



# Spiritualism

**Margaret (1833-1893) and Kate (1837-1892) Fox**

## **INTRODUCTION**

According to a recent Gallup Poll, 38 percent of Americans believe ghosts or spirits can come back in certain situations. In 1990, it was 25 percent. Today, 28 percent think some people can hear from or “mentally” talk to the dead, compared with 18 percent eleven years ago. Still found to be a strong influence on society, spiritualism remains a dangerous temptation for all people. It was used in the Bible (sometimes called: divining, magic, fortune-telling, necromancy, or astrology), and it can still be seen today at retreats, séances, and even on television. Very simply defined, spiritualism is the science, philosophy, and religion that claims that the departed can be summoned or contacted through a medium, offering a way to communicate with the dead. Many believe that these spirits have been given special insight into God’s mind and motives. Although spiritualism does not have an established church or creed, there are various individual organizations that provide loose principles.

## **HISTORY**

Realizing that the Children of Israel would be tempted with the pagan ritual of spiritualism, the Lord warned Moses and the people about this problem prior to entering the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 18:9-12 says: *“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD.”* Isaiah 8:18 said it very clearly: *“When someone tells 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?”* In 2 Kings 21:6 we read of wicked King Manasseh, *“He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.”*

The modern trend of spiritualism can be partially traced back to March 31, 1848, when two sisters from Hydesville, New York, claimed to have received strange revelations through mysterious rapping sounds. Margaret and Kate Fox were asked questions and the spirit of “Old Splitfoot” would reply by rapping once for “no”, twice for “perhaps” and three times for “yes.” The story was given extra news coverage when a buried body was discovered in the cellar of their home. After achieving great popularity, the sisters finally admitted they were faking the sounds by cracking their tow knuckles. They even demonstrated before an audience how

they had deceived the people, but folks were now too preoccupied with believing that spirits of the dead could speak to the living. Spiritualism quickly grew in popularity during the Civil War and later after World War I as many tried to contact the spirits of their slain family members. It was estimated that by the 1890s spiritualism had more than eight million followers.

Spiritualism today is often connected with the celebration of the “séance”. A séance is a meeting with the sole purpose of communicating with the dead. It is conducted by a medium or sensitive go-between who alleges to be trained in contacting the spirit world. (The New Age called this “channeling”.) It usually takes place in a



darkened room because they claim spirits are less likely to appear in the light. Ghosts might appear, trumpets sound, lights flash and a foul smelling substance (ectoplasm) may drool from the medium’s mouth. Sometimes the voice and personality of the medium takes on that of the spirit. Séances may also include telekinesis (objects moving without touching them), levitations (objects or people rising up and floating), apports (objects seeming to penetrate solids), automatic writing (writing of words or letters – similar to the Ouija Board), speaking in a trance (medium loses consciousness and becomes controlled by the

spirit), table lifting (suspending the table in space), and apparitions (spirits appearing in a wonderful or horrible form – also known as a specter).

Many well-known people have been involved in spiritualism including author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (“Sherlock Holmes”), and Mary Todd Lincoln. Harry Houdini believed spiritualism was a scam and spent his days trying to expose it.

The world’s first school of spiritualism, the Morris Pratt Institute, was founded in Whitewater, Wisconsin, in 1901. The institute is still in operation in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. (Wisconsin is also home of the Wonewoc Spiritualist Camp. Their web site provides a list of healers and mediums who offer their services at their annual summer camp in Wonewoc, Wisconsin.)

Unfortunately cable TV has popularized the concept of spiritualism (especially among children and teens) with shows like Ghost Hunters, Ghost Adventures, Ghosthunters International, Crossing Over, Beyond, and Paranormal State. These programs all provide spiritual risks for the viewer.

There have been many cases that have proven to be frauds like the Fox sisters. Any medium well-versed in the art of illusion can seduce a crowd into believing anything, especially when deep emotions are involved. Job 13:4 says, “*You, however, smear me with lies; you are worthless physicians, all of you!*” There are many organizations of skeptics who set out to prove many in the world of psychics are out to deceive. Satan is not necessarily in the business of concocting the supernatural to fool unsuspecting individuals. Most often it is a case of simply leading those individuals into sin. That is why Jesus warned us in Matthew 26:41 to, “*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” Whether it be through ghost hunting, the Ouija Board, a psychic reading, or seated at a séance, there is a real danger of inviting Satan into the circle. Such an invitation should never be part of the Christian’s life. Any contact with the spirit world is strictly forbidden by God.

## THE OUIJA BOARD

The Ouija Board arose from the 19<sup>th</sup> century obsession with spiritualism. As early as 1891 ads appeared regarding “Ouija, the Wonderful Talking Board” that promised “never-failing amusement and recreation for all the classes.” The price was \$1.50. The name Ouija may date back to the French word “*oiu*” for yes and the German “*ja*”. The board was popularized as a game by Parker Brothers who later sold the rights to Hasbro in 1991. The board consists of the printed words “yes”, “no”, “hello”, and “good-bye” plus an alphabet and the numerals 1-9. The users touch a slider or “planchette” that is supposedly led by spirits to provide answers to questions. As Christians we must avoid this satanic device since the Lord explicitly commands his people to refrain from contacting the dead. It provides an open doorway to the occult and for demonic contact.



