

Taking a Stand: A Biblical Approach to Halloween

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Ephesians 6:10. *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

When God created the heavens and the earth, He declared them as “good.” God’s creation itself is not intrinsically evil; hence this created world is not in itself evil. Sin entered the world when God breathed spiritual life into mankind and man chose, and still chooses, to rebel against Him. Since the beginning of man’s rebellion this world has been characterized by sin, a world that has become a playground for a prince, the prince of this world who is satan. As God is the almighty LORD of life, satan is the impotent lord of death. We find the influence of the prince of this world only through the sinful works of man, but we see that influence everywhere we look.

We find in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians that Christians are to place their confidence in the LORD and utilize the resources that God has given us that enable us to stand against the influence of sin in this world. However, where we stand when confronting the evil of this world is largely a matter of our own choices.

Everyone who has put their faith and trust in God is engaged in a journey that takes us from the immaturity of a new babe when we first come to know the LORD through a series of learning experiences, trials, and other opportunities that serve to grow us spiritually and to draw us ever closer to the LORD in our daily walk. Where are you on your Christian walk

between being lost and at "enmity with God"¹ to the point of sinless perfection?² Everyone is on a life-long spiritual journey and is at some point on that spectrum. If you have not placed your faith and trust in God, you are at enmity with Him, without a relationship with Him, and facing eternal separation from Him by that choice. However, if you have placed your faith and trust in God, you are on that journey toward sinless perfection. Of course, no person can reach perfection while living in this world because even the most faithful still fall short of that mark because the consequences of our own sin, and the sin of this world is always confronting us.

Will the faithful experience attacks by sin and satan during that walk? What kind of conflicts do they experience? The faithful should expect to be tested on occasion because God uses testing to teach us how to become triumphant. If we never underwent testing, we would not learn patience.³ If we did not learn patience, we could not endure the rigors of life; and if we never endured, we could never be triumphant.

What are the faithful, in the power of God, triumphant over?

- Despair: we have hope in Jesus
- Devil: we have salvation through Christ
- Death: we have life from Christ.

Paul admonishes Christians to be strong in the LORD so that they can withstand the attacks that come from evil in this world. What does it mean to be "***strong in the LORD?***"

We see some examples of demonstrated strength when David faced Goliath, when Moses faced the Egyptian Pharaoh, and when Abraham endured when commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac. We saw examples of prophets and apostles who were

¹ James 4:4.

² Matthew 5:48.

³ James 1:3.

brutalized for their uncompromising faith, and remained strong and faithful. These are examples of individuals who stood firm against tremendous adversity. Many of us may never be called to the task of standing against a Goliath, or facing brutal persecution, but we do stand continually against evil pressure from a wide variety of sources. Understanding the nature of those sources and the power that God has given us with which to stand can be instructive and helpful to our journey.

Living in Christ and allowing Him to empower (*endunamoo*, sim. dynamite) us enables us to do what God has planned for us. We are empowered to see what God is doing around us, and put our lives in line with what He is doing, rather than simply give to God a little of what we are doing and hope that He is pleased. If Jesus is truly our LORD, we have no other desire than to be obedient to Him. When we make that commitment to him He gives us the strength to fulfill that commitment. When we make a commitment to Him, He gives us the resources to stand against this evil world. In the next few verses Paul describes some of those resources.

Ephesians 6:11 *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

Paul uses the metaphor of the Roman military for the Christian's engagement in a decisive conflict with evil. As armor is meant to defend, the armor that God has given us will serve to defend us. To "put on" means literally to clothe oneself, in the sense of being wrapped around, or totally immersed. Consequently, how much of the armor are we to put on? We are to take on the full set of armor that God has provided.

How do you defeat an armored defense? You locate weakness or breaks (chinks) in the armor and focus your attack on them. If this is reasonable, how may satan attack us? What "schemes"

will he use? Satan will attack in our areas of weakness. These include ...

- (1) those areas in our life where we are vulnerable to transgression, and
- (2) areas where we are apathetic or ignorant to the influence that evil has in our lives.

That vulnerability, apathy, and ignorance leaves us open to attack, and without exception, we all tend to focus on the wrong enemy when we find ourselves in conflict. When attacked, we would attack back at the people who we feel transgressed us. Paul teaches that this illustrates a misunderstanding of the nature and source of sin, and the identification of the true enemy. Paul exposes who the enemy truly is:

Ephesians 6:12. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Paul describes the conflict as a "struggle (NIV)", "contending (RSV)", "wrestle (KJV)", "*pal'-ay*, (Greek)". The term refers to hand-to-hand grappling that was both popular and common in ancient Greek sporting events. With whom do we wrestle? First, the enemy of a Christian is never a human enemy, though the true enemy uses humans in his attacks.

