

CAN THE LIVING TALK WITH THE DEAD?

OWING to the frail nature of men, which always makes them seek supernatural aid, they are easily influenced by beliefs most of which are misguided. One of such beliefs, which the devil has been using to hoodwink or mislead men, is born out of the idea that death is merely a change from a lower to a higher plane of existence.

The belief that “the human personality continues to exist after death, and that it is possible for living persons to communicate with those who have died”, is ancient and very wide spread.

In various parts of the world there are people who claim to have special powers by which they hold intercourse with the dead; they are known as spiritualists. And today, believers in spiritism hold to it as a sort of religion, a science and a philosophy.

It is believed that a spiritualist can be a medium (which means a “go-between”) through whom “the souls or spirits of dead persons” can send messages to living persons. Under the heading of SPIRITUALISM, the Illustrated World Encyclopaedia (volume 18) has this, among other things, to say: “Usually spiritualists assemble in a meeting called a seance. The medium goes into a trance or deep sleep. During this trance, the spirit of the dead person supposedly enters the medium’s body and talks to living persons, or gives signs by knocking on tables or in some other way.”

Superstition

Many of the fears to which men have been subjected are either the figments of imagination or the devices of the devil aimed at alienating mankind from the purpose of God. One can but agree to a large extent with David Hume, a British philosopher, in his conclusion that “weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance, are the true sources of Superstition”. Among many African tribes as well as some other nations, it is generally believed that as soon as a person dies he assumes supernatural powers which he can exercise – for good or evil – over the living. Hence there is the threatening statement by some people: “If you don’t help me, I’ll haunt you after my death.” There are people who worship their dead parents and pray to the dead to bless them with the good things of life even though they know that their parents in their life time; lived in abject poverty.

Some who claim to be Christians share some of these wrong beliefs and practices. When certain Galatians Christians turned to heathenish rites in the days of St. Paul, he warned: “Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” – Galatians 4:8, 9.

Dead Fathers

When some people find themselves in certain unfavourable circumstances, they develop a bad state of mind, and fear even their own shadows. For this reason they are prone to believe everything which seems to give them temporary relief or false hope and they seek aid from witch doctors, magicians, dead fathers or relations and so forth.

There is a story of someone who was said to have struck a bargain with a spiritualist so that he could talk with his dead father. The spiritualist assured him that it was quite possible and that the venue would be at a burial ground. The man, as the story went, paid a handsome sum of money to the spiritualist. On the appointed day, both of them went to the burial ground where another fake posing to be the “dead father” had earlier gone into hiding. And it

was about midnight. As soon as they arrived at the cemetery, and of course, the spiritualist having recited some incantations, the fake dressed in white flowing robes emerged with a cane. The man was so frightened that he was trembling as the whole thing looked like a nightmare to him. Worse still, his so called father came close to him and started to administer severe strokes of the cane on him. He screamed and ran away under agonising pain without getting his “father’s” advice. The spiritualist blamed the failure of the mission on him for being unable to bear the strokes of the cane which were a prelude to the blessing the “father” would have bestowed upon him.

It is the stupid and simple folks that enrich the purses of quacks. The Illustrated World Encyclopaedia states: “Many people honestly believe in spiritualism. Unfortunately, there have been many professional magicians and others who use trickery to make themselves appear to be mediums.” (Emphasis ours)

“Surely Die”

Now, turning to the Holy Bible the belief that “the human personality continues to exist after death” and that there can be communication between the living and the dead, is without foundation; it is devilish, and true Christians discard it.

God commanded Adam in the Garden of Eden that he must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2: 17) It is quite clear that to “surely die” means to cease to exist, pure and simple. But Satan, in his characteristic opposition to God, went subtly to Eve, Adam’s wife, in the guise of a serpent and deceived her saying: “Ye shall not surely die”. This was a blatant lie which gave “the mother of all living” a false hope and led her to sin.

Concerning the devil, Jesus Christ said: “When he (Satan) speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8: 44) In his efforts to sustain his lie, the devil whose disposition for deceit had earned him the notorious title of SERPENT, has been influencing the thoughts of men into thinking and believing that when a man dies, he is not completely dead. Also to this end, he with the assistance of the demons has been working in men to event unfounded dogmas and warped notions about the dead, and to inspire bad dreams, false visions, hallucinations, and such like.

The truth of the Bible is that when a man dies, (the breath of life having left him) he is completely out of existence. He does NOT take any other form or shape nor does he go anywhere to live. He is absolutely unconscious and is turned to nothing: “Vanity of vanities,” said the Preacher, “all is vanity.” The next stage according to God’s promise is RESURRECTION – and then the dead rose shall be judged. Said St. Paul: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” – Hebrews 9: 27.

