



# Media Spotlight

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR MEDIA

## SPECIAL REPORT



# HALLOWE'EN

## SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE APART?

by Albert James Dager

It's the time of year when the world holds its festival to honor the powers of darkness—the time when stores stock up on all the goodies that children seek as they make their way from door to door with their wails of "Trick or treat." Doting parents take pictures of them in their little costumes, dressed as witches, demons, monsters, and their favorite media characters. They no doubt think of how cute their kiddies look as they waddle about the neighborhood working their peculiar brand of blackmail.

Humor aside, it's important that Christians consider the true meaning of this holiday called Hallowe'en. Whether or not Christians should be a part of these festivities is a legitimate question. It's one among many concerning how God's people are to relate to the affairs of the world. If we are called to be holy and separated unto Him, we should seek to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise (Ephesians 5:15).

Many Christians think that Hallowe'en is an outgrowth of Christian tradition honoring the Church's saints. While the name and most recent influences of this holiday appear to be Christian (the name means the evening before All Hallows, or All Saints Day), most of its customs are remnants of ancient pagan superstitions connected with the Druidic new year. The date was a joint festival known as Samhain (or, Sowein), held in honor of the Celtic sun god and their Lord of the Dead.

Common to new year festivals around the world, to the Druids this was a time when the dead came back to mingle among the living. The Celts believed that the sinful souls of those who had died during the year had been transferred to the bodies of

animals. Through gifts and sacrifices their sins could be expiated and the souls freed to enter the land of eternal youth and happiness. The Lord of the Dead judged the souls and decreed the form in which their existence was to continue, whether as humans or animals.

Some modern witches claim the day as a time to give thanks to their great goddess and god for their abundance in harvest. As the start of the pagan new year, Hallowe'en is the time when they also invoke the help of spirits for the coming year, since the veil between the dead and the living is believed to be at its thinnest.

### "CHRISTIAN" INFLUENCE

The reason many Christians associate Hallowe'en with Christianity is that in the eighth century Pope Gregory III established November 1 as the Roman Catholic feast day honoring the dead. Then, in the ninth century, Pope Gregory IV decreed that the day was to be universally observed by the Roman Catholic Church which, at that time, held the greatest influence among the Christian populous because of its political strength.

The evening before that Roman Catholic feast day coincided with the pagan Samhain festival and came to be called All Hallows Eve or Hallowe'en (Hallows Evening). In reality, then, Hallowe'en was at first a pagan festival which was later merged with a Roman Catholic feast day.

During the Middle Ages, the evening before All Saints' Day became known as the time most favored by witches, sorcerers, and devil worshipers.

It should be noted that not all witches are satanists, since they believe that Satan is a fabrication of the Christian faith. Today's witches in the Celtic tradition adhere to Wicca, a form of witchcraft that worships nature.

A belief of Wicca is that God is beyond understanding and, thus can only be understood by looking at "parts" of God. Since every person and everything is believed to be a part of God, they may greet one another with the expression, "Thou art God."

Wicca holds to a form of dualism as expressed in the masculine and feminine ("god and goddess"). What they believe to be the mother aspect of God they call Goddess, and prefer it to the father aspect because the feminine is perceived as more understanding and kind. The feminine aspect is also perceived as more powerful because of its creative abilities. This is one reason why Wicca is very active in the feminist movement, considering the male as somewhat subservient.

Satanism is a different form of witchcraft which invokes the powers of Satan specifically. There are many kinds of witchcraft throughout the world and some of their traditions are similar. Satanism is one form of witchcraft whose traditions and practices are in many cases similar to those of Wicca. To both forms of witchcraft Hallowe'en (which they call Sowein, pronounced similarly to "cow-ain") is the most sacred day of the year.

### PHYSICAL & SPIRITUAL DANGERS

The physical dangers that Hallowe'en presents to children are easily discerned. There are numerous warnings on radio, television and in other mass media outlets of what to beware of in the way of contaminated food, how to dress to avoid the hazards of fire and to be easily seen at night, and what to give children to neutralize the aches in their little tummies from gorging themselves on too many sweets.