## ARE GHOSTS REAL?

**(First a clarification:** *The terms “Holy Spirit” and “Holy Ghost” mean exactly the same thing; both refer to the third Person of the Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). The phrase “Holy Ghost” is simply an older term that dates back several hundred years, and is found in some old versions of the English Bible (such as the King James Version). Because the word “ghost” has a different meaning today than it did several hundred years ago, modern translations of the Bible always use “Holy Spirit.” From Billy Graham Ministries)*

Recent polls suggest that a majority of Americans believe in the paranormal world of spirits or ghosts. That number seems to increase with the younger generation. (Note: The Barna Group poll in 2006 found that 73% of teens surveyed had “engaged in at least one type of psychic or witch-craft related activity.) While some reject the notion of ghosts being real, others point to experiences they have had or have heard of. Certainly it is a topic not often discussed among Christians. Perhaps that is because many believers do not know what Scripture says about the subject. As we can see in this study, it is not a question that should be ignored.

First, we should understand that the term ghost was used often in Scripture. In the King James Version it appears over 100 times. Of those mentions, it is always used in connection with death – as in “give up the ghost” – or in dealing with the Holy Ghost. When relating to spirits of the dead it calls them familiar spirits or ghosts in the New Testament. The disciples must have been well aware of spirits or ghosts. When Jesus came to them on the Sea of Galilee we read: “*When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost*” (Mark 6:49). And after Jesus resurrection, “*They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.*” But in both instances Jesus quickly dismissed that notion for he replied: “*Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have*” (Luke 24:37-39).

The phenomenon of spirit contact or sighting ghosts dates back to early civilizations. It seems as long as there has been death, people have had the notion of making contact with the deceased. Mediums or necromancers were used by pagans to consult the dead for information about the future which is exactly what we see in King Saul, with whom the Lord had refused to communicate because of his unbelief. Consequently we find in 1 Samuel 28 that Saul decided instead to go to a witch and ask her to contact the spirit of Samuel, who had been dead for some time, for information regarding an upcoming battle. Samuel seemed to speak through the witch as he announced that not only would they lose battle but he and his sons would be killed in the fight. As we read the account there is no assurance that this was or was not the true spirit of Samuel, however, many details in the account suggest that it was not, and instead it was Satan making the visit.

Today, however with the popularity of cable TV, young and old are glued to the screen as ghost hunters enter suspect homes with the latest camera techniques and recording equipment to detect these spirits. Unfortunately many Christians have been deceived into thinking that such apparitions are real. God in his wisdom offers answers to our questions. As believers we always go to God's Word as our first resource when faced with a difficult question.

The Bible approaches this topic from several angles. First, God repeatedly warns his people to keep away from all forms of spirit contact. These warnings are firm and serious because God knows how Satan uses this temptation against his people. Getting people to believe in ghosts forces them to reject Scripture. Both the Old and New Testaments warn God's people that all spirit contact is a sin. In breaking God's command to refrain from any attempt at contacting forbidden beings we bring dishonor to his name as is mentioned in the second commandment.

Second, God has complete control over life and death. When an individual dies, there is a separation of soul and body. One remains in the ground, and the other is transported to heaven or hell. God's is clear in his Word that souls never linger after death nor do they wander about the earth. Jesus told the thief on the cross, *"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:43). Psalm 146:4 says, *"When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing."* And Paul tells the Corinthians that he would much prefer to be away from his body in heaven with the Lord.

Third, when an individual is buried, so is his or her body which includes vocal chords and muscles, clothing and anything else connected with a decaying body. It is impossible for a clothed ghost to appear years later, to move and to speak or groan. And Satan has not been given power to bring the dead back to life again. The best that Satan can do is to disguise himself to appear as someone else. He is a master of such trickery.

Fourth, Saul wished to look into the future for answers, much like the questions asked of the Ouija board or during a seance. We believe that only God knows the future and he does not communicate his plans to us through spirits or ghosts.

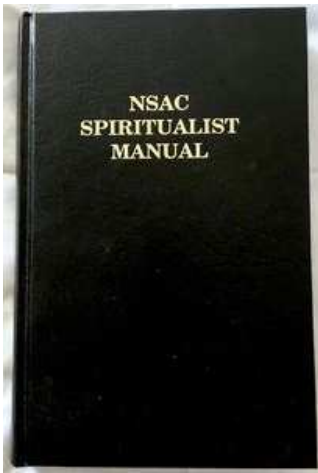
Yet there remains a problem. Although ghosts are not possible, what about spirits affecting people's lives? The Bible clearly tells us that there is a spirit realm. These spirits can connect with our physical world. We have many instances in the Bible of spirits known as angels doing just that. They were seen riding in flaming chariots. They were seated in the empty tomb. They spoke to God's people, and could be seen hovering over the fields of Bethlehem. But there are other spirits that are not loyal to God. These are the demons, the fallen angels, who are also spirits and whose goal it is to deceive. The evil spirits that Jesus drove out of people were certainly real. Mark 5 tells the account of Jesus driving out as many as two thousand demons from one man. When Philip was in Samaria, Scripture says the evil spirits came out of many (Acts 8:7.) Likewise Paul cast out demons as well. The 72 disciples Jesus sent out returned with the surprising report that they had the power to cast out demons. However, never does Scripture tell us these were the ghosts of dead people. Rather they were all fallen angels doing the work of their leader. In Matthew 12:22-28 Jesus makes it clear that the demon-possessed were inhabited with Satan's evil angels. And demons are no more the spirits of the deceased than angels are the spirits of saints. So demon possession should not be taken lightly, because they do have superior intelligence and the ability to pass from one realm into another, even entering the body of an individual.

