

Christians and the Dead

Paganism has always tried to reach out to the dead and contact those who have left this life (cf. 1 Sam. 28:8-15). In American culture we are currently witnessing a widespread resurgence of pagan ideas and beliefs, and as a result God's people need to be armed with the truth concerning the relationship between Christians and those who are dead. Consider the following principles from Scripture:

We are not to try to contact the dead – Ouija boards and séances may entice the curious to investigate and perhaps experiment, but the Bible clearly warns God's people to have nothing to do with contacting the dead: "There shall not be found among you... 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..." (Deut. 18:10-12). One who attempts to contact the dead is practicing the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).

We are not to pray to the dead – Although some who claim to follow Christ regularly offer prayers to dead and beloved "saints," Christians need to remember that prayer is an act of worship which belongs to God alone. "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve" (Matt. 4:10). Not even angels are worthy of our worship and petitions (cf. Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10).

We are not to try to help those who are dead – Scripture clearly indicates that when this life is over, so also is the opportunity to choose whether to serve God. The souls of those who are dead are either in a place of peace or torment, and there is nothing that can be done to change their status (Luke 16:22ff). Some religious groups have been known for selling indulgences or even baptizing living people on behalf of the dead, but these practices are foreign to the teachings of Scripture.

We are not to try to appease the dead – In many parts of the world there are holidays when people believe that dead spirits return to this world and must be appeased through sacrifices and offerings (one of many possible examples: "El Dia de los Muertos" in Mexico). Even in ancient times, any attempt to appease the dead through some kind of sacrifice or ceremonial ritual was condemned: "You shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead" (Deut. 14:1). Those who leave offerings in order to bring comfort or appeasement for those who are dead are in clear violation of God's law (cf. Rev. 9:20-21).

We will see the Christian dead again one day – Paul wrote to the Thessalonian brethren and said, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the

Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

May God help every person to respect His will concerning our relationship with those who have died.

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