

Ghosts

Introduction

I have touched on this subject a number of times when dealing with the issues of the occult; however, I have not treated the matter as a specific subject. Since I have been asked about this issue, I have decided to do a simple and short study, as time does not permit an extended examination.

When I was first converted, within two weeks I was asked to give a message on this matter, and the occult in general, at a college Bible study; it was my first study presentation. I was asked because my previous, unconverted life had included significant experiences in the occult where I learned its evils first hand. So, I have personal experience in this matter as well as a Biblical understanding.

What are Ghosts?

A ghost is an apparition of a dead person which is believed to become manifest to the living, usually as a nebulous image. Ghosts are claimed to be the spirits of dead people that can become faintly visible, or fully visible for a moment.

Ghosts are especially supposed to haunt buildings. Sometimes objects are considered ghostly, such as the famous ghost ship, The Flying Dutchman.

The origin of the word 'ghost' is from the Old English *gāst* (spirit, soul), of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *geest* and German *Geist*. The *gh-* spelling occurs first in the early printer Caxton, probably influenced by Flemish *gheest*.

In a nutshell, the word ghost is usually referring to the spirit of a dead person that has become visible.

How did the modern interest in ghosts and spirits begin and who is involved?

There are a number of practices that surround the concept of ghosts, usually these are people manipulating others to make money. Originally, communication with spirits was the province of a shaman, or witchdoctor, which was prevalent in primitive occult and animistic societies; but this had been virtually eradicated in western society after the advent of Christianity and rationalism.

In the late 19th century the concept of ghosts, spirits of the dead, poltergeists and ESP¹ became extremely popular, even fooling rationalists like Arthur Conan Doyle. This was when the practice of clairvoyance (mediums) became big business.

This interest bred a new surge in faith-healers, clairvoyants / mediums and magicians (sorcerers) and séances; a history of this would be extensive and include studies of Wicca,

¹ Extra Sensory Perception.

witchcraft, Satanism, magic, spiritualism, divination, Shinto, Theosophy, New Age and so on.

One example is Edgar Cayce [1877-1945] who demonstrated remarkable abilities as a clairvoyant and as a supposed healer. His abilities were given by occult means, even though he was a professing Christian, Bible reader and Sunday school teacher. Needless to say he went on to teach major heresies, such as reincarnation and a denial of the attributes of God.

The proliferation of Victorian séances and mediums is well known to all. The new interest in spiritualism began in 1843 when a New Yorker named Andrew Jackson Davis claimed to be able to communicate with the dead and wrote many books. In 1848 Kate Fox and her sisters claimed to hear spiritual noises in their supposedly haunted home in New York. They also discovered that they were mediums. Their particular familiar spirit was called Mr Splitfoot, the spirit of a supposedly murdered man. The Fox sisters claimed in 1855 to have faked the whole thing but then recanted the confession later. Nevertheless the Fox sisters' story was a major publicity boost for the occult. Conventions for spiritualism were held, such as a major one in 1852 in Cleveland.

Then spiritualism spread from America to Europe, notably with Daniel Douglas Home (who was supposed to be able to levitate and float out of windows) and Eusapia Palladino (who could move objects by the blink of an eye). By the end of the century many spiritualist churches and movements had sprung up, such as The Universal Church of the Master in Los Angeles (1908). Studies revealed that spiritualists tended to be simple and impressionable people, mostly middle-aged women. Meetings were said to follow a set pattern with a common verbiage and were very boring. Nevertheless, some spiritualists were intelligent professional people, such as social reformer Robert Dale [1801-1877] who addressed President Lincoln on the subject (who was not impressed).

Illusionist Harry Houdini was the most famous sceptic and critic of the movement. With *Scientific American* magazine he offered \$5,000 to any medium that could satisfy a scientific investigative committee. No one could do this and many frauds were exposed. However, later on some mediums appeared to be genuine and were not exposed, such as Mrs Leonora E Piper of Boston. Scientists were unable to disprove her abilities. Such cases involve real contact with demons that communicate information unknown to the medium through the network of demons in the world. I have personally seen this.

