

SPIRITUALISM— AN UPDATE ON AN OLD SAW

**By Paul Penno Jr.
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An “old saw” is a fantasy, a story, a parable that has become so familiar that we’ve lost interest in it. For example, mom’s saying: “Haste makes waste” makes little sense in our fast-paced world. Likewise “spiritualism” no longer captivates our interest because we think it’s associated with ghosts, haunted houses, séances, and the paranormal. We’d never be taken in by such foolishness!

Our culture has just experienced an all-out tsunami wave of the celebration of the dead in connection with Halloween. Halloween is the Christian-pagan holiday of All Souls’ Day. The basic idea is a celebration of the dead. Why this fascination with the dead?

Halloween now exceeds Christmas in terms of the profits it brings in to retailers and media. Scary movies, sit coms, comedy, video games, home entertainment is big business. People love to be scared to death by entertainment. The Bible says that death is our enemy, but most people believe it’s great fun to have your fears of death laughed away by inane visual effects.

In the meantime, Satan is laughing all the way to his bat-cave, knowing that he is getting people wrought up with the most crude forms of spiritualism, while masquerading his true design. Satan wants people to think that spiritualism is evil spirits knocking on walls, and the dead returning to

the place of their murders seeking revenge. He wants people to think that spiritualism is blood-sucking vampire-like human bats, suddenly appearing monster-like apparitions, slim oozing from the walls.

The real foundation of spiritualism is this: There is no death. This teaching runs through all religions. Whether it’s native American reverence for nature, Dali Lama Buddhism, sacred cow Hinduism, tribal animism, Catholicism, Protestant Christianity, ancestor worship, all believe the dead are living.

Satan has a very coherent theology which is based upon the lie which he told Eve in the garden. Most of the people of the world love it and lap it up because it caters to their self-centeredness. The serpent taught Eve spiritualism when he asserted, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). And that doctrine is the undermining of the gospel of the cross to save sinners who have transgressed the law of God. If every person does not die, then the inevitable conclusion is that everyone is immortal. Since immortality is a quality of God, then everyone is a god. Pantheism is the idea that god is everything. Every person is a god and there is really no such thing as death because the dead continue to live.

There are different kinds of “meditation”: there is the popular Eastern kind, “yoga,” induced by a trance or bodily contortions. This is a direct link to Hinduism, which professes to be a very “spiritual” religion. There is “Transcendental Meditation” which claims to be religiously “neutral.” These forms of meditation are a search for a “higher form of

consciousness,” actually a search for “divinity within oneself.” The idea is that God is everywhere—you just need to search him out. He is inside you, unrecognized; you make contact with him through these forms of “meditation.” Beware; the root idea is pantheism, and it leads one into Spiritualism, away from Christ.

Well, it's God who sets the rules. The Ten Commandments are God's law. But if everyone is a god, then all his/her impulses, desires, wants, are good and to be indulged. Everyone can set the rules for their own life because they are a god. Now we can clearly see that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul abolishes the law of God. It sets up every man as a law unto himself. It also does away with the cross and the plan of salvation because if God doesn't set the rules, and everyone sets their own rules, then there is no sin. If there is no sin, there is no need to be saved from sin. This is spiritualism. It is the doctrines of devils.

Now every teaching that either implies or gives an excuse for continued sin in the life is anti-gospel of Jesus Christ, and abolishes the law of God. Such teachings are not that of the true Holy Spirit. There is a true Holy Spirit who comes from the most holy and there is a counterfeit holy spirit who comes from Satan who has set up shop in the first apartment. Popular Christianity has already gone far down the road of embracing the false Holy Spirit. It is inevitable given their understanding of the state of the dead as we have just outlined.

There is a long history of God's people being absorbed with the teachings of Babylon. From the

“Victorious Life” movement of the early 1900's to Billy Graham's evangelism; from Bill Hybel's user-friendly church growth movement to Rick Warren's mega-purpose-driven church. Should we get our ideas of righteousness by faith from Protestants?

Our former Union Conference President, Thomas Mostert, discerns some profound but unpopular truths for which he took grief from his own colleagues. He sees that the popular but counterfeit versions of “Christianity” that the Bible labels “Babylon” are a dangerous yet subtle deception. He sees the words of Jesus as too true: “false christs, and false prophets..... shall..... if it were possible..... deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24). The book (*Hidden Heresy*) recognizes that even highly educated ordained ministers are susceptible to exceedingly well-concealed falsehood. And it's lethal!

