

Dangers

Danger: Occultism

Human nature has always longed for knowledge and power. The human can satisfy their wishes to some extent by using natural sources, and if it is not enough for them, they often turn to supernatural ones. Then comes the moment when they can easily get into occultism (Latin "occultus" - secret, mysterious). The reason for this is that there are only two sources of supernatural knowledge and power - God and Satan. All that doesn't come from God - comes from Satan.

God's Kingdom is a Kingdom of light, and its servants know whom they belong to and what they do. From another point of view - Kingdom of Satan is a Kingdom of darkness, and most of those who are in its Kingdom, do not know whom they are serving and true nature of what they do.

There are no limits for the kinds of a lie, deception and manipulations which are used in occultism. That is why occult practices have always attracted people with great interest despite age or social status. All of these causes great harm to spiritual and physical life of society as a whole and of each in particular. That is why in this section we will investigate main occult tendencies and practices, so that we could be able to stand against all wiles of devil.

Attention! Sects

Many Christians think that "there is one God, and it doesn't really matter where and with whom to go to salvation". For somebody it doesn't matter whether church is Catholic or Orthodox, others also consider Protestant denominations, Baptists... Others go much further - new age, Scientology... They may say: "Today I'm in one church, tomorrow I'll be in another".

Does it really don't matter which church or group you belong to? Or is it enough to "only believe in Christ" with no difference in what church or sect? Why during His prayer before the cross Christ a couple of times prays to Heavenly Father for His disciples: "... so that they will be united just as we are" (John 17:11-22)

Why does He say to Peter "on you I will build my church", not "churches"? And exactly to this Church He promises victory over "gates of Hades". What models of modern schisms and sects does Bible show us? What does the Word of God say about the meaning of splits in church? What are the reasons and signs of split, and what are the consequences? How do these consequences influence on our chances for salvation?

Church is the body of Christ (Eph.1:22-23), Christians are parts of this body (1 Cor. 12:12-27). None of the parts can be outside the body - at least dead.

We'll consider possible answers to these important questions.

Astrology originates from Babylon, not from the Bible

Astrologers assert that destiny of people and whole nations depend on stars' disposition. They say that you may find out what these destinies are by the help of detailed investigation of horoscopes. Astrology is an ancient "science". It originated in Egypt and Babylon. At that time, astrology dealt mainly with foreseeing disasters and future of whole nations. This, one of the first forms of astrology, had been closely connected with worshipping stars. People 'consulted' with stars and considered them to have power over human, since they believed that stars were gods. The Old Testament has lots of records of stars worship. At the time of divided kingdoms, Israel imitated the practice of astrology from pagans. The final fall of Israelitic kingdom had been directly connected with the fact that people have become pagans and started to worship stars:

"And they abandoned all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only. Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced. And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had cast them out of his sight. When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD and made them commit great sin."

(2 Kings 17:16-21) One of the most honoured astrologic idols, to which people were sacrificed, was Moloch (Molech, Milchom, Malcham). He impersonated Sun and people worshiped him by burning living babies. Worship of Moloch and Rephan, or Saturn, is condemned in the book of Acts (7:43):

"You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon!" When kings, such as Hosea, who feared God, came into power, they fought against paganism and astrology. Some astrologic idols are mentioned in the following text: "And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel. And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people.

And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove." (2 Kings 23:4-7)

In the Old Testament, spread of Baal worshiping in Israel is mentioned about hundred times. Baal was an idol of Sun of Finikia. Israeli went so far in their apostasy, that they have built a temple of Sun (Baal) and in front of the entrance to the House of the Lord they placed statues of horses and chariots, devoted to Sun. Syrio-finikia worshiping of stars, when Sun and Moon were worshipped calling them Baal and Astarta, as representors of male and female natural powers, was a real worship of stars... Stars were worshipped as sovereigns and rulers of undermoon world. People burnt incense not only to Sun and Moon but also to signs of the zodiac, as well as to all hosts of heaven, i.e. all stars. Prophets of the Old Testament unanimously condemned worship of stars. Jeremiah rejected serving to the „queen of heaven" - Moon (Jer. 7:18; 44:17-25).