- When we contend against people,
 - when we point fingers,
 - when we condemn one another, and
 - when we get caught up in bickering amongst ourselves
- ...

... we are only destroying the very relationships that the love of God would have us nurture. When we attack one another we are confronting the wrong enemy and only satan laughs.

A good illustration of this dynamic is found in the illicit sport of rooster fighting, an immoral, unethical, and illegal enterprise. Two roosters are placed in a small pen and a tight metal band is tightly placed around a part of their body resulting in great pain. Each rooster thinks the pain is caused by the other rooster, causing them to attack one another, fighting until one is killed. This is not unlike the effect that sin has on us. We tend to attack one another, but in truth, the enemy is never another person, and particularly, never another Christian. The enemy is always expressed sin that is within the domain of satan. Just as the bloodthirsty crowd is entertained by the cock fight and lusting over the prospect of winning a wager, satan laughs when he can get us to attack one another, and looks forward to the damage that he can do to the people he attacks.

- We harbor evil sins such as anger and unforgiveness;
- we criticize, pass judgment upon one another,
- we complain, fuss and fume, and by so doing
- we destroy the very work of the Holy Spirit among us...

... and satan is thoroughly entertained.

Who is the true enemy? Paul continues to describe the true source of conflict in the life of the Christian, a set of powers and authorities that we often either ignore, or we are simply unaware of. Only satan gains from such ignorance.

The first power of evil is described as "**principalities**, (*arkhay*)", a term that refers to the very basic principles, (literally architecture or design) that form worldly society. We contend against a world system where the pagan and secular principles under which we live are in conflict with one another and they are universally in conflict with God. All sin in this world is

expressed through the lives of people, and when people gather in community, sin characterizes that lifestyle. People do not choose the things of God, but rather choose the things that their secular and pagan culture agrees upon.

The second power of evil is described as "**powers**, (*ex-oo-see'-ah*)", literally the authority to exercise the worldly and base principals that we contend against. Who has that authority? Society has great power over its people both in the authority of its leaders and in the authority of its accepted mores.

The third power of evil is described as "**rulers over the darkness**, (*kos-mok-rat'-ore*).\" This single word is literally \"rulers over the (dark) cosmos,\" or an epithet for satan, and his demons. The first two powers (worldly authority and those who wield it) are in place solely through the active work of the third (satan and his minions).

Finally, the fourth power of evil is described as "**spiritual wickedness in high places**, (*ponyoo-mat-ik-os', pon-ay-ree'-ah, ep-oo-ran'-ee-os*)\". This is literally that spirit of depravity that surrounds us all, from the poorest to the richest and most powerful. Where do we see this spirit of depravity? We see it all around us as this secular and pagan culture is immersed in greed, crime, injustice, and bloodshed. Our media, which is controlled by secular forces, is a godless entity that only feeds the depravity of our culture. We see that depravity in the television shows that entertain us and in the secular celebrations that we may take part in. Christians are immersed in this world's spirit of depravity as if they are swimming in a pool of thick, black, ink. It is impossible for a lost person to get out of the pool without being covered in the blackness of its sin.

This sounds like a pretty heavy-duty enemy, one against which we have no real capability to resist. Left to our own strength how would we be affected by the conflict? Without the power of God, working through the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are

without hope, we would simply be swept away by this evil culture and be ultimately destroyed.

However, there is good news. What kind of power does satan have when confronted with the power of God? Satan has no power over the Holy Spirit just as darkness has no power over light. When satan attacks, the source of power from which we can draw is simply the Holy Spirit who dwells in the heart of every person who has placed their faith and trust in God, and in Him alone.

However, even Christians will fail to stand firmly against evil when they do not recognize it. Today's Christians are, as they have always been, immersed in an evil, secular, and pagan culture. We are so immersed in it that we sometimes may not recognize its unholy character when it is right in front of us. Just as a fish who is immersed in water is unaware of that water unless he is taken out of it, Christians can become so complacent, apathetic, desensitized, and disinterested in God's call to obedience that they start to accept and even participate in evil and ungodly practices that society embraces.

This study is useful in preparation for the annual Halloween holiday. Most of us are entirely unaware of the history of Halloween, and what it truly stands for in today's culture. Halloween first started as a national holiday in America in the mid 19th century, and since that time it has been accepted as a fun time of dressing up in costumes, going "trick-or-treating," and taking part in Halloween parties and other Halloween events. However, if we really understand the background and meaning of the celebration, we will find out that this is simply one more area where Christians may have been duped by the lord of death into accepting that which is more than evil. When we shed the light of the Holy Spirit on the celebration and measure it by the Word of God, we will find that the celebration of Halloween is, without doubt, an abomination to the LORD.

