

Witches, Ghosts, & Halloween / COB / 10.18.25

Introduction

- † In one sense, this is my favorite time of the year!
 - As Katelyn posted on Facebook this week, it is flannel season, and I love wearing flannel! And I love wearing a denim jacket. I love the crisp autumn air, the falling leaves, the harvest in the nearby fields.
 - I know spring represents new life, while autumn is a time of death and dormancy, but autumn also is a season for hearty stews, apple pies, football, and roasting turkeys. I love all that!
 - But as I have become closer to God and more passionate about seeing God glorified, I have come to dread the end of October. So today, allow me to present a seasonal sermon, because I have been exploring why Halloween troubles me.

Witches

- † We will start with a question: Are there witches in the Bible?
 - There is nothing about associated black hats and broomsticks, but the Hebrew noun [כַּשְׁפָּא] means sorcery, which is the use of magical powers obtained through demons.
 - The related verb [piel = כִּשְׁפָא] means to practice sorcery and [כַּשְׁפָּא] means sorcerer.
 - Another word [מַכְשֵׁף] refers to spells. These words occur a dozen times in the Old Testament.
 - E.g., when Isaiah gave a prophesy about God’s curses coming upon the evil empire of Babylon, he said in **Isaiah 47.9 NIV**: “**They [God’s curses] will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells.**” God was more powerful than their witchcraft.
- † How does God feel about witches and witchcraft? Open your Bible to Deuteronomy 18.10.
 - When God developed the legal code for the nation of Israel, it said in **Deuteronomy 18.10-12 NET**: **There must never be found among you anyone who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, anyone who practices divination, an omen reader, a soothsayer, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, one who conjures up spirits, a practitioner of the occult, or a necromancer. Whoever does these things is abhorrent to the LORD and because of these detestable things the LORD your God is about to drive them [the people in the land] out from before you.**
 - Abhorrent is an unusual word, so maybe you have not learned it yet. As *The Oxford American Dictionary* defines it, something abhorrent inspires disgust and loathing.
 - Proponents of witchcraft today, such as those in Wicca, claim their magic is innocent. Notice God does not agree; God says it is detestable and those who practice it are abhorrent to him!
 - Why? because if these people are not getting their power from God, then from whom? Either they are fakes and fraudsters, or they are getting power from an evil entity, a demon.
- † So what should our attitude be toward witches?

- Among God’s earliest rules for the newly rescued Israelites after the exodus was this in **Exodus 22.18 NET: You must not allow a sorceress [a witch] to live.** Apparently this was a real issue for the newly formed nation, coming out of Egypt.
 - Does that command give us the right to kill witches today? No. The church is not a nation, meting out justice, nor are we under the Mosaic Covenant today.
 - But knowing God takes the issue that seriously should deter us from ever getting involved with witchcraft, and deter us from any involvement in any related activities, such as those mentioned in Deuteronomy, like fortune telling, talking with the dead, or casting spells.
 - Nor should we get involved with other people who are doing these things. Even if they mean to be harmless, they are making themselves vulnerable to demonic activity.
- † This is sinful activity mentioned in the Bible as detestable to God, activity that makes practitioners abhorrent to God. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to be disgusting to God!
- So should we dress ourselves or our children as witches? I would say, no.
 - Should we watch shows about witches or talking with the dead or fortune telling? No.
 - Should we be playing with a Ouija Board, Magic 8 Ball, or the modern, techno-equivalent? No.
 - We might take these things light heartedly, but in God’s eyes this is serious symbolism of evil, and it also is an invitation for evil to come into our lives.

Ghosts

- † Another question: Are there ghosts in the Bible?
- Ghosts are thought to be human spirits who are trapped here on Earth after a person died.
 - We know the Bible does talk about our immaterial spirit using the Greek noun πνεῦμα.
 - Interestingly, whenever someone would die in scripture, the King James Version would euphemistically refer to that as “giving up the ghost,” meaning the body gave up the spirit, even though that is not how it is written in the Greek and Hebrew texts. I find that an amusing flaw.
 - When the apostles saw Jesus risen from the dead, they thought they were seeing a spirit, perhaps a ghost: **Luke 24.36-37 NET: ... Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” But they were startled and terrified, thinking they saw a ghost [πνεῦμα].**
 - πνεῦμα also can mean an angelic spirit or a demonic spirit. The Greek text of Luke does not distinguish whether the apostles thought they were seeing a demon or a human spirit.
 - But when the apostles were battling a storm on the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus was walking on the water toward them, they thought he was a φάντασμα, a ghost: **Matthew 14.26 NIV: When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.**
- † It would appear that the apostles knew of folklore about human spirits being earthbound. Is that good theology, to believe in ghosts?
- Some people and churches who consider themselves Christian do believe that human spirits can be stuck here, perhaps to work out their punishment for their many sins.