A root deception of “Babylon” is the doctrine of natural immortality. Every non-Christian religion teaches it, and many Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have imported it from paganism. If man is an immortal soul then it cannot be true that the Son of man died on His cross. But the Bible is clear—man is by nature mortal. “Babylon” says no. And there is where the alarm system goes off for anyone who reverences Bible truth.

Mostert's grasp of it is like a blast of fresh air into a stuffy house: no one who holds to natural immortality can understand or appreciate what Christ accomplished on His cross! And no one who holds to that pagan-papal doctrine can comprehend

justification by faith; and if one doesn't understand that cardinal truth, he doesn't hold what Paul calls "the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:5, 14). Church leaders, Protestant and Catholic, are alike under judgment of Scripture. Mostert sees that confusion here creates a vacuum into which the falsehood of Spiritualism enters; why should we want to fill our cup with that? From now on, serious issues are to engage our attention. The same Jesus who prodded His disciples awake in Gethsemane is prodding us awake just now. Our "hour" is also critical in world history, as was Gethsemane's!

The true Holy Spirit "reprove[s] [i.e., convicts] the world of sin" (John 16:8). He directs to "Jesus: for He shall save his people *from* their sins" (Matt. 1:21) not *in* their sins. The false Holy Spirit comforts by saying you are OK; you will be saved in sin. You may boast, "I am saved." Once you get saved you're locked in for life. You don't really need to worry about the temptations of the flesh because occasionally you'll slip, but not to worry, you're saved.

The true Holy Spirit "makes every spot of defilement painfully distinct." "Lays bare deformity and defects of character."¹ We ought to be thankful for such diagnosis of sin cancer in our lives so that it can be removed by the Holy Spirit by our permission. But at any time that we put up our walls of resistance to His comforting ministrations it anesthetizes, blurs, and evades the sense of guilt for unchristian selfishness. We hear preachers give

excuses for character deformity by saying, "You're only human. You can't expect perfection. Deformity is normal." Any excuse that is given for sin is an echo of Satan's charge that the law of God cannot be kept even with the power of love which God reveals in the gospel. The true Holy Spirit exposes "the sinner's acts of disloyalty in making void the law of God" (SC 29). The false Holy Spirit represents the law of God as impossible truly to obey.

The true Holy Spirit teaches "the soul" to "hate its selfishness, abhor its *self-love*, and will seek, through Christ's righteousness, for the purity of heart that is in harmony with the law of God and the character of Christ" (SC 29). The whole self-esteem movement which has taken root in the evangelical church is based on the teaching that self-love is desirable. It encourages flattery and self-affirmation. It is the false Holy Spirit which caused Lucifer to love himself and assert his independence from God in heaven. All self-love movements must inevitably result in the overthrow and murder of the Son of God. Says a wise writer, "Love is a precious gift which we receive from Jesus." Love is not self-love—that's its counterfeit, the perversion of all that's beautiful and noble. Self-love is the pure evil of Spiritualism, learned from the fallen Lucifer.

The true Holy Spirit teaches "lowliness of mind" to "esteem others better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3), imparts true self-respect "in Christ," glories in the cross. Realizing that the price paid for each soul on the cross was equivalent to the life of the Son of God creates a genuine healthy self-respect. Christ

¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 29.

paid the price of His life directly to you. “Ye are bought with a price.”

The false Holy Spirit abhors Paul’s counsel; encourages self-centered self-esteem; glories in self-assertion; creates religious arrogance. Christ’s condescension is virtually ignored.

The true holy spirit discloses how “enmity against God has deviled every act of life” (SC 28, 29). The bad feeling; yes, downright hatred directed toward God fills every sinner’s heart unbeknownst to him. That is why it is so basic to understand that we are each responsible for the murder of the Son of God. It was our sin that put him on the cross.

On the other hand, the false Holy Spirit assures the sinner that self-denial is the root of his problems. He does not need to go around feeling bad about himself. “I’m Ok and you’re OK.” There is a disconnect between the Christian profession of believing in the cross and living by its principle of self-denial. Just wear the cross as an ornament. Put it up on the wall of your house. Have a little shrine with candles around it. The phone is off the hook from heaven to the private soul in getting through the message of daily living identification with the crucifixion of Christ.