The History of Halloween.

Halloween originated many years before the coming of Christ as a pagan worship practice adhered to by the Celts of what is now Ireland, Great Britain, and northern France. The ancient practice was almost identical in context and purpose to the worship of Baal by the ancients in the Middle East. Consequently, the celebration of Halloween is the closest thing we have today to Baal worship, yet participation in the Halloween holiday is second only to the celebration of secular Christmas in today's society.

This day marked the end of summer and the harvest and the beginning of the dark, cold winter, a time of year that was often associated with human death. Celts believed that on the night before the (November first) New Year, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred. On the night of October 31, they celebrated Samhain (SOW-an), when it was believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth (and wandered through the countryside, seeking revenge for their misery).

It was a Druidical belief that on the eve of the Samhain festival, the lord of death, called together the wicked spirits that within the past twelve months had been condemned, to inhabit the bodies of animals.^{4,5}

The lord of death was characterized as a skeleton, cloaked in a black, hooded robe, carrying a scythe with which he would brutally kill anyone he encountered. This is the source of the image we refer to as the "grim reaper." They also believed that animals such as black cats, bats, spiders, and wolves were inhabited by the spirits of the dead, and had the power to influence people's lives for evil purposes. This is the origin of

⁴ <http://www.history.com>

⁵ <http://www.creatingfutures.net/halloween.html>

the idea of the “werewolf,” a mythical evil and violent half-man, half-wolf. They held that these evil spirits wandered in the dark, causing the people to fear the evil that roamed the dark forests.

To commemorate the event, Druids built huge sacred bonfires, where the people gathered to burn possessions, crops and animals as sacrifices to the Celtic deities. During the celebration, the Celts wore costumes, typically consisting of animal heads and skins, and attempted to tell each other's fortunes. When the celebration was over, the people re-lit their hearth fires, that they had extinguished earlier that evening, from the sacred bonfire to help protect them during the coming winter.

The souls of the dead were supposed to revisit their homes on this day, and the autumnal festival acquired sinister significance, with ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, black cats, fairies and demons of all kinds said to be roaming about. It was the time to placate the supernatural powers controlling the processes of nature. In addition, Halloween was thought to be the most favorable time for divinations concerning marriage, luck, health and death. It was the only day on which the help of the devil was invoked for such purposes. The pagan observances influenced the later Christian festival of All Hallows Eve.”⁶

“There was a prevailing belief among all nations that at death the souls of the good men were taken possession of by good spirits and carried to paradise; but the souls of the wicked men were left to wander in the space between the earth and the moon, or consigned to the unseen world. These wandering spirits were in the habit of haunting the living...But

⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica Vol. IV p862.

there were means by which ghosts might be exorcised."⁷

*To exorcise these ghosts, that is to free yourself from their evil sway, you would have to set out food and provide shelter for them during the night. If they were satisfied with your offerings, they would leave you in peace. If not, they were believed to cast an evil spell on you.*⁸

When people failed to participate in this tradition, the Druids dressed in evil attire so that the evil spirits would not recognize them. They would then go door to door demanding the payment, compelling the poor to contribute. Those who failed to provide food were brutalized by the Druids. This extortion is the origin of the tradition of "Trick or Treat."

By the 800s, the influence of Christianity had spread into Celtic lands. In the seventh century, Pope Boniface IV designated November 1 All Saints' Day, a time to honor saints and martyrs. It is widely believed today that the pope was attempting to replace the Celtic festival of the dead with a related, but church-sanctioned holiday. The celebration was also called All-hallows or All-hallowmas (from Middle English Alholowmesse meaning All Saints' Day) and the night before it, the night of Samhain, began to be called All-hallows Eve and, eventually, Halloween. Even later, in A.D. 1000, the church would make November 2nd All Souls' Day, a day to honor the dead. It was celebrated similarly to Samhain, with big bonfires, parades, and dressing up in costumes as saints, angels, and devils. Together, the three celebrations,

⁷ Napier, James (1976). *Folklore in the West of Scotland*, London: EP Press. p11. ISBN 0715811657.

⁸ *ibid.*, www.history.com.

the Eve of All Saints', All Saints', and All Souls', were called Hallowmas.⁹

Halloween Christianized

How could a practice that celebrates the demonic become embraced by the church? An understanding of the history of the Roman church can also help us there. It was a general practice of the Christianized Roman Empire and the church at Rome to demand conversion of the pagans within the empire as quickly and on as large a scale as possible with absolutely no consideration given to the necessity of faith.

