

CHURCH. SUPPLEMENT 8

[CHURCH AND CULTURE] THE RELATIONSHIP TO DEPARTED ANCESTORS

Introduce. Christians have the God-given responsibility to change their own world-view, ideas, truths, convictions, beliefs, values, convictions, experiences, behaviour, relationships and institutions to conform to the culture of the kingdom of God! In this teaching we will consider the relationship to our departed ancestors.

In certain cultures, much emphasis is put on relating to one's departed ancestors. The spirits of the departed ancestors are viewed as being present:

- in the home where they used to live
- at the grave where their bodies are buried
- in some special place, like a temple
- or in an amulet they wear or have in their home.

What does the Bible teach about the subject of the spirits of departed ancestors?

What is the difference between the spirits of the departed ancestors and evil spirits?

A. THE DWELLING-PLACE OF THE SPIRITS OF ANCESTORS AFTER THEY DIE

Read Luke 16:22-23.

Discover and discuss. Where are the spirits of the ancestors after they die physically?

Notes. When *unbelievers* die, their human spirits (souls) immediately go to *hell*, where they suffer torment. "The hell" is the place where:

- "God leaves himself without testimony, not show his kindness by giving rain from heaven and crops in their season, not provide people with plenty of food and not fill their hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17).
- "you are shut out from the presence, majesty and power of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:9)
- "you feel forsaken by God" (Matthew 27:46)!
- "you cannot die and the your pain and sorrow cannot be quenched" (Mark 9:48).

But when *believers in Christ* die, their human spirits (souls) immediately go to *heaven*, where they will live in the presence of Christ forever (Ecclesiastes 12:7; John 14:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:1-2; Philippians 1:23; Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 20:4).

Thus, the spirits of departed ancestors are either in hell or in heaven and never present on earth! This truth should cause Christian children to share the gospel with their non-Christian parents and other family members while they still are alive on earth!

B. THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRITS OF DEPARTED ANCESTORS ON THE PEOPLE ON EARTH

Read Ecclesiastes 9:5-10.

Discover and discuss. What possible influence can people in the state of death have on other people on earth?

Notes. While the body lies in the grave, the spirit (or soul) of a departed person is either in hell or in heaven. The Bible teaches clearly that the spirits (souls) of dead people have no involvement in the lives of people on earth! The spirits of the departed ancestors are not on earth and they can have no influence on any person or event on earth!

- The spirits of the departed ancestors do not reside in the house, where they used to live before.
- The spirits of the departed ancestors do not reside at the grave, where their bodies are buried.
- The spirits of the departed ancestors do not reside in temples, where they can be remembered, honoured or even worshipped.
- The spirits of the departed ancestors cannot be captured in amulets that are worn.

The spirits of the departed ancestors are nowhere on earth! The spirits of ancestors are only in hell (if they were non-Christians) or heaven (if they were Christians). The Bible clearly teaches that the spirits of the departed ancestors cannot show hatred or jealousy to people on earth. They cannot revenge themselves and they cannot harm people in any way, because they cannot have any influence on any person or any event at all!

C. THE CALLING UPON THE SPIRITS OF DEAD PEOPLE FOR HELP

Discover and discuss. Why is it useless for people to call upon the spirits of dead people for help?

1. **The spirits of the departed ancestors have no knowledge of people or events on earth!**

Read Ecclesiastes 9:5-10.

Notes. They have no wisdom to give wise counsel to the people on earth. They cannot influence the plans of people on earth. They cannot help people on earth, because they are not on the earth! The Bible teaches, that after death, the spirits can no more take part in any activity on earth!

2. **Evil spirits can imitate the spirits of departed ancestors.**

Read 1 Samuel 28:8-14; John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:14.

Notes. When king Saul visited a medium, he thought that he heard the dead prophet Samuel speaking. However, it most probably was a demon counterfeiting Samuel's voice. Saul did not see Samuel and even the medium did not say that she saw Samuel. Instead, she only saw "a spirit (a being that belonged to the world of gods or evil spirit) (Hebrew: elohim) coming out of the ground that looked like an old man wearing a robe" (1 Samuel 28:13-14).