The true Holy Spirit reveals the “pure spotless character of Christ” as the sinner’s true ideal which is attainable by faith which works by love. The false Holy Spirit teaches: Believe your sins are forgiven and the necessary adjustments will be made to your heavenly accounts light years away, and don’t worry about attaining to the character of Christ. In other words, just get ready to die so you can go the

underground route to heaven. Selfishness hasn’t really changed inside. The heart never receives the closest bond with Jesus perceiving His love.

The true Holy Spirit “reprove[s] [i.e., convicts] the world of . . . righteousness” (John 16:8). Christ is our Example as well as the forgiver of our sins. His loveliness of life and character becomes ours in the straightening out process of living by faith. Like a carpet that has bunched up with hills and valleys through wear and tear, Jesus’ gift is to stretch out the wrinkles and repair the worn spots. But His work is not just superficial; He wins your heart so that you consent for His work to be done in the life.

The false Holy Spirit specializes in beclouding understanding of Christ’s becoming human. If the spirits can convince that Jesus was so wholly other than where we live and breath, that He did not subject Himself to being tempted to lie, cheat, steal, break the Sabbath, assert himself in opposition to His Father, covet the opposite sex, hate His brother, then we have no Saviour from those sins which are common to humanity. The spirits confuse His holiness with His righteousness failing to see that He truly wrestled with temptations at our level and by faith conquered them thus working out a perfect righteousness for us.

The true Holy Spirit reveals Christ as send “in the likeness of sinful flesh, condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3, 4). “Sinful flesh” is the hideout in everyone of us that goes unrecognized. It is the / that is in constant conflict with God and seeks to dethrone Him in the life. This self-centeredness resists the love of God and frustrates it. Well, Jesus

experienced those temptations from within because He took upon Him and contrary *will* which needed constant rejection. This is how He “condemned sin in the flesh”. This is how He sanctified Himself from his entrance into this world until His exit at the cross.

The false spirit presents Christ as come in holy flesh, thus not truly condemning sin in our flesh. A misunderstanding of the humanity which Christ took will lead to continued excuses that sin cannot be overcome in human flesh until Jesus takes away our temptations at glorification—the second coming. And, as we have learned, any gospel which teaches an excuse for sin does away with God’s law as impossible for sinners to keep and that is a doctrine of devils. It’s little wonder then that the humanity of Christ means everything to us. An understanding of the Saviour who has come near to us and not afar off in terms of our temptations means everything to our understanding of the gospel which delivers us *from* our sin rather than *in* our sin.

One day at customer service in Marshall’s my daughter was cashier. She was accustomed to handling paper money and the feel of it. When she was handed a \$50 dollar note, it did not have that cloth-like feel of the genuine currency. It felt like coarse paper and she identified it immediately as counterfeit, but it was ever so close to the genuine.

It’s absolutely essential for us to identify the true Christ from the false Christ. The more excuse for sin that we give in our lives it becomes increasingly difficult for us to discern the genuine Christ who has come all the way to where we are, yet without sin.

The true Holy Spirit “reprove[s] [i.e., convicts] the world of . . . judgment” (John 16:8), because the “prince of this world is cast out.” The actuating principle of Satan is self-love. The principle of self-love is condemned by the true Spirit and vanquished. As the redeemed identify with Christ in His crucifixion, the cross expels the self-centered motivation. There is no longer a concern for elevated status. There is not a concern for one’s personal assurance of salvation. The Christ-centered concern takes over. It is a concern for His honor and glory.

In so much of the artwork of the world, the masterpieces are an exhibition of creator’s talent. Sometimes he hides himself in the landscape of humanity so that the observer will try to spot him. Sometimes he signs his name in the lower corner. But for the redeemed that artistry of Jesus’ masterpiece becomes the driving force so that the channel of grace decreases while the Master artist increases.

In contrast, the false spirit justifies sin in the heart where it is never truly vanquished or condemned. Christ paid the penalty for sin, but does not destroy it. There is a perpetual self-centered motivation which majors on fear of hell and hope of reward as the only effective motivations.

