In all these things he was the same as anyone else who has ever lived. Yet there was one significant difference. Whereas everyone else has been disobedient to God, he was not. Everyone else has transgressed and sinned; he did not. Though he lived in the circumstances introduced into the world because of the first sin, he proved himself worthy of something better. If death was God’s judgement on sin, Jesus’ obedient life showed that though he died willingly at God’s command, he did not as other men deserve to die. God raised him up “because it was not possible that he should be held by it (i.e. death)” (Acts 2:24).

He therefore has become the way of escape from sin and death for all who associate themselves with his victory. Moses told Israel that God would send someone they needed to listen to ó “him you shall hear.” How different all this was from the occult practices of the nations around. God’s word is a light showing men and women the sort of life they should live (Psalm 119:105). Jesus is the light of men (John 1:4), the light of the world (John 8:12). Satanic, demonic and occult practices are dark and secret, and God sent Jesus as a light to shine even into their dark recesses and expose the serious errors indulged in by those who follow them.

Yet some people believe that Jesus himself recognised the existence of a satanic control over mankind. We need to be certain that Jesus spoke and acted in accordance with his Father’s word spoken through earlier prophets if we are to accept him as The Prophet promised when Moses spoke to the nation of Israel warning them against meddling with occult practices.

Did Jesus believe in supernatural evil spirits?

During Jesus’ ministry, when he healed many people suffering from a variety of complaints, it is recorded that “he cast out many demons” (Mark 1:34). This is taken by those who believe there are occult powers controlling the world as proof that Jesus also recognised such a power.

A careful examination of the Bible accounts of the miracles of Jesus and his disciples shows that where there was clear physical evidence of the cause of the disease, the ailment is simply explained: men were blind, lame, or deaf; they had withered limbs, could not straighten themselves, had continual bleeding, or were lepers. Only when there was no obvious physical cause, or where the illness was inexplicable by the information available at the time, are evil spirits ever mentioned.

One example from many will make the point. In Matthew's Gospel two incidents of healing are brought together. The first concerns two blind men whom Jesus healed. The record says simply, "their eyes were opened" (Matthew 9:30). But straight afterwards, when the two men had left, another man was brought to Jesus. He was "mute, and *demon-possessed*" (verse 32). How strange that two men were blind because their eyes needed opening, but a man was dumb because he was possessed by demons! If there really is a spirit-inhabited world, then both illnesses would have been caused by unclean spirits. The only explanation that makes sense of the information, and which accords with the rest of Bible teaching, is that illnesses without any obvious cause were ascribed in those days to evil spirits.

This does not mean that Jesus himself was uneducated about these things. He knew that there is only one God, who has no rival. But through his miracles Jesus was showing the people how in the kingdom age sin and mortality will no longer bind those whom he raises to be made like himself – immortal and incorruptible. Even if he had described to them some of the processes discovered by medical science in the last two centuries, Jesus' countrymen would not have understood. But they *were* able to understand his power and the promise it held for the future.

The effect of this knowledge on Jesus' followers in the years immediately following his period of ministry in Israel was that they clearly perceived the truth about the occult, about magic, and about Satanism – that they are based upon false claims, and only exist where there is a climate of fear; a climate they seek to create and preserve. Those who practised these things also saw the difference between their alleged powers and the power exercised by the apostles. One man in Samaria, for example, "of a long time had bewitched the people – with his sorceries". When he witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit, he knew it surpassed the powers he claimed to possess, and tried to persuade the apostles to sell it to him (Acts 8:9-24).

In another city, Ephesus, there were some people who had also been caught up in occult practices. They were convinced of the supremacy of the power exercised by the apostles when some "itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits – and the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" The effect of this incident was that "many of those who had practised magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all" (Acts 19:11-20).

The only authority

There is a compelling honesty about this reaction to the Gospel message. Once their books were burned, they could not be used again! It expressed the firm belief that Satanism and Christianity cannot exist side by side, or as the Apostle Paul wrote, "What communion has light with darkness – what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (2 Corinthians 6:14,16). Anyone today who has been caught up in occult practices, and who may be fearful

of the consequences of rejecting them can take great comfort from the example of these early disciples in Ephesus. They knew that God has granted His Son Jesus Christ unlimited use of His supreme power; they recognised the truth spoken by Isaiah:

“When they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Isaiah 8:19,20)

This is the advice we have attempted to encourage in this booklet. Only one authority exists which is trustworthy in these matters. How can the dead offer any hope to the living? What can they teach us except that death is certain for every man and woman on earth? Mediums and wizards, practitioners of occult arts, all claim to have contact with the after-life where the spirits of dead men reign. But there is no such place. There are no ‘spirits of dead men’. Spiritists’ claims do not stand up to careful scientific examination. But more importantly, those who say these things ‘do not speak according to this word’ – the word of God – which denies the existence of such a world.

Jesus – the light of the world

If we want to know what hope there is for the living, we must turn to the living Christ! Having been raised from the dead, Jesus is now immortal and waiting in heaven for the day when his Father will send him back to the earth to raise and judge the dead and establish a kingdom centred upon the city of Jerusalem. This is a reliable and trustworthy promise revealed to all mankind, not a hazy notion deliberately kept secret or hidden. After Jesus’ resurrection his apostles went all round the world of their day preaching ‘the good news of the kingdom of God’. They were able to claim ‘this thing was not done in a corner’ (Acts 26:26). The same is true today. The information about God’s plan of salvation is freely available in the Bible. It must become the test of all other human ideas. When they coincide with its message, they speak the truth. When they diverge or disagree, they are false.

Do you want to be associated with life, or death? With light, or darkness? God recognises only those who approach Him in the name of Jesus Christ. He is light, and he is life.

By Michael Ashton

All quotations from the Revised Authorised (New King James) Version of the Bible.

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