

Is the Spirit World Real?

Do you know for sure whether there really is an evil spirit named Satan? What about his minions called demons? How does all of this affect young people?

In Western cultures today there is a growing fascination with the occult and Satanism, despite the traditional Christian teaching that Satan represents the consummate evil.

Statistics show Satanism and Wicca to be among the fastest-growing religions in the United States today. Popular movies make it appear cool to be able to cast spells or call on powers that mere mortals do not possess. The Gothic culture calls to those who tend toward sadness or anger. The spirit world is clearly becoming more and more of a factor in our society.

Teens today report that this is a big issue. Local high school students told me there are many openly Wiccan students at school, and that the number appears to be growing. There are also a number of students who are heavily involved in the Gothic culture and mentality, which for some includes a fascination with bondage and torture. One teen also mentioned how much easier it is to get caught up with the spirit world when drugs and alcohol are involved.

A popular genre of music is referred to as “Gothic/Darkwave,” which one Web site describes as “a musical journey of sadness and anger.” There are also a growing number of movies focused on witchcraft, demonism and any number of “horror” themes. Books can be checked out of the public library on how to cast spells or how to be a witch.

The Internet is a ready source of “how-to” information on any of these subjects. Add to this tarot cards, Ouija boards, palm readers, psychic hotlines and an abundance of both drugs and alcohol, and we have a picture of a growing percentage of youth today experimenting with the spirit world.

At the same time a growing number of people deny that Satan, demons and a spirit world even exist. Many “enlightened” people today make statements like “I don’t believe in a personal Satan. Satan to me is more of a metaphor, and a scapegoat to take the blame for the evil deeds of man.” They believe Satan is simply a creation of the minds of men, a fantasy and nothing to take seriously. Satan is dismissed as a creation of “religion” to scare people into submission. So what is the big deal? Isn’t participating in Wicca or Gothic culture simply an expression of personal taste? Who are we to criticize personal choice?

Aren’t these movies about witchcraft and demonism just “fantasy”? Surely we are mature enough to tell the difference between fantasy and reality. Aren’t Ouija boards and tarot cards just harmless party games? What is the problem with playing around with them?

As followers of Jesus Christ, what should our perspective be toward the spirit world? If we are willing to believe the Bible, we see that Satan is not only very real and very powerful, but God clearly commands us not to get involved with him or the occult (closely associated with Satan) in any way. Let’s understand why.

Who are Satan and the demons?

The Bible reveals that Satan was originally created as “Lucifer,” which means “light bringer.” At some point he chose to rebel against his Creator (Isaiah 14:12-15). Ezekiel wrote of him, saying, “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you” (Ezekiel 28:15). There was no sin, no evil, no disharmony in all God had created. This changed with the rebellion of Lucifer.

When this very first sin took place, Lucifer, whose name was then changed to Satan (which means “adversary”), apparently convinced a number of the angels to rebel with him against God. Together they fought God and lost. Satan and the rebelling angels, now known as demons, have been restrained here on earth since that time (Job 1:7; Revelation 12:3-4). Instead of being the “light bringer,” Satan came to be known as a ruler of darkness (Ephesians 6:12).

Even though they were defeated by God, the demons have not given up their goal of trying to destroy whatever God creates. They have worked feverishly since the creation of man to destroy mankind, as we can see by the example of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-6).

Neither Satan nor the other demons can forcibly take control of a human being against his or her will, as some people fear. But that does not mean that Satan and the demons are powerless among men. We must be sure we understand what power they do have and, as Paul wrote, make sure we do not allow them to take advantage of us (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Avoid contact with evil spirits

We can, whether we mean to or not, invite demonic influence into our minds. When Israel came into the Promised Land, God warned them not to allow anyone to practice witchcraft, cast spells or try to talk with the dead (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). The reason for this prohibition is that by involving ourselves in these practices, we open up our minds to the direct influence of the demon world. It is as if we opened the door of our minds and invited an evil spirit to come on in!

Put in terms of today’s practices, this would include tarot cards, Ouija boards, palm reading, horoscopes and psychics. It would also include filling our minds with music, books and movies of the occult. There is an added danger if we also give up control of our minds through the abuse of alcohol and drugs. Our minds are precious instruments, and God expects us to carefully monitor what we allow to come in.

But the idea of having or being given a special “power” is an incredibly appealing idea to our pride and vanity. Satan knows this and uses it to his advantage.

In Matthew 4 we read that he even tried to get Jesus Christ to fall for his perverted reasoning. After showing Him all the kingdoms of the earth and their wealth and power, Satan said, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:9). But Jesus understood the price of such a decision—worship of Satan meant losing His position as Savior

and member of the God family. What will be the cost for us if we fall for the lie and worship Satan?

How Satan deceives us

Some of what we have talked about may seem quite extreme. What if you aren't involved with any of these practices? What if you don't worship Satan? If you don't go to horror movies, use Ouija boards or read bad books—then you are safe, right? Perhaps the most powerful way in which Satan influences human beings is through his power to broadcast attitudes. He is described as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). This seems to be a reference to his ability to transmit attitudes and tempting thoughts, and from this no one is immune.

Have you ever found yourself thinking an evil thought and wondered where it came from? Have you heard the comment “The devil made me do it”? The devil cannot make you do anything. But he can make something sound or feel so appealing that you are willing to choose to do it “on your own.” Maybe the quote should be, “The devil tempted me to do it, and I gave in.”

In Ephesians 6:12 (NIV) we are told: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

We struggle with ourselves, with the unrighteous influences of our society and with the powerful attitudes and temptations presented to us by Satan and his demons. Temptation worked effectively against Adam and Eve, and it can work just as effectively against you and me!

How to resist satanic influence

What can we do to fight against Satan and his powerful evil influence? The apostle James gives very solid instruction: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:7-8).

How do we cleanse our hands and purify our hearts? We make sure that our relationship with God is right. No other relationship we will ever have will be as important.

We must come to know God through prayer and Bible study. We have to learn to think like He does. We must ask Him to help us build a strong relationship with Him. We must repent and ask Him to cleanse us of our sins and give us the strength to stop sinning (Psalm 51:10). As we develop this relationship with Him, we will be able to discern what is of God and what is of Satan. They are not the same.

Once we are able to distinguish between what is of God and what is of Satan, we need to eliminate what is of Satan. The verses above in James tell us to resist the devil. We need to remove ourselves from situations where there are activities involving Satan and his demons.

This should include movies and TV shows that glorify witchcraft and the occult. It should also include music that is dark in nature or that makes you feel sad or depressed. It also means that we do not give in to the many temptations that we face every day to break God's laws. That is what it means to resist Satan and draw closer to God!

Even though we cannot see it, the spirit world is very real. It has become quite popular with many people, young and old alike, to become involved with it through Wicca or various Gothic practices. Music, movies, books and magazines make these practices seem all the more appealing. But you do not have to join them. If you have been involved, you can remove yourself from it by the help of Almighty God.

When Paul recounted his conversion, he said that Christ sent him "to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18). As God worked through Paul to bring people to the light, so He will do for you if you choose to obey Him. VT

To learn more about this subject, request our free booklet "Is There Really a Devil?" online at www.ucg.org or by writing to United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

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