He prophesied about God's judgement over Israel for its astrologic idolatry (Jer. 19:13). Depravity of such serving was not only about idolatry, but also about desire to foresee future. Jeremiah warns:

"At that time, says the LORD, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves: And they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth." (Jer. 8:1-2)

God condemned Israel for practicing astrology, because that was an attraction to the world of occult religions. Israel was forbidden to take part in any kind of occult actions which aim to foresee future:

"When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God." (Deut. 18:9-13)

Prophet Isaiah made fun of astrologers in a special way. They told the king that Isrealitic kingdom will not fall, while Isaiah asserted the contrary. In this classic contradiction between horoscopes and divine revelation the prophet says:

"But evil shall come upon you, which you will not know how to charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, for which you will not be able to atone; and ruin shall come upon you suddenly, of which you know nothing. Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed; perhaps you may inspire terror. You are wearied with

your many counsels; let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons make known what shall come upon you. Behold, they are like stubble; the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before! Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have done business with you from your youth; they wander about, each in his own direction; there is no one to save you." (Is.47:11-15)

Hostile attitude of the Old Testament prophets towards astrology was based on two facts:

- 1) astrology had been one of the forms of polytheism and lead to worship of stars.
- 2) it had been an occult practice, which was forbidden by Moses; if Judes wanted to know something, they had to ask God of Israel about it, not stars. In biblical understanding, worship and dependance on any kind of powers created by God, is an offence of God the Creator. A human is called to worship the Creator, not His creation.

For a long period of time astrology had been used mainly to foresee destiny of kingdoms and nations, until it hadn't been returned to Greece by Alexandr the Great after his aggressive marches. Greek scientists soon turned astrology into „science", which was applied to every person. A leading role in this transformation played Ptolemy (130 A.D.).

In his «Tetrabiblos» Ptolemy connects signs of the zodiac, location of Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn with person's date of birth. It had been considered that knowing the exact time of a person's birth, it is possible to foresee his/her future.

Zodiac is an imaginary zone in the firmament. Planets cross it when they follow their orbits. It contains visible constellations. It is divided into twelve „buildings" with thirty divisions in each „building". By using zodiac you may count an exact location of seven worlds at any moment. The calendar year is divided into twelve parts which correspond to each of the zodiac „buildings". E.g., if someone was born in the period between November 23 and December 23 then his sign will be Saggitarius. The signs of seven planets and twelve „buildings" are still being used by a great number of astrologers.

The Early Church was as hostile to astrology as the Old Testament was. In «Didache» (church guidance of the end of the first - beginning of the second century) there is such a warning:

"My child, be not an observer of birds [for divination] for it leads to idolatry; nor a charmer (enchanter), nor an astrologer, nor a purifier (a user of purifications or expiations), nor be thou willing to look on those things; for from all these is generated idolatry." At Laodicea Council in year 345 (Canon 36), astrology was forbidden and astrologers were excommunicated from the Church. One of the famous astrology fighters was St. Augustine, though he believed in it before conversion himself. In the period of late Middle Ages astrology had returned its past respect. In the Reneascance-period astrology had been practiced by rulers and ordinary people. Astronomy and astrology where considered then to be the only 'science'. The Kopernik discovery badly insulted astrology. Ptolemy's astrological theory was based on

the assumption that Earth is a centre of the Universe. Ptolemy reckoned that the Sun, the Moon, and five planets turn around Earth. By focusing their 'powers' they define every person's fate.

When people got to know that the Earth is just one of some planets that turn around Sun, people started to treat astrology as superstition. At the same time, after a serious decay at times of early Christianity and the modern science lift, astrology renewed its power in the twelfth century. In the end of nineteenth century, as the result of Christianity decay a spiritual vacuum emerged, which gradually started to fill up with different occult teachings, such as theosophy and anthroposophy. Astrology has also renewed.

Spiritual warfare

Christian life is a constant spiritual warfare which lasts from the creation of the world and embraces whole Universe - both visible and invisible worlds. This is a fight „not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph.6:12), against the worst enemy of every Christian - devil and his wiles.

Spiritual warfare is the most complex and dangerous of all kinds of wars, because the price of it is the most precious - human souls. That's why every Christian is called to take part in it and win.

Unfortunately, very often people run to two extremes: some think that devil and his kingdom of darkness do not exist, others see him at every step they take. None of these opinions works for us. Our enemy is strong and dangerous, so we shouldn't underestimate him, and at the same time we shouldn't be afraid, but fight with confidence that we are already winners in Jesus, Who not only defeated devil at the cross, but also has given us power to do so. Main instructions concerning fighting the spiritual warfare we have in Holy Scriptures.

In this section we will consider everything that concerns our enemy (his tactics and strategy, enemy's hierarchy and possible ways of influence) and means to fight with him (help of our allies, armour and spiritual discipline) in order to stand against all devil's attacks with dignity and win the war for the most precious. «For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?»

(Mth.16:26).

Prepared by Fr.V.Popyk