The initial interest in ghosts and the occult was followed by the development of new religions affirming the supernatural (such as Hindu groups in the west and various occult and witchcraft societies). Some were centred upon communication with spirits, such as Theosophy, which later developed into the New Age movement. This was followed by syncretistic sects in Christianity (such as the Mormons, New Thought, Christian Science or Unity) where occult practices were mixed with Biblical topics. Many sects became fascinated by miracles, healing, tongues, demons, angels and so on.

At roughly the same time that secular American occultists were becoming famous for speaking to the dead or seeing ghosts, or moving physical objects from a distance,² or faith-healing, there was also the rise of the interest in the supernatural in the American church in the Holiness and then Pentecostal Movements. The second flowering of the occult came with the variegated New Age Movement after 1960, which coincided with the development of the Charismatic Movement in the church. [These parallels should tell you something!]

² Telekinesis; mostly fake and fraud.

The principal people dealing with ghosts:

- Clairvoyants: people who supposedly can see into the spiritual realm above physical reality, communicating with ghosts and spirits.
- Mediums: people who are clairvoyant and act as a go-between for people seeking communication with dead relatives and friends (usually for money).
- Shamans: see glossary.
- Witchdoctors = shamans.
- Certain types of prophet who communicates with spirits (which is usually called an angel). There are secular and 'Christian' forms of this and they are all dangerous.³
- Those who conduct séances.
- Those who use Ouija boards.
- Spiritualists ('spiritists' in USA).

Biblical facts pertaining to ghosts

No ghosts

There are no ghosts mentioned in the Bible whatsoever; none.

The word 'ghost' appears in the NKJV twice only (the same event in different Gospels). This word is actually 'spirit' in the Greek text and is referring to the superstitions of men; albeit disciples before they understood all things (Matt 14:26; Mk 6:49).

The idea of a disembodied spirit of a man being observed on earth is completely unbiblical. There are, however, references to disembodied spirits in heaven who are alive with Jesus after death; these cannot appear on earth.

The dead do not communicate with the living

Do not put your trust in princes, *nor* in a son of man, in whom *there is* no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Ps 146:3-4

For the living know that they will die; but 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; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun. Eccles 9:5-6

But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us'. Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead'. Lk 16:25-31

It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment. Heb 9:27

[Note that this also rules out reincarnation.]

For more information see my paper, 'Dead Certainties'.

³ William Branham is an example of a heretical Pentecostal that did this.

The dead do not haunt houses

As the cloud disappears and vanishes away, so he who goes down to the grave does not come up. He shall never return to his house, nor shall his place know him anymore. Job 7:9-10

The dead are not angels

Angels are spirits created by God to do his will; they are not material creatures but spiritual beings. They dwell in heaven before God but in the past have been sent to earth to perform a task in human form. They were created before human beings were made out of dust. Man is a lower form of life than angels are (at this time; the elect will later judge angels).

What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honour. Ps 8:4-5

Who makes His angels spirits. Ps 104:4

His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Ps 103:20

The angel answered and said to him, 'I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God'. Lk 1:19

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Heb 1:14

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels. 2 Thess 1:7

Demons are angels that fell from heaven with Satan; fallen angels. Thus angels and demons are a specific creation, albeit in a spiritual, immaterial form. Satan is thus a fallen angel; a created spirit that has no divinity.

They [Jews] sacrificed to demons, not to God. Deut 32:17

In the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice. Lk 4:33

The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 1 Cor 10:20

*And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. Eph 2:1-2*

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Rev 12:9

*They are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth. Rev 16:14*

For more information see my paper: 'Rumours of angels'.

The appearances of demons

The Bible talks about people that commune with demons many times. This is usually in the context of idolatry where the worship of an idol is actually going to a demon.