People who believe that the spirits of dead people can be contacted or can have influence on this world are deceived by evil spirits or demons. They are liars and Jesus teaches that the devil is *the father of all lies* (John 8:44). And the apostle Paul teaches that the devil *masquerades* or pretends to be someone other than he really is (2 Corinthians 11:14). What Saul and the woman really saw, was not the spirit of the departed Saul, but an evil spirit or demon who imitated the voice of Samuel!

D. THE CALLING UPON THE SPIRITS OF DEAD CHRISTIANS FOR HELP

Read Job 14:21; Isaiah 63:16; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1.

Discover and discuss. Why may Christians not call on the spirits of dead Christians (saints) for help?

Notes. Some people believe that the spirits of particular famous dead Christians, called "saints" may be requested to intercede for them in heaven (with God, Jesus or Mary). These people venerate (regard with deep respect or warm acceptance) these so called "saints" and crave their intercession and help.

However, the Bible clearly teaches that the spirits of the departed saints are unconscious with respect to people and events on earth and are also not involved in people and events on earth. According to Job, the spirits of the departed dead do not know whether their children on earth are getting rich or remain very poor. And according to Isaiah, neither the departed spirits of Abraham or Jacob are able to see or hear what is happening on earth to their descendants.

The only One who can intercede for Christians on earth is Jesus Christ! Therefore, Christians may not pray to so-called "church saints" or to their ancestors. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that Christians should only pray to God, the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:10).

E. THE CALLING UPON EVIL SPIRITS OR DEMONS FOR HELP

Discover and discuss. Why may people not call on evil spirits or demons for help?

Notes. Modern spiritists or mediums (fortune-tellers) who claim that they can communicate with the spirits of the departed ancestors (family members) are actually communicating with evil spirits or demons! Evil spirits or demons are fallen angels who lie and deceive. Good spirits or messengers with whom people may communicate simply do not exist. The only good Spirit with whom people can make contact, is the Holy Spirit! He reminds people of the words of Jesus, leads them into all the truth, makes the future known to them and glorifies Jesus Christ (and not one or another departed ancestor) (John 14:26; John 16:13-16)!

1. **Evil spirits are false messengers.**

Read 2 Corinthians 11:14. Paul warns Christians that the evil spirits or demons are experts in disguising and counterfeiting. They can pretend to be messengers of Christ, while in reality they are messengers of the devil! They can pretend to be your ancestors, while in reality they are evil spirits!

2. **Evil spirits give false messages.**

Read Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 23:25-26; 1 Timothy 4:1; Matthew 4:5-6; John 8:44.

Paul warns Christians that the evil spirits (demons) teach false teachings and they deceive people. They can give people, who trust in them, counterfeit messages, false dreams and visions, false feelings and experiences, and many false doctrines, etc., which seem to come from God, but in reality come from the devil!

The devil even quotes the Bible to deceive people! He tried to deceive Jesus by quoting Scripture out of context (Luke 4:9-11). Jesus Christ warns Christians that "the devil is a liar and the father of all lies". Therefore Christians should always test messages of preachers and the dreams, visions and experiences of people with the clear teachings of the Bible!

3. God forbids people to contact spirits.

Read Deuteronomy 18:9-13; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6,27; Isaiah 8:19-20.

God forbids people to contact the spirits of departed ancestors, evil spirits, spiritists (fortune-tellers) and all kinds of occult practices! In Isaiah 8:19-20, is written, “When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? *To the law and to the testimony!* If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn”.

The Bible forbids Christians to consult any spirit, and commands Christians to only listen to God’s Word! God commands Christians to study the Bible, to interpret the Bible correctly and to obey only the teachings of the Bible. People, who disregard this command, will receive no guidance (light) from God! Therefore, Christians must seek the will of God as revealed in the Bible! See manual 4, lesson 43 and supplement 18.

F. VENERATING THE SPIRITS OF DEPARTED ANCESTORS

1. Christians are forbidden to worship anyone except the living God.

Discover and discuss. Why may Christians not venerate the spirits of the departed ancestors?

Notes.

Christians are forbidden to venerate or worship the following:

- angels (Colossians 2:18-19).
- the devil or his demons (Matthew 4:8-10)
- other people (Acts 14:11-15)
- the spirits of the departed ancestors

Jesus Christ commands that Christians must worship the Lord their God, and serve *him only* (Matthew 4:10)!