Abel

Some people sometimes refer to St. Paul’s statement about Abel at Hebrews 11: 4, that “he (Abel) being dead yet speaketh”. This does not mean that Abel was talking after his death. Rather the apostle was explaining how by Abel’s illustrious example of faith, which made him offer a better sacrifice than Cain, he is being spoken of up till today as a righteous man to teach people about faith in God and the doing of things that are pleasing in His sight. The paraphrased epistles, LIVING LETTERS, by Kenneth N. Taylor, renders the text thus: “It was by faith that Abel obeyed God and brought an offering that pleased God more than Cain’s offering did. God accepted Abel and proved it by accepting his gift; and though Abel is long dead, we can still learn from him about trusting God.”

Witch of Endor

Another account in the Bible often cited by certain people to show that the living can talk with the dead is the story at 1 Samuel 28: 3-25, about King Saul and the witch of Endor. At that time, Samuel the prophet was dead and had been buried in Ramah, his own city. And Saul the King drove out of the land all the witches and wizards.

But Saul because of his unfaithfulness was not in favour with God and the Philistines had marshalled their forces and were set to war against Israel. As Saul saw the host of the enemies, he was troubled in heart for fear. And when he enquired of the Lord there was no answer, "neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets". It was in this desperate state that Saul went to consult a witch. Shame to him! In order that he might not be recognised by the witch who was one of those ousted from Israel, he had to disguise himself by changing his royal robes. He went to the woman in the night – yes, the dark night is most suitable for this sort of dirty, shameful and ungodly business.

Saul requested her to use her witchcraft power to bring up Samuel so that he might consult the dead prophet in regard to the war of the Philistines. When the woman under demoniacal influence divined, Samuel who was purported to have been raised was not seen by Saul.

What he did was to ask the witch: "For what sawest thou?". And she answered: "I saw gods ascending out of the earth." (Verse 13) The dialogue continued. "And he said unto her, what form is he of? And she said, an old man cometh 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 himself." (Verse 14)

It does not even require a specialised knowledge of the Bible for any clear headed person to know from the narrative that the whole affair was under the command of an enemy of God – Satan the devil. In the first place, Saul himself testified, "God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams." (Verse 15) And secondly, by going to consult a witch he was contravening the law of God which said: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God." – Leviticus 19: 31; see also Deuteronomy 18: 9-12.

Devil's Tricks

Moreover, Saul did not see the so-called Samuel; he merely "PERCEIVED" from the woman's description that it was he. And the witch herself said that she saw "gods". How could Samuel alone turn to be gods? There lie the tricks of the devil, which are frequently manifested in the works of sorcerers and all kinds of demon possessed characters.

The fact is that it was not Samuel that came up but demons that put up the appearance of an old man like Samuel. They are also known as "seducing spirits", and it is they that impersonate the dead and make appearances or sounds that are seen or heard by spiritualists. St. Paul stated that Satan as well as his visible and invisible agents could change himself into an angel of light but that in the end all of them would get every bit of punishment their wicked deeds deserved. – 2 Corinthians 11: 13-15; see also 1 Timothy 4: 1; Revelation 16: 13, 14.

Since it was made clear that God had forsaken Saul and refused to answer to his inquiries either "by dreams or by prophets", there is no ground, therefore, to believe that Samuel, a faithful prophet of God who was already dead, could come back to be a party to the sins of the apostate Saul.

By the way, why is it that any communication between the living and the dead is never through any genuine prophet of God but through witches, wizards, occultists and what have you? The plain truth is that the idea or practice did not originate from God. And the Lord

warned: "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word (God's word), it is because there is no light in them." – Isaiah. 8:19, 20.

Christian Hope

To show that the dead are absolutely unconscious and that they cannot be in communion with the living, the Psalmist declared: "For in death there is no remembrance of Thee (God): in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?" "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." – Psalm 6:5; 146:3, 4; see also Psalm 30: 9; Isaiah 38: 18, 19.

What is more, King Solomon stated: "For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished...whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." – Ecclesiastes 9: 5-6, 10.

We advise you, dear reader, not to go to those people who are parading themselves as diviners or spiritualists when you are in trouble or in need of anything. Please, turn to God Almighty and pray to Him. If you earnestly pray with faith, and exercise patience, God the Merciful and Gracious Father will certainly grant you the desire of your heart. (Proverb 10: 24; Matthew 21: 22; Philippians 4: 6) God Himself said:

"Look unto me, and be ye saved,
all the ends of the earth: for
I am God, and there is none
else."- Isaiah 45: 22.

On the whole, the highlight of the Christian hope about the dead is the consoling, divine promise of resurrection. And until the resurrection takes place the dead must remain silent and unconscious in the grave, and no one living can talk with them. Read Job. 14: 13-15; Psalm 115: 17; John 5: 28, 29.