They should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. Rev 9:20

However there are other times when the communing is for other purposes, such as divination.

The spirits that associate with witchdoctors and mediums⁴ are called ‘familiar spirits’. This is because that are well acquainted with the sorcerer or diviner.

Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I *am* the LORD your God. Lev 19:31

The person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. Lev 20:6

This activity of communing with demons to achieve some goal is not only forbidden by God but in the OT it was punishable by death.

A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood *shall be* upon them. Lev 20:27

There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices 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. Deut 18:10-12

What about the disembodied spirit of Samuel?

Then Saul said to his servants, ‘Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her’. And his servants said to him, ‘In fact, *there is* a woman who is a medium at En Dor’. So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, ‘Please conduct a seance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you’. ... Then the woman said, ‘Whom shall I bring up for you?’ And he said, ‘Bring up Samuel for me’. ... And the woman said to Saul, ‘I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth’. So he said to her, ‘“What *is* his form?’ And she said, ‘“An old man is coming up, and he *is* covered with a mantle’. And Saul perceived that it *was* Samuel, and he stooped with *his* face to the ground and bowed down.¹ Sam 28:7-19

Since we have multitudes of texts telling us that it is impossible for a man to appear on earth and talk to people after death, we cannot believe that this spirit was actually Samuel himself.

Some folk aver that God performed a miracle to condemn Saul through the real Samuel, but then God would be disobeying his own laws. This cannot be the case. Notice also that the woman mentions seeing a spirit rise up from the ground. Samuel was in paradise in ‘Abraham’s bosom’ (Lk 16; not heaven at this time before the cross) so Samuel would have had to come down not up.

Therefore, it had to be a demon masquerading as Samuel.

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’. Isa 8:19-20

This is what demons routinely do to deceive people. The manifestations of dead people in séances today are simple frauds most of the time, but occasionally are really demons

⁴ The Hebrew word translated by ‘mediums’ means ‘those having a familiar spirit’. E.g. Lev 19:31, 20:6; Isa 8:19, 19:3.

pretending to be dead people in order to deceive the living. As demons in a satanic worldwide network they have access to information not known to local people; thus they can fool people quite easily.

It is noticeable that spiritualists and those who attend séances often fall into depression, and mental disorders. There have been many that committed suicide.

Christians do not need to fear demons

What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? Rm 8:31

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities⁵ nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rm 8:38-39

Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Eph 6:11

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith. 1 Pt 5:8-9

Summary of principles

Ghosts are immaterial

Ghosts, even if they were true (which they are not) are only spirits. Therefore, as immaterial objects, they can do no harm to people. The image portrayed by Hollywood movies (designed to create fear amongst the impressionable) where ghosts can touch people and objects and cause havoc, such as dragging someone into hell, is absolute utter nonsense.

Even without any Biblical understanding, common sense tells you that a ghost can do you no harm. The only problem is if you believe in such nonsense and fear.

The dead cannot be seen or move out of Hades

All those who have died in sin are currently in Hades, the place of departed spirits. There they await the end of all things whereupon they will be sentenced to eternal condemnation in hell forever, hence their current torment, as exemplified by the rich man in Luke 16. There is no escape from Hades.

Today, all believers who die at this time go to be with the Lord in heaven until Christ returns to initiate the restoration of all things.

Departed spirits are masquerading demons

We have examined this in the earlier text.

Physical changes

Making changes to the material world through occult means (such as magic) are outside of the scope of this paper. Can this happen? The Bible tells us that magicians can do

⁵ A word sometimes used to refer to angels and demons as the first created beings. Lit, 'first, beginning, origin'.

remarkable feats through demonic activity, such as turning a staff into a living snake.⁶ However, all demonic activity is under the permissive will of God and is not sovereign.

