

Supernatural vs. Natural Faith

Pastor Steve

August 14, 2023

By nature we are ambiguous creatures. Ambiguity and the tolerance for ambiguity belong to human nature. This is a good thing. There are many times when some critically important consideration needs to be made and we are of two (or more) minds about it. The most precious gift you can possess at such times is your ability to hold two conflicting ideas in your mind at the same time.

Ambiguity provides us with a great conceptual framework from which to consider the deeper questions of evil in our world along with questions of the occult, dark energy, and supernatural beliefs.

The first great ambiguity we will look at is the ambiguity of power. In the world, evil is always close at hand wherever there is power. Take a look at any great political or social leader who has ever existed. That person was good for some people and bad for others. They helped some people and hurt others.

In Ephesians 6:12 the Apostle Paul says; "For us the struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in celestial places." The deeper message here follows the old saying that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Evil will be present wherever we invest power. Evil will usually present itself ambiguously, so that some people will support it and others will reject it.

Faith in its most generic form represents the solution to the ambiguity of power. Faith is our ability to believe the best in any situation no matter how bad things may look. As we read in Hebrews 11:1 "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the assurance of things not seen." Faith is not a doctrinal or denominational thing as much as it is a way human beings have of seeing beyond the gravity of present hardships.

This brings us to an examination of the problems we have when we place our faith in supernatural forces. Many people may disagree with the following statement, but I find it to be true in my own lived experience and in the experience of countless others I have known. The supernatural only exists in the realm of faith. It is only there if you believe it is there. In material, purely physical terms, it does not exist. This means there is no reason to fear anything having to do with the occult or the supernatural.

I have a theory regarding Satan. This theory came to be formed by reading the Bible, the Qur'an, John Milton (Paradise Lost), and William Blake. My theory is that Satan does not exist in any way in relation to the physical world. In popular religious conversation, we hear a lot of "The Devil did this...and the Devil did that." What we are really hearing is the voice of a person

complaining that they are facing this or that reality, but they possess no power over it. Devil talk is something we need to be very cautious about because it is easy, by religious faith, to ascribe great or even unlimited power to this spiritual entity, this myth called Satan or Lucifer. I have heard preachers who spend more time talking about the Devil than they do talking about Jesus. They do this for one simple reason. FEAR SELLS STUFF. If a preacher or a politician or a writer can make people afraid, people will buy whatever they are selling. We call this fear mongering, literally selling fear. Given this realization, we would do well to accept the great Biblical mandate which says simply; "FEAR NOT."

We fall into fear when we fall into trouble. Trouble causes us to be afraid. This is especially the case when our troubles have to do with things we can't control. We often face trouble in four major areas. These are:

1. The larger world of swirling dynamic chaos. We perceive this area as the forces of randomness surrounding us.
2. Our own unique genomic program. This area includes many of the physical, body problems we might encounter.
3. Troubles we face due to the decisions we or others have made.
4. Troubles we face because we have chosen to believe our own fears. We place our faith in the negatives.

The solution to fear is faith. Don't let fear have power by believing in it.

So my belief about Satan is that he does not exist in any physical, material, or cosmic sense. This includes all demonic forces, sorcerers, witches, demons, minor devils, dark energies, etc. These things only exist to the extent we choose to believe in them. This is not to suggest that horrible things do not happen to people. They do happen, but such things always have material causes. Bad things happen because people DO bad things. When people choose to do bad things collectively, even worse things can happen. There is no practical limit to how bad things can get if we do not stop believing in the power of the negative.

In history we find a perfect example if we observe the role of Cotton Mather and the other ruling clergy of Massachusetts during the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 to 1693. Cotton Mather was a great and respected leader in Massachusetts during the colonial period. He was pastor of the Old North Meetinghouse in Boston. He illustrates human ambiguity and the ambiguity of evil better than any person I have ever studied. He was a rationalist and an intellectual in many respects, being an early proponent of inoculation against smallpox and a student of medicine. He also believed very deeply in supernatural forces working in the physical world.