The physical dangers of Hallowe'en are minimal, however, when compared to the spiritual dangers. Yet through ignorance and/or love of human tradition, many Christians engage in its festivities and encourage their children in them. The common excuse for doing so is that it's only in fun and the kids don't know the difference.

And that's the problem: it's all in fun and they don't know the difference. The desire for fun often runs counter to the commands of Christ. Our joy should be in Him, and the things we do for enjoyment, while not always necessarily spiritually edifying, should at least not compromise our testimony. As we should do all things to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31), so, too, we should abstain from all appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22).

When we engage in tributes to Satan and pagan gods, we are sanctioning the works of God's enemies. It is the same as enjoying a banquet held in honor of someone who has sworn to kill our earthly father. If we will look at pagan festivities in that light we may better understand how our involvement grieves our Lord.

In participating in these things, either we are failing to acknowledge the reality of those demonic forces and their influence in the world, or we think they are something with which we can align ourselves and not be adversely affected.

Nor does the argument that Hallowe'en isn't what it was originally hold up in view of its continued observance by witches in honor of their pagan gods. On that day, also, Satanists continue to engage in all sorts of perversions including animal and human sacrifices.

Whether we believe in these things or not, the traditions linked to Hallowe'en carry evil connotations, and the fact remains that it's still a feast of Satan. It really doesn't matter whether or not certain types of witches acknowledge him as a reality. Therefore its practices must be exposed for the evil they are. As we look at these customs we'll realize that their very nature is contrary to our faith.

#### TRICK OR TREAT

The modern custom of going from door to door begging candy, nuts, apples, and money while masked and dressed in grotesque costumes goes back to the pagan new year feast. The spirits that were thought to throng about the houses of the living were greeted with banquet-laden tables. At the end of the feast, masked and costumed villagers, representing the souls of the dead, paraded to the outskirts of town leading the spirits away. This was done to avoid any calamities the dead might bring upon them should they not be provided for. Were the living to fail in their provisions they believed that they might find their lives disrupted by having their livestock die, their milk turn sour, their food spoil, or by some other mischief the spirits of the dead might devise.

This appeasement of the spirits was celebrated in various ways according to locale and custom, with minor differences. One way was to set out bowls of fruit and other treats so they could partake of them and, once satisfied, they would leave in peace. Your child, going door-to-door, is reenacting that ancient superstition.

#### JACK-O-LANTERNS

The jack-o-lantern (also known as will-o-the-wisp, fox fire, fairie fire, friar's lantern, and corpse lantern, among other things) was believed to be a wandering soul which could not find refuge because of a particularly evil deed committed in its lifetime. Some believed it to be a malignant imp. The Finns believed that it was the soul of a child buried in the forest.

According to ancient folklore, a will-o-the-wisp wanders about swamp areas, enticing victims to follow. Should a person succumb to curiosity and follow its light, he may become hopelessly lost or led to his death in a bog or pool. There are tales of these mischievous spirits chasing terrified victims through mud and brambles until confused, and then leaving them stranded with the sound of mocking laughter ringing in their ears. Today's leering pumpkin face is symbolic of that mocking spirit.



A corpse candle is said to be a small flame moving through the air in the dark and is believed by the superstitious to be an omen of the observer's imminent death, or the death of a loved one. These strange fires, thought by the more rational to originate from the atmospheric ignition of swamp gases, were also known as "Ignus Fastuus," or "Foolish Fire," because only a fool would follow them.

#### BONFIRES

Most everyone is familiar with the Hallowe'en bonfire. This had its origins in the Celtic fire festivals.