Any unusual paranormal activity (such as poltergeists) that are not fraudulent or fictitious,⁷ would have to be exceptional demonic activity. In the Bible demons possessed pigs and ran over a cliff (Lk 8:32-33), but they needed a material body to do this. Demons require human hosts or devotees in order to achieve material change. However, I have yet to see any proof that poltergeist events have actually occurred. When scientists have investigated houses and rooms that had claimed poltergeist activity, nothing was found. As far as I am aware, no poltergeist movement has been repeated in the presence of trained scientists.

Some claim that poltergeist activity is actually the unconscious telekinesis of the victims. An investigation of this is outside the scope of this paper. However, one first has to prove that poltergeist activity or telekinesis actually exists.

Supernatural mental perception does exist and the CIA / US Military even had a department devoted to this to identify enemy locations. However, this is clairvoyance – the gaining of information from demons available through their world network of demons.

Conclusion

Even this short study shows that Christians have nothing to fear from either ghosts or demons. The former do not exist while the latter are created beings that we are able to resist in the power of God.

The power of the focus upon ghosts, as other occult things, is the ability to get people to fear for nothing at all. The problem is in the mind. As always for the Christian, the spiritual battle is for the mind. Therefore, it behoves Christians not to fill their mind with the junk Hollywood movies that glamorise ghosts and other occult phenomena. The power of gratuitous images now available through CGI technology allows the mind to be filled with graphic images that can do real damage to the psyche, especially those of a nervous disposition.

This is a world away from Victorian suspense literature, fairy tales and ghost stories to be read around campfires when young. These usually had a moral purpose while being chillingly entertaining and were sometimes written by church leaders. However, it is safer to avoid all forms of ghost literature and entertainment. Keep your mind clean and focused on Christ.

Abbreviated glossary

Apparition

Another word for a ghost or ghostlike image of a person. The appearance of something remarkable or unexpected, especially ghostly image. Origin: late Middle English (in the

⁶ Exod 7:11-12, 'But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods'.

⁷ The supposed movement of objects, rapping noises, door slamming etc. are usually the result of hallucinations or a deranged mind.

sense the action of appearing): from Latin *apparitio(n-)* ‘attendance’, from the verb *apparere* (see appear).

Clairvoyance

One of the three forms of the occult. The supposed faculty of perceiving things or events in the future or beyond normal sensory contact. From the French; from *clair* ‘clear’ + *voir* ‘to see’. In the occult, clairvoyance can come from a variety of disciplines, such as prophecy, divination (a multitude of forms) or contact with spirits. It is the special ability of shamans.

Divination

The practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown spirit world by supernatural means. There are a multitude of variations in the practise of this, such as astrology, I Ching, Tarot cards, reading palms etc.

Ghoul

An evil spirit or phantom, especially one supposed to rob graves and feed on dead bodies. Origin: late 18th century from Arabic *gūl*, a desert demon believed to rob graves and devour corpses.

Magician

Magic (sometimes magick) is one of the three branches of the occult (with spiritualism and divination). A magician is someone who can manipulate nature through various disciplines, such as incantations and spells. The power of influencing the course of events by using mysterious or supernatural forces.

The origin of the word is late Middle English from the Old French *magique*, from Latin *magicus* (adjective), late Latin *magica* (noun), from Greek *magikē (tekhnē)* ‘(art of) a magus’: magi were regarded as magicians.

Medium

A person claiming to be in contact with the spirits of the dead and able to communicate between the dead and the living. [See Clairvoyance.]

New Age

A very broad movement characterised by alternative approaches to traditional Western culture, with an interest in spirituality, mysticism, holism, and environmentalism. It typically includes many aspects of eastern religions, especially Hindu concepts (such as karma, a universal soul), mixed with Spiritualism, pantheism, Gnosticism and mysticism.

New Thought

A religious break away movement, arising out of Christian Science, developed by Methodist minister Warren Evans and Julius Dresser. It is based upon the Platonic, occult and mystical healing ideas of PP Quimby [e.g. sin and disease only exist in the mind] plus some influences from Emmanuel Swedenborg. New Thought ideas permeate some radical Pentecostal/Charismatic and Word Faith teachings.