During the 1680's and 1690's the colonists of Massachusetts were experiencing tremendous hardships. There were crop failures, hostile natives, outbreaks of disease, poverty, and many interpersonal conflicts. The leaders of the colony, men such as Mather, were deeply religious people who believed on scriptural evidence that pure and focused Biblical faith would lead to success and prosperity in the physical world. In 1690 their beliefs were not working. The

colonists were under constant fear and hardship. They believed more and more in the manifestation of Satanic activity. A few young people began to act possessed and to blame others, as witches, for their possession. This scenario had already been acted out many times previously in Europe. Mather and the other leaders believed that order could be restored and prosperity would follow if the Satanic element could be purged from society, so that is what they set out to do. They purged the evil by accusing more than 200 people and executing 19 of them. Mather was present for at least one execution where the accused (Giles Corey) was slowly tortured to death. After the trials and executions Mather organized a group of clergymen to formally endorse both the process and the outcome of the trials. (See the document published by Mather entitled "Return of the Several Ministers.")

One could ask, where and how was Satan operating during all this? The answer would be in the heart and in the ambitions of Cotton Mather and the other clergymen leading Massachusetts at that time. We can see the same story enacted over and over again in the Inquisition and various other witch hunts that had happened previously throughout Europe.

In response to all this atrocity, the founding fathers of the United States sought to create a much more rational social order. The new country they established would be based on a government that would be separate from the authority of the church and a legal concept of due process based on strict rules of evidence. Sadly, we note that both of these principles, the separation of church and state, and legal due process are now under attack by religious and political extremists who are totally ignorant of the historic processes on which our civilization is based.

One of the voices of reason that came out of the religious chaos of Europe in the 1600's was John Webster. He wrote a book in 1677 called "The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft." In this book Webster introduced the same basic principles we are attempting to set forth here. His idea is that the manifestations of Satanic activity we see happening in the world are actually the products of what he calls "melancholy and fancy". He also observes that these manifestations of human misery are exploited by "deceivers and imposters." Along with Webster, I have concluded that sorcerers, witches, demons, and devils, even the Evil One himself are all products of the faith of those who choose to believe such things. They do not exist in terms of the material, physical world. They do exist though, solidly and effectively, in the minds of those who choose to believe in them. The moral of the story is to beware of religious extremism and ambitious clergymen. (We also observe that the players in such deceptions usually are men.)

Another critical observation we can draw from Webster's work is the idea that the miracle stories related in the Bible and in other religious texts are not statements of literal historic truth as much as they are motivational allegories aimed at strengthening a culture that is under threat. A critical analysis of the miracle stories in the Bible shows us that these "signs and miracles" were collective motivations and validations of cultural identity. Such signs and miracles perceived in various times and places validated a given culture and its religion. A prime example of this would be Elijah calling down fire from heaven to shame the priests of Baal at Mount Carmel (I

Kings 18:20-40). This is an archetypal Biblical miracle story where the miracle celebrates the survival of one culture and the destruction of another.

The point here is that stories of supernaturalism and supernatural manifestation are all about ways that powerless people can claim power over their circumstances. This is the case with positive miracle stories and also with negative manifestations such as those at Salem in 1692. Either way, the lesson always comes down to what we choose to believe. We live in a world full of trouble and troubling circumstances. These troubles often belong to the randomness of deterministic chaos. They can be attributed to our personal genetic code. They can result from faulty decisions we or others have made. In the end though it all boils down to faith. The power is where we believe it to be. The ways we think, perceive, and believe give us the power to transcend and to transform the outer circumstances of our lives. This is not a magic power. It is not supernatural. It is not even religious. This is a natural, human power.

All Rights Reserved.

All material appearing on the Pastor Steve website (“content”) is protected by copyright under U.S. Copyright laws and is the property of Pastor Steve or the party credited as the provider of the content. You may not copy, reproduce, distribute, publish, display, perform, modify, create derivative works, transmit, or in any way exploit any such content, nor may you distribute any part of this content over any network, including a local area network, sell or offer it for sale, or use such content to construct any kind of database. You may not alter or remove any copyright or other notice from copies of the content on Pastor Steve’s website. Copying or storing any content except as provided above is expressly prohibited without prior written permission of the author or the copyright holder identified in the individual content’s copyright notice. Your purchase grants you a ONE TIME download for your OWN PERSONAL perusal.

Copyright © Pastor Steve All Rights Reserved