Ever since the time of Constantine, who made Catholicism the state religion, the Roman Emperors realized how essential it was to have a unified empire, where as many as possible would have one mind. The civil and religious leaders saw how important it was for the sake of unity to allow only one religion within the Roman realm. It became a state policy to force all non-Christians to accept the orthodox faith, (by violence, if necessary). The conquered pagans had a profound influence on the affairs of the church. These pagans brought with them many pagan practices and celebrations. Halloween was merely one of many. The pagans were fervent in clinging to their past ceremonies and observed them openly, yet they were supposed to have been converted to Christianity.¹⁰

The Harm of Halloween

How can the modern-day practice of this ancient pagan religious holiday be harmful? Is there anything wrong with participating in a holiday that celebrates the dead, and

⁹ www.history.com.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, www.history.com.

embraces images of satan, witches, ghouls, ghosts, and goblins? We might start with how the scriptures deal with these same issues, as these same practices were common in the ancient Near East.

Paul's admonition to take an armored stand against the wiles of the devil came just after he was dealing with this very issue: members of the Ephesian church were in conflict over the participation in pagan traditions.

Ephesians 5:6-12. *Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. ⁷Be not ye therefore partakers with them. ⁸For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: ⁹(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) ¹⁰Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. ¹¹And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. ¹²For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.*

Christians are called to expose unfruitful works of darkness; not participate in them. Participation in a pagan celebration that celebrates evil is similar to participation in the Baal worship that so vexed the ancient Israelites. The scriptures frequently expose that practice and teach the faithful to avoid such practices. Halloween is such a practice. There are three characteristics of the celebration of Halloween that people of faith should be aware of:

1. Halloween now celebrates violence and death.

Consider for a moment the "Nightmare on Elm Street", "Halloween", and "Friday the 13th" film series. They are popular

viewing fare at Halloween parties. Who or what inspires these "actors"? Robert Englund who plays mass murderer Freddy Krueger in the "Nightmare on Elm Street" series says he draws his inspiration from the late Ted Bundy, who raped and murdered more than 28 women. Englund told Slaughterhouse magazine, "I just read an article on Ted Bundy, so a lot of my imagery is based on him."¹¹

At the least, exposure to sadism, violence, satanism, torture, mutilation and bizarre murders causes our kids to become desensitized and even calloused to these behaviors. Harriet Kozkoff, a public TV producer told the press, "Entertainment is a powerful socializing agent in contemporary society. Slasher and horror movies ... use violence ... to maximize profits and are an inevitable prescription for conditioning ... sadism into our pre-teen, teenage and young adult film fans."

Every year the producers of film and television violence try to out-do the level of vulgarity from the previous year and this year will be no exception with the multitude of new cable movies and violent computer games that are released to coincide with the Halloween celebration.

Psychiatrist Dr. Thomas Radecki said, "Every year film violence and real-life violence continues to get worse. We must protest and stop this growing sadism in our homes, schools, and on our streets."¹² Of course, the explicit violence is not limited to Halloween, but its presentation and its celebration hits a peak as a direct result of this holiday and the attempt by the celebrants to glorify it.

¹¹ Halloween and Christianity, www.creatingfutures.net/halloween.html

¹² Encyclopedia Britannica Vol. IV p862.

2. Halloween celebrates horror and fear.

That same entertainment media, as well as the practice of Halloween parties with its haunted houses, haunted hay rides, and scary vignettes are specifically intended to induce as much horror and fear as possible. Paul and John also write on the subject of fear:

Romans 8:15. *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

2 Tim 1:7. *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

1 John 4:18. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*

Satan is the author of fear, and any holiday that celebrates fear celebrates satan by rejecting the Holy Spirit who brings peace and chases away all fear. All fear.

3. Halloween celebrates the Occult practice of witchcraft.

This is one area where Christians should be most aware of the harm of Halloween. One of the fastest growing spiritist groups today is Wicca, the pagan religion of the occult. Wicca traces its roots directly back to the ancient practice of Samhain and is characterized by witches and warlocks who then and now attempt to attain power from the world force, which those who are well-indoctrinated in the practice acknowledge as Lucifer, the lord of death, or satan himself. Though many of those who defend Wicca argue that it is a pagan practice that acknowledges neither good or evil, the simple truth is that it is

based fully in satanism, entirely submitted to the lord of death, the Grim Reaper, the lord of Wicca. The word, occult, refers to something that is hidden. The hidden part of Wicca is its foundational submission to the lord of death, and its agenda to draw power from him in order to accomplish its purposes. It is the lord of death and his influence on this earth that is celebrated in the images and practices of Halloween. Because of this, and its heritage, Wicca celebrates Halloween as its new year's eve, as it has done for at least two thousand years.