Ouija board

A board ‘game’ utilising a pointer and letters whereby people attempt to contact the dead. Similar to a séance.

Phantom

Another word for ghost or a phantom ship. It also means a figment of the imagination. Origin: Middle English (also in the sense illusion, delusion): from Old French *fantosme*, based on Greek *phantasma* (see phantasm).

Phantasm

A poetic/literary word meaning a figment of the imagination; an illusion or apparition. Origin: Middle English (in the sense deceptive appearance): from Old French *fantasme*, via Latin from Greek *phantasma*, from *phantazein* 'make visible', from *phainein* 'to show'. The change from *f-* to *ph-* in the 16th century was influenced by the Latin spelling.

Poltergeists

A ghost or other supernatural being supposedly responsible for physical disturbances such as making loud noises and throwing objects about. From the German *Poltergeist*, from *poltern* 'create a disturbance' + *Geist* 'ghost'.

Satanism

The worship of Satan, typically involving a desecration of Christian symbols and practices, such as placing a cross upside down.

Séance

A meeting at which people attempt to make contact with the dead, especially through the agency of a medium. Origin: late 18th century, from the French *séance*, from Old French *seoir*, from Latin *sedere* 'sit'.

Shaman

(Plural 'shamans') A person regarded as having access to, and influence in, the world of good and evil spirits, especially among some peoples of northern Asia and North America. Typically such people enter a trance state during a ritual, and practise divination and healing. See 'Witchdoctor'.

Shinto

Shinto = from Chinese *shen dao* 'way of the gods'. A Japanese religion dating from the early 8th century and incorporating the worship of ancestors and nature spirits and a belief in sacred power (*kami*) in both animate and inanimate things. It was the state religion of Japan until 1945. Amaterasu is the principal deity of the Japanese Shinto religion, the sun goddess and ancestor of Jimmu, founder of the imperial dynasty.

Sorcerer

A person who claims or is believed to have magical powers; a wizard.

Spectre

Another word for 'ghost' or something widely feared as a possible unpleasant or dangerous occurrence; e.g. the spectre of nuclear holocaust. Origin: early 17th century from French *spectre* or Latin *spectrum*.

Telekinesis

The supposed ability to move objects at a distance by mental power or other non-physical means. From *tele-* at a distance + Greek *kinēsis* 'motion' (from *kinein* 'to move').

Theosophy

Any of a number of philosophies maintaining that a knowledge of God may be achieved through spiritual ecstasy, direct intuition, or special individual relations; especially the movement founded in 1875 as the Theosophical Society by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907).

Origin of the word: mid-17th century from the Medieval Latin *theosophia*, from late Greek, from *theosophos* 'wise concerning God', from *theos* 'god' + *sophos* 'wise'.

Unity

Unity School of Christianity was a syncretic American religious movement. It began in 1887 when a certain Mrs Fillmore was healed. The Fillmores studied Christian Science and New Thought and developed Unity out of this mix. It is mainly a teaching establishment to serve enquirers but is far from being Biblical, being a blend of mysticism, Gnosticism and Hinduism (syncretism).

Wicca

The religious cult of modern witchcraft, especially an initiatory tradition founded in England in the mid-20th century and claiming its origins in pre-Christian pagan religions.

Witchcraft

The practice of magic, especially black magic; the use of spells and the invocation of spirits. This is an old tradition that goes back to ancient Babylon. There are various expressions in different countries and cultures.

Witchdoctor

The chief practitioner of magic in primitive tribes. They usually ward off evil spirits, through spells and incantations, invoke curses or perform healings. Equates to the Native American Indian Medicine-Man.

Wizard

A man who has magical powers, especially in legends and fairy tales. Origin: late Middle English (in the sense philosopher, sage): from 'wise' + -ard.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2015
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>