In North Wales every family built a bonfire into which each member would throw a stone he had marked with his own identification. The family would recite prayers to their gods while gathered around the fire. Should a stone be missing when they returned to the site the next morning, it was believed that the owner of that particular stone would die within the coming year. A similar belief existed in the Scottish Highlands, and diverse forms of

fortune telling would accompany the festivities. The Celtic new year provided a suitable time for predicting the future due to the closeness of the spirits. Even today, during this time of year modern "mystics" fill the newspapers with their predictions for the next year.

It is believed that the bonfires were first meant to provide light and heat to compensate for the feeble sun during the darkening and chilling winter to come. On this particular night all the people would extinguish their fires at home and congregate at a great community bonfire consecrated through sacred rites during the fire festival. In order to receive fire for the next year it was necessary to engage in pagan rituals, many of which included human and animal sacrifices to the gods of nature.

#### DUCKING FOR APPLES

There were many divination practices associated with Samhain, many of which dealt with marriage, health, and the weather. Ducking for apples was a marriage divination based on the belief that the first to bite into an apple would be the first to marry in the coming year. This is similar to the wedding tradition of the throwing of the bride's bouquet for women and her garter for men.

Apple peeling was another type of divination to determine how long one's life would be. The longer the unbroken peel, the longer the life of the one peeling it.

#### BLACK CATS & OTHER TALISMANS

Witches of many persuasions own living talismans—animals indwelt by evil spirits, through which they derive their power. Common talismans are dogs, owls, snakes, and swine, but among the most common are cats. The witches invoke the familiar spirits to enter the bodies of their talismans for the exercising of power.

The black cat in particular has come to symbolize these familiar spirits because black represents evil, death, and darkness—commodities with which evil spirits are obsessed.

#### THE UNHOLY MADE HOLY?

The other trappings of Hallowe'en are all steeped in magic and the occultic practices of ancient civilizations. With the advent of Christianity, rationalizations were given to these practices in order to make them palatable to the Church, while providing for appeasement of pagans forced to become "Christians" or lose their lives at the hands of the Roman clergy.

One variation on trick-or-treat, for example, was for children to go around on the eve of All Souls' Day (the day following All Saints' Day) offering to fast for the departed souls of loved ones in exchange for money or some other offering.

Like many pagan festivals that were conveniently adapted for Christian usage, Hallowe'en is today accepted as Christian in origin and practice. But the darkness that permeated the Roman Church at that time resulted in the taking of things consecrated to Satan and the pagan gods of nature, and offering them to God. We have numerous Scriptures that reveal this as an abomination to God, punishable by death. That's how much He detests such practices, regardless of whom one says they honor.

Jeremiah the prophet wrote, Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jeremiah 10:2). Lest those "under grace" think this doesn't apply to the present, I remind them of Paul's words to the Church:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Wherefore come out from among them, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty. (II Corinthians 6:14-18)

To engage in revelry associated with such an anti-Christ festivity as Hallowe'en is a slap in our Lords' face. Yet because of "vain tradition," Christian parents—and even some churches—go all out to make Hallowe'en a special time of celebration. Some churches and Christian organizations even go public with "haunted" houses designed to scare the wits out of people for profit in order to finance their programs. Yet God says that He has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love and power, and of a sound mind (II Timothy 1:7).

#### A WORD FROM A WITCH

Several years ago, I appeared on the Joy program on the Trinity Broadcasting Network in which I addressed the problem of Christians celebrating Hallowe'en. That

week I received a letter from a professed witch who took offense at my statements. Her letter revealed information that should be of interest to any Christian whose mind is not yet made up about celebrating Hallowe'en—especially Christian parents who are unaware of its dangers:

Dear Mr. Dager;

I was notified that morning to watch Ch. 40 as you would be on it discussing Halloween. I have also been given your sheet on Halloween.

As a practicing Witch I take exception to the information you have promulgated in both your T.V. appearance and your Newsletter on Halloween. It is filled with conjecture, myths and outright lies. Your research is lacking in every detail. Where do you get your research materials? Have you ever spoken with a person who is a practicing Witch? I can give you a list of over 8000 Witches just in our area who could give you insight into what Witches do and what they believe.