- We know that cannot be the case. In his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus paid the punishment for our sins, so there is no punishment for us to work off. **Isaiah 53.5 HCSB: But He was pierced because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace [with God] was on Him, and we are healed by His wounds.**
 - We know that when a believer dies, s/he goes immediately to Heaven. The sinner who came to faith while dying next to Jesus must surely have been comforted to hear Jesus tell him in **Luke 23.43 NET: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."**
 - What about for evil people and what about for people who died before the crucifixion? Turn to Luke 16.22. Jesus conveniently told a parable that answers those two questions. He told a parable about two people who died before his saving sacrifice. As Jesus described it in **Luke 16.22-23 NET: "Now the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. And in hell, as he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far off with Lazarus at his side."** You have to be careful about drawing conclusions other than the main point from a parable, but Jesus implied the righteous people were somewhere good and the rich but unfaithful man went straight to Hell.
 - We believe that when people die, they go to straight to Heaven or Hell, and this is based on whether they have a faith relationship with Christ, not working off sins. There is no purgatory, there is no wandering the earth without a body.
 - Could some of the paranormal things people experience be real? Yes. There are no human ghosts or spirits wandering about, but we know there are demons, and they might appear to us as ghosts or phantoms.
- † If ghosts represent either demonic activity or terrible theology which denies the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice, should we take ghosts lightly? No.
- So should we be dressing our children as ghosts, decorating our houses with ghosts, or watching shows about ghosts? No.
 - We do not want to play at being ghosts or get involved in trying to communicate with one. We don't want to upset God, we don't want to invite evil into our lives.

Halloween

- † If this is what the Bible says, then why do so many Americans celebrate Halloween?
- There is an interesting history to it. Hallow is an old fashioned word meaning "holy."
 - In the early church, people would commemorate the lives and martyred deaths of especially holy people, to encourage themselves and their friends in faith. This was like Hebrews 11, which encourages faith by remembering those faithful heroes who have gone before.
 - That chapter starts, **Hebrews 11.1-2 NET: Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see. For by it the people of old received God's commendation.**
 - Eastern churches tended to celebrate heroes of the faith just after Pentecost, while western churches chose the first Friday after Easter, both in the spring. In the early seventh century, the church in Rome fixed the date to May 13, when Pope Boniface claimed for Christianity the pagan Roman temple called the Pantheon and dedicated it to all the saints.

- In scripture, the term “saint” refers to every believer. For example, Paul wrote that his letter we call Ephesians was [Ephesians 1.1 NET:] ... to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.
- Over time, however, this term came to refer to those who showed faith in special ways and later only in extraordinary ways.
- In the early eighth century, the Roman church changed the date again, making November 1 All Saints’ Day or All Hallows’ Day.

† How did this Christian celebration turn evil in nature?

- I am sad to say it was bad theology taught by the church. In the ninth century, prominent Roman Catholic writers began to speculate on dead people not immediately going to Heaven. The concept of Purgatory was made official church doctrine in the thirteenth century, but in the centuries leading up to it, priests had taught their people to pray for the dead to get to Heaven, particularly on what became All Souls’ Day, right after All Saints’ Day on November 2.
- The official Roman Catholic view of purgatory was that people who did not do penance for sins in life would have to suffer purifying punishments in death before getting to Heaven. Some thought the human spirits suffered on Earth during this time, as ghosts. We have already seen this is bad theology, because Jesus took the punishment for our sins on the cross.
- The Roman Catholic Church also taught its people to help their dead loved ones along through this process with special masses, prayers, financial gifts, and so on. This also is bad theology. We know a person gets to Heaven by trusting in God’s promise of grace through the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ.
- Eventually, based on all this bad theology, Roman Catholics began to use this time at the start of November to ask the dead saints to help their dead loved ones get out of Purgatory. So the focus shifted from building faith by remembering great people of faith to focusing on the supposedly suffering dead who were on Earth as ghosts.
- “Trick or treat” comes from British customs based on false beliefs. Prior to the Reformation in England, the poor would go door to door October 31 to November 2, asking for food in return for praying for the house’s dead relatives to get through purgatory. Even after the Reformation, the poor continued to ask for food and money to help sustain them in the cold months. English youth found Halloween [or Hallows’ Eve] an opportunistic time for tricks, because of superstitions about evil mischief being more likely on that night. Irish custom was to offer a good natured bribe to prevent a trick by those who came asking for food.
- Even after new Christian churches were set up during the Reformation, many Protestants still held fears and folklore beliefs, despite better teaching in the new churches. As these people settled our country, their practices took on new directions as ethnic groups mixed.