How are Christians to respond to the occult, or hidden practice, of satanism? Should Christians accept its practice as cute and entertaining? The acceptance of pagan and occult practices by ancient Israel was the very act that destroyed them. Moses wrote a warning into the Deuteronomic Law:

Deuteronomy 18:9-11. *When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. ¹⁰There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, ¹¹Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. ¹²For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.*

Some may argue that people of faith are no longer under the law, so this is not a law that Christians are to follow. Actually, this is true. However, these things are still an abomination to the LORD, and it is certainly true that a mature Christian, one who seeks to be obedient to the LORD and have a close relationship with Him will abstain from that which the LORD

finds an abomination! When Paul wrote of these things to the church in Thessalonica, he stated,

1 Thessalonians 5:22. *Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

- If our children dress as devils, witches and sorcerers,
- if we hang cardboard witches, skeletons, dead bodies, and ghosts in our windows,
- if we display animals such as bats and black cats,
- if we entertain with tales of ghouls and haunted houses,

what are we doing but imitating that which is the most pervasive evil of this world?

“We need to make it clear as Christians that witches and evil spirits are not funny and are not harmless, even if the people in witch costumes are only play-acting.”¹³

Halloween has its roots deeply immersed in witchcraft and everything related to man’s attempt to appropriate power from satan. Therefore, Christians should shun any involvement in it. We are called to be "holy" (wholly "separated" from the world and from evil), and have no part in such things.¹⁴

The Christian Response

So, how might Christians respond to the upcoming Halloween holiday? Paul has admonished Christians to stand against the wiles of the devil, and do so by submitting to the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. When we listen to the Holy Spirit He will reveal that which is ungodly, and lead us in the path of peace and love, away from satan’s path of death and horror.

¹³ http://www.nisbett.com/holidays/halloween_christian_perspective.html

¹⁴ <http://www.dianedew.com/halloween.htm>

Still, we are immersed in this sin-crazed pagan world and our journey in it, a journey we share with our children, can lead us to participate in many of its traditions. However, there are some very practical ways to respond to the holiday in a way that glorifies the LORD and draws us even nearer to Him.

We find the answer in many places in scripture, and one passage may stand out: The Shema:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: ⁵And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. ⁶And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: ⁷And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ⁸And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. ⁹And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*

Our love for the LORD is paramount. Our love for Him supersedes our love for this pagan world's authorities. God's Word, the very content of His true plan and purpose for us is written upon our hearts. We can listen to the Holy Spirit and He will reveal the ungodliness around us and lead us in a path that is consistent with His plan for us. We are to teach God's word to our children. We can teach our children the truth about that which is ungodly in this pagan world. The teaching of godliness never stops. We are to teach our children every hour of every day both in fact and in example.

- God's word should be evident in all that we do ... therefore it is as though it is written on our hands. Our actions demonstrate our true faith.
- God's word should shape the way we see our world ... therefore it is as though it is a frontlet before our eyes. When we listen to the Holy Spirit we will see the influence of evil in this world and the power of God over it.
- God's word should shape the nature of our homes. One would not expect to enter our home and see images of ungodliness, and certainly images that celebrate satan, but rather like scripture on our doorpost, God's Word should be openly evident.
- God's word should shape our behavior at work and in the marketplace ... the gates.

The Shema can illustrate clearly how we can respond to the ungodly, pagan rite of Halloween:

- Know the truth of the holiday and the ungodliness it represents.
- Teach those truths to your children so that they understand what is represented by the skeletons, witches and goblins.
- We should not participate in activities that promote ungodliness, so our participation in Halloween should be tempered by the Holy Spirit's lead.
- Our homes should not be places that celebrate the lord of death, but rather celebrate the author of life. It is inappropriate that we would display witches, ghosts, goblins, and other images that are ignorantly intended to scare away evil spirits. Satan is not deterred by evil images, but is attracted by them. Satan is defeated only by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Our witness to the life-giving gospel should never be compromised by our participation in activities within

the home, or outside of it, that celebrate the lord of death.

The way we respond to Halloween should be no different than the way we respond to any event that comes our way as we listen to the Holy Spirit and draw upon God's Word for guidance. Again, we can return to the writings of the Apostle Paul for some very sound advice.

Philippians 4:8-9. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. ⁹Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*