Halloween has, from the earliest of man's time, been a time of great celebration and festival. The true meaning of this time is that we give thanks to the great Goddess and God for their abundance found in the harvest and now they seek their time of rest. Halloween is not an outgrowth of the x-ian traditions as we, who are Witches, have nothing to do with x-ian traditions and in fact, it is you who have taken our celebrations and perverted them to your own use in order to have your converts in earlier times. Samhain (pronounced, So-wein) is not the name of the lord of the dead. It is a period of time. The celebrations of this time were never to satan as he is part and parcel of the x-ian heritage and not ours. It is not a demonic practice as we do not believe in demons. The fact is, x-ian, that were you informed you would know that satan has no part in our rituals or practices. We leave this figment of the x-ian imagination to you and yours. None of us engages in either human or animal sacrifices. I could go on and on, but it is needless for me to, in your words, cast pearls before swine.

We intend to celebrate Samhain this year, with one of our largest groups and will have a wonderful time. Our houses and lawns will be decorated with all aspects of the harvest and many of your Sunday school beggars will be at our doors, just as they are every year.

I have included our tract which we present to your kind who come to our doors. Perhaps you would like to read it and just get a hint of what we are about and what we believe.

Blessed be. And a Joyous Samhain celebration to you, now looking forward to a Happy Yule.

Obviously this woman didn't listen very carefully because she really just verified everything I was saying about Hallowe'en. Rather than recognize my concern that the Roman Catholic Church had passed on this legacy to "Christendom," she assumed that all Christians think alike and lumped me in with those who celebrate that holiday.

She also missed the point that, although the witchcraft to which she adheres (Wicca) does not claim to believe in Satan and animal or human sacrifices, other forms of witchcraft which celebrate Samhain do believe and practice these things. As to where I got my facts, they came from several sources and are a compilation of those sources' information.

Interestingly, some of the sources are from Wicca publications, while others are scholarly works found in public libraries.

I wrote back to her offering her the Gospel in the spirit of love and telling her of Jesus' sacrifice for her sins. I received a four-page letter in reply castigating me for insulting her.

#### THE REAL ISSUE

If I had been mistaken about anything (and I don't believe I was) it was not about the nature and history of Hallowe'en. And this is the real issue. So, too, is the fact that practicing witches do propagate their beliefs through the handing out of tracts to trick-or-treaters.

I am speaking to those who truly believe in Jesus Christ—those who are aware of demonic presences that can affect even Christians if we are not careful of the things with which we associate. Is it possible that spells might be cast on the objects placed in your child's bag? This is not paranoia or unreasonable thinking. Demonic forces are real; and regardless of whether practicing witches believe in them, those witches are being used by the demonic forces to destroy the unsuspecting. In any case, is it worth the chance?

If this seems like a scare tactic, maybe it's not so bad, although that's not my intention. After all, doesn't Jude tell us to save some with fear, "pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh"?

This is godly fear and is suitable for those who need it. But is it suitable for the Body of Christ to embrace the symbols of Satan for any cause and, for the excuse of "fun," induce ungodly fear in people? How easy it is to become oppressed by evil spirits if we don't keep our guard up and continue in the peace and joy of Christ, but instead allow ourselves to indulge our senses in momentary pleasures revolving around Satan and his domain.

To realize that there are some 8,000 witches in this woman's area alone should be sobering to any committed Christian. In view of the proliferation of occultism in American society I certainly have no reason to doubt her. While we recognize that these people are lost and without hope as long as they continue in their rejection of Christ, our hearts must go out to them in genuine compassion. The obvious hatred and anger against Christianity can be seen to be not without reason if we'll honestly recognize the evil that has been done in the name of Christ over the centuries. The world does not understand that those who do evil and do not walk humbly before God and men are not true Christians.