Celebrating

† Based on what we have said so far, do you think it saddens God to see how Americans celebrate Halloween, with its themes of evil and the supposedly undead?

- I do. In our country, this has become the second biggest decorating holiday, after Christmas. We spend millions of dollars on costumes and decorations that mostly represent evil, to celebrate a holiday that focuses on evil and the supposedly undead, representing theology that

is not only bad, it actually counters the gospel, it counters the teaching about Christ's sacrifice being effective for all sins and that salvation is by grace through faith, not earned.

- Given that, would God want us to participate in activities that represent such anti-Christian beliefs and evil entities? Would this behavior be top line, walking with God and representing God, or bottom line, immersing ourselves in the ways of the pagan world?
- Who is haunting the haunted house, demons or human spirits stuck in an earthly purgatory? Are you lightly entertaining the demonic and inviting trouble, or mocking the teaching of the Bible about Christ's sacrifice?
- We talked about witches, but what about dressing up as zombies or serial killers or Star Wars villains? Even in fun, do you think God wants you or your children to dress up as something evil? Are we perhaps taking God and evil too lightly? I think we do.

† At this point, we should all fall on our faces in repentance, but I am sure at least some of you are asking, is there any way we can have some fun at this time of year without upsetting God? Sure.

- If you want a religious holiday, celebrate Reformation Day. Perhaps because of what this time of year had come to represent, the Roman Catholic priest Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses protesting false teaching and practices in the Roman Catholic Church on October 31.
- This is now celebrated as Reformation Day, a good time to share the true gospel with people, and share our hope with them.
- If you want something less religious but still honoring to God, celebrate Harvest Day. The Old Testament had holidays to celebrate the harvest, times when people thanked God for his provision. Like the Israelites, we tend to farm almost around the calendar here, but we do still have an autumn harvest of corn, soybeans, pumpkins, and other things.
- Many churches have started having harvest parties, as safe, fun, and Christian ways to party on this date, without getting involved in anything hinting of evil.
- You can decorate your houses with seasonal things like gourds and hay, just be sure to do it well in advance of Halloween, and keep it to a non-scary harvest theme.

† What about participating in Halloween activities?

- I personally am hesitant to be involved in anything associated with Halloween, because it is a celebration of evil thought.
- Turn to **Colossians 1.21-22 NIV: Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation...**
- We once were over here in the pagan world, with our backs turned to God, immersed in spiritual darkness, but God reconciled us to himself. We know we are justified, that is we are made holy in his sight, declared righteous in his sight, by grace through faith, but if we really are born again and trusting Christ then we should seek to follow Christ and shine his light.
- Still, I do think Christians can be involved in some Halloween activities if they make adjustments for proper decorum and they participate with the intention of evangelistic outreach.
- LeeAnn had a coworker who threw an annual Halloween party and would invite us. These parties, besides being Halloween themed, also featured much drunkenness. After several years

of being invited but not going, I jokingly told him, fine, we would come, but I would dress as an apostle and share the gospel with every other guest. He actually was delighted with that idea!

- It is more my style to hand out candy along with an invitation to the church or a verse. We have some bookmark style handouts you can use, if you distribute candy at home.
- A pamphlet by Rose Publishing shares some ideas, such as loudly playing harpsichord hymns for Christian yet suitable music; or having pumpkin carving parties during which you explain the carving as a metaphor for what God does in us: God scoops out the gunk, gives us a happy face, shines through our transformation. If you are creative, you can come up with similar ways of shining God's light in this darkest of holidays.
- I would caution against letting your children dress as something evil. Costumes could be superheroes, prophets, angels, sports figures or movie stars, but please stay away from anything evil, demonic. Remember, you want to honor God more than you want to participate in a fun cultural activity and you want to beware of engaging evil.
- Turn to **John 3.20-21 NET: For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed. But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God.**
- Let us be those shining God's light at this time of year, drawing others out of the spiritual darkness to Christ. We can do that only if we are engaging with them, but also only if we are distinctly different, righteously reflecting Christ rather than joining them in celebrating evil and encouraging false beliefs.
- Those are the results of my reflections this month. Let's pray...