2. Christians are forbidden to make any kind of religious sacrifices.

Discover and discuss. Why may Christians not offer incense or make sacrifices to their dead ancestors?

Notes.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:19-20. The apostle Paul teaches that sacrifices offered to idols are in reality sacrifices to demons! Evil spirits or demons like to be associated with idols and with pictures and images of idols. Evil spirits like to dwell at temples, houses, house altars and graves of the dead. They like to be associated with temple ceremonies, religious festivals of non-Christians, sacrifices of incense, food or money, etc. Evil spirits (demons) associate with all these visible religious things, because that is the easiest way for them to influence and control people on earth! Therefore, Christians may not offer incense or make sacrifices to their dead ancestors, because such activities are in reality sacrifices to evil spirits or demons!

Read Matthew 6:24; 1 Corinthians 10:21. Paul says that people cannot serve demons and the Living God at the same time! People must choose between serving demons or the living God who revealed himself in the prophets in the Bible and in Jesus Christ!

G. THE REMEMBRANCE OF DEPARTED ANCESTORS

Discover and discuss. Why may Christians remember their departed ancestors (family members)?

Notes. The Bible forbids the veneration and worship of human beings and the veneration and worship of the spirits of the departed ancestors (family members).

But the Bible recommends the remembrance of important people and events in the past.

1. Remember the genealogy of Jesus.

Read. Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-37.

The first paragraph in the New Testament contains the genealogy of Jesus Christ. It summarises the fact that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament revelation (Matthew 5:17) and at the same time introduces the New Testament revelation about Jesus Christ.

“Jacob became the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who was called Christ” (Matthew 1:16). Joseph knew that he was a descendent of David (Luke 1:27) and the angel Gabriel confirmed this fact (Matthew 1:20-23). But Joseph was not the natural father of Jesus. He was only the legal father of Jesus according to his human nature (Luke 2:4-5).

Also Mary knew that she was a descendent of David through what the angel Gabriel said to her (Luke 1:32). And the high priest Zechariah knew that Jesus Christ was a descendent of David (Luke 1:69). But Mary was the natural mother of Jesus according to his human nature. God himself took on the human nature through the mighty work of the Holy Spirit in Mary (Luke 1:26-38).

Matthew probably recorded the *legal genealogy* of Jesus via Joseph, Jacob, Matthan, etc. until Solomon and David (Matthew 1:1-17), while Luke recorded the *physical genealogy* of Jesus via Mary married to Joseph, the son in law of Heli, Matthat, etc., until Nathan and David (Luke 3:23-37). Jesus was the legal son of Joseph and Joseph was the son-in-law (not son) of Heli. Thus Heli was the father of Mary. That is what Luke implies when he says, "Jesus was the son, *so it was thought*, of Joseph." Thus Matthew recorded the genealogy of Joseph and Luke the genealogy of Mary.

The genealogy in Matthew contains names of women and the names of good and bad people. The Bible even records the sins of the so-called "good" people, in order to emphasise that everyone has need of salvation.

2. Remember the events of salvation and judgement in the Bible.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-11.

The Bible says that the events in the Old Testament occurred as examples to keep Christians from setting their hearts on the evil things their forefathers in the past did. It says that in the Old Testament, the judgements of God happened to those people as examples and as warnings to Christians today! Thus Christians must commemorate the events within salvation history in the Bible!

3. Remember especially the faith of the people in the Bible.

Read Hebrews 11:7-10,24-27,32-40.

Hebrews chapter 11 commemorates many of the Old Testament people, whose lives of faith witness to the reality of God and his kingdom.

4. Remember especially the faith of your past leaders.

Read Hebrews 13:7.

It teaches that Christians should remember their leaders, who in the past spoke the word of God to them. Christians should especially consider how their past leaders practised what they preached. And they should imitate the Christian faith of their past leaders.

Conclusion. Christians may not venerate, worship or pray to their ancestors, leaders or any other important people. But Christians should remember the good examples and faith of their predecessors and follow their example. Christians may remember and commemorate the good lessons they have learned from their ancestors!