The True Holy Spirit gives an acute “hunger for righteousness,” “guides into all truth,” dislodges complacency, heightens the love of truth rather than a mere consensus. The false spirit encourages self-satisfaction, in-need-of nothing assurance. Luke-warmness perpetuated. The false spirit destroys an

acute hunger for truth and substitutes a concern for consensus.

There is an irreplaceable element of the pure gospel which Ellen White represents as being ministered only to those who have followed Christ by faith into the Most Holy Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. She speaks of it as “love,” but obviously it is the quality of love that dominates the New Testament as *agape*. It is markedly different from the popular sentimental, self-centered idea of love that pervades many Christian churches, including many Seventh-day Adventist ones.

But the third angel’s message in verity is *agape*, and “the last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of [God’s] character of love [*agape*]” (COL 415).

Occasionally someone who has no conscious awareness of the sanctuary truth comprehends something of the significance of *agape*. Anders Nygren, Lutheran Bishop of Lund, Norway, confesses that the doctrine of natural immortality does not comport with Biblical *agape*: “This idea of the natural immortality of the soul,” he says, “is completely foreign to the *Agape* motif Wherever the natural immortality of the soul becomes the fundamental religious dogma, we can be fairly certain that we are within the sphere of *eros* [an anti-*agape*, self-centered idea of love].” (*Agape and Eros*, p. 224).

The Life After Death enthusiasm appeals to deep levels of human emotion, to the very roots of personality. Spiritualism wears a beautiful, heart-thrilling appearance. Speaking with the tongues of

men and of angels cannot compete with it, neither can understanding all mysteries and having all faith that moves mountains contend with it, nor can bestowing all one’s goods to feed the poor and giving one’s body to be burned save one from its delusive power. Only one thing can meet it “face to face,” to borrow Ellen White’s term, without being vanquished by it: *agape*.

And that is actually a unique Seventh-day Adventist truth.

If Spiritualism will eventually masquerade as a counterfeit Holy Spirit, we must inquire how we can be sure of distinguishing between the true Holy Spirit and its opposite. Jesus warned us to beware of “false christs” for they would be very deceptive (Matthew 24:24). A superlative false Christ will make a final debut just before the end: “As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. . . . The great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come . . . a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. . . . The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: ‘Christ has come: Christ has come!’ The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him. . . . His blessing is pronounced upon the worshipers of the beast and his image, the very class upon whom the Bible declares that God’s unmingled wrath shall be poured out.” (GC 624, 625). Although we read that there is only “one Lord,” that means only one true Lord. Satan sees to it that “there be gods many

and lords many” (1 Cor. 8:5). Why does he also counterfeit the Holy Spirit?

Long before his impersonation of Christ will come his clever misrepresentations of truth. A false Holy Spirit is “that spirit of antichrist” that John warns us against (1 John 4:3). It is what Ellen White describes as “another spirit,” the source of numerous false revivals that are widely hailed as blessings from heaven (GC 464). Whereas the true Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin and motivation to forsake it (John 16:8), the counterfeit will bring the opposite—the conviction that all is well and sin need not or cannot be overcome. He induces the inner feeling and outward claim which is false assurance, “I am saved,” which COL 155 warns against. He prepares souls to protest sincerely “in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” But the Lord must reply, “I never knew you.” (Mt. 7:21-23). Their constant sense of “Christian” euphoria, their unending miraculous answers to prayer, their phenomenal success in soul-winning, their confident assurance of salvation, were all induced by “another spirit.”

The false Holy Spirit subtly disparages genuine Christian experience which is a deep humbling of self before the cross wherein human pride and self-importance are crucified “with Christ.” To “fall on the Rock and be broken” is ridiculed as being negative. At some mysterious, unseen moment the hidden line is crossed where the true Holy Spirit’s insistent conviction of sin is rejected as being the work of the

devil, and the soul surrenders to Satan’s alluring sense of confident well-being when in fact the final sin against the reproof of the Holy Spirit in *agape* is indulged.

While one class afflict their souls in deep contrition and receives the seal of God, the other class receives the final seal of Spiritualism. One has security by *agape*-induced faith alone; the other embraces a false security by assumption and presumption.

We are never standing still; this very moment we take a step in either one direction or the other.