But what of the many accounts of ghost sightings, strange happenings, and spirit contact? Aren't many of these sightings or unexplained happenings shared by well-meaning individuals? There seems to be but two possibilities for ghost or spirit contact with the living world. Could they be ghosts of the deceased? No! Either the instances can be easily explained rationally, they are the result of deception or wild imagination (as our inquisitive minds love to be teased), or they are demons doing the devil's bidding and as such they are a force to be feared and avoided. In no way should God's people tempt Satan's demons or even begin to dabble in the

occult or spiritualistic world. Ephesians 6 tells of the armor God provides for the protection of his children. Notice that Paul writes that *“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, **against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms**”* (Ephesians 6:12).

## **IN THEIR WORDS**

According to the Morris Pratt Institute says a spiritualist is *“One who believes, as the basis of his or her religion, in the communication between this and the Spirit World by means of mediumship and who endeavors to mold his or her character and conduct in accordance with the highest teachings derived from such communication.”* (1914, Rev. 1938)



Although spiritualism is considered a certified religion, there are few parallels with Christianity. Spiritualism claims that one can remain a faithful Christian and still practice the tenets of spiritualism, but that is certainly not the case since spiritualism does not believe in the Triune God, original sin, heaven or hell, and the redemption of Jesus Christ. However to get an idea of the beliefs of this religion, the following is a public statement from the *Declaration of Principles* which is adhered to by most spiritualist churches today. (From the web site of the National Spiritualist Association of Churches. NSAC.)

*The following Declaration of Principles is published to the world, not as a creed binding on the conscious of the individual, but as the consensus of a very large majority of Spiritualists on the fundamental teachings of Spiritualism:*

- *We believe in Infinite Intelligence.*
- *We believe that the phenomena of Nature, both physical and spiritual, are the expression of Infinite Intelligence.*
- *We affirm that a correct understanding of such expression and living in accordance therewith, constitute true religion.*
- *We affirm that the existence and personal identity of the individual continue after the change called death.*
- *We affirm that communication with the so-called dead is a fact, scientifically proven by the phenomena of Spiritualism.*
- *We believe that the highest morality is contained in the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”*
- *We affirm the moral responsibility of individuals, and that we make our own happiness or unhappiness as we obey or disobey Nature’s physical and spiritual laws.*
- *We affirm that the doorway to reformation is never closed against any human soul here or hereafter.*
- *We affirm that the precepts of Prophecy and Healing are Divine attributes proven through Mediumship.*

## **In God’s Words . . .**

- How serious is God in condemning those dabbling in the spirit world?

Leviticus 20:6,27 *“I will set my face against anyone who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute themselves by following them, and I will cut them off from their people. . . A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.”*

- What does God say about the possibility of the dead coming back to haunt people?

Job 7:9,10 *“As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so one who goes down to the grave does not return. He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more.”*

● Why is this a warning intended for the believer as well as the unbeliever? Why is it poor judgment for the Christian to make light of the ghosts and spirits at Halloween?

1 Timothy 4:1 *"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons."*

● How can these words serve as a warning to anyone consulting a Ouija board or sitting in on a séance?

Isaiah 8:19 *"When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God?"*

Leviticus 19:31 *"Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them."*

● Why are séances done in darkness and why do ghosts seem to appear at night?

John 3:19-21 *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God."*

● Why does God make such a strong point about people who try to seek the dead? Isn't it just a harmless ruse?

Deuteronomy 18:10-12 *"Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD."*

● How do these words of God speak to those who claim that the dead can deliver messages from God?

Ecclesiastes 9:5 *"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing."*

● Can the dead deliver the secrets of God?

Deuteronomy 29:29 *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."*

## **DISCUSSION**

1. Why do some people feel the need to contact the dead?
2. Why is it dangerous to use the Ouija Board?
3. Why is it not possible to be a Christian and to delve into Spiritualism?
4. Why should we consider TV programs about ghost sightings, etc. off limits for our families?
5. Why is it important for God's people to become well educated in Scripture in order to fight these evils?

## **NINE SIGNS OF A CULT**

Which of these cult signs apply to the Jehovah's Witnesses?

- Central Figure
- No Trinity
- Special Vocabulary
- Mention of Jesus
- A Different God
- Mind Control
- Another Written Authority
- Salvation by Works
- Reincarnation