Yet while we may understand this, and love those who demonstrate anger toward us, we cannot have fellowship with them or involve ourselves in their festivities. There is nothing on earth, least of all some bits and pieces of candy, which can justify embracing Satan in his unholy days celebrations. For too long Hallowe'en has captivated the minds of Christian children and adults alike to the detriment of their spiritual lives. It's time that pastors and teachers take responsibility to educate their flocks to God's requirement of holiness.

As pastors and teachers have the responsibility of educating parents in the Church, so, too, the responsibility of educating children belongs to parents—especially the fathers. But no more so in this age or society than in ages past. The difference is that today children rule many homes, Christian and non-Christian alike. For that reason compromise is the easy way out for parents. Thinking they are showing love by acquiescence, they are really destroying their children's spiritual life.

#### ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES?

No matter what evil the world utilizes to entice children, parents are forever searching for alternatives in order that their children not feel deprived of the world's fun. When it comes to Hallowe'en, Christians decide to substitute their own parties for the world's. Instead of calling their festivities "Hallowe'en parties," they call them "Harvest Festivals" and dress their children in biblical costumes.

But that's what Hallowe'en is: a harvest festival. By dropping the name "Hallowe'en" in favor of "Harvest Festival" they are really drawing closer to the meaning of the pagan celebration. If anything, it would be more "Christian" to retain the name "Hallowe'en," and shun the name "Harvest Festival."

Besides, many children wear biblical costumes for Hallowe'en anyway, so what's the difference except in the compromise of their minds? You can be sure that to most children it's still Hallowe'en that they are celebrating.

To illustrate, a church we attended several years ago felt that it would have a Harvest Festival in lieu of a Hallowe'en party for the kids. At the time, I was not as up on these things so I didn't see the harm in it. Several of us adults were meeting in a home for a fellowship and some of the other couples' children were at the Harvest Festival. When they came home someone asked where they had been. Their answer, "At the Hallowe'en party at church."

It is a religious spirit that persuades Christians that, by substituting angel costumes for witches' costumes they are somehow pleasing God. His Word calls for separation, not compromise.

It isn't going to traumatize children if they aren't allowed to join in some things just because "everyone else is doing it." It's the responsibility of Christian parents to teach their children the truth from the beginning—not wait until they've been sufficiently infected by the world that they must be deprogrammed at a later date.

Children who are taught to love Jesus will understand that, because of that love, they should not have anything to do with a celebration that glorifies the power of God's enemies. Even if they rebel and, for a time reject the truth, parents can trust God's promise: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

If parents will be faithful in their responsibility to bring up their children in the knowledge of God's righteousness He will keep His hand upon their children and will guide them back to the truth.

On the other hand, Jesus' warning in Matthew 18:6 applies no less to parents and Church leaders than to child molesters and abusers: "...whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

If Christian parents encourage their children in celebrating pagan festivals in any manner—even by calling it something that it isn't—they are placing before them stumbling blocks in their relationship with Christ. This is an offense against their own children, often propagated in ignorance.

Yet there is an alternative to Hallowe'en: Christians can gather in special services to wage spiritual warfare through prayer for protection from the powers of darkness for those they love. While being careful not to intrude into areas forbidden by Scripture (II Peter 2:11; Jude 9), prayers of supplication and repentance from the world's evils are in order. A church service which educates Christians to these and other dangers, and which continues in worship, praise, and prayer against demonic influences in the community is an idea whose time has come.

Special services can be held for the children in which they can be educated in their responsibility to avoid the appearance of evil. It's a perfect time to contrast our faith with the world's beliefs, and to display to God our seriousness in wanting to stand for His righteousness.

This is no trivial matter. Satan is alive, and souls are being lost in great numbers daily. But so, too, is God alive. And He is working His plan of redemption. If we want to be a part of that plan and, just as importantly, if Christian parents want their children to be a part of that plan, we must once and for all let God have His way at any expense.

This is a tremendous responsibility; hardly worth sacrificing on the altars of worldly pleasure.v



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