

Bewitched with Halloween?

Taken from Ronald L. Dart's Notes

Why would you dress up your children like witches, or hobgoblins, ghosts, demons, dead men's bones, and send them to your neighbors to trick or treat? Isn't it a form of extortion to demand treats while threatening tricks if the neighbors don't oblige the little demons? What could you possibly be thinking? Why allow your children to go to the door of a house of a total stranger and accept gifts of candy? Is that safe? It's wise to take candy, apples, and stuff to a hospital to have them x-rayed ensuring there isn't a razor blade embedded in the child's loot. Honestly, can't you afford to buy candy for your kids? Do you have to send them around the neighbor's house begging?

How did Halloween get its name? It's called Halloween because it falls on the eve of All Hallows or All Saints Day. This is the day when the church honors all the great Christians of years gone by, people who've lived good lives and sometimes sacrificial lives in their service to other Christians and other peoples.

Since All Hallows is all about people who have lived their lives doing good works, why don't we dress our kids up in costumes representing these good people and take them out on All Hallows to do good works? Do we have to dress them like dead men's bones? Couldn't we have gone out and done good works instead of tricking or treating?

Halloween has nothing to do with All Saints. It's the old Druid New Year Sanhaim, the night in which the doors of the abyss, the underworld with all their evil spirits, are released into the world. The Internet magazine called Sanhaim, said "Sanhaim, in the druidic calendar, was the beginning of the year, a time when barriers between man and the supernatural were lowered. Fires were lit to honor the descending sun god. On the eve of Sanhaim the gates of the abyss were unlocked and spirits from below flew free. Human souls that had been trapped in the bodies of animals were released by the lord of the dead and sent to their new incarnation." Does that sound like fun?

The rituals of Sanhaim have passed into modern mainstream customs as Halloween. This article continues, "There's rarely any religious feeling in these festivities but a fascinating celebration of night and imagination

remains. Children and adults reach into literature, television, comic books of the depths of their own minds [I like that—the depths of their own minds] and bring out the faces of mythic creatures or characters to wear over their own. The creative energy at work on the streets

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Why Plan Your Estate? . . .

If you don't have a plan for your estate, the government does. You've worked hard for the wealth you have accumulated, and you, not the government should decide how your real and personal properties are divided. You may have no children to leave your earthly possessions to. So what do you do? The tax advantage from good estate planning can also be sizable. Learn how your gift to CEM is one of the easiest ways to show your support for the values we represent, and to preserve those values for the future. Call toll FREE 1-888-BIBLE-44 and ask for free a Estate Planning brochure that will provide you with valuable information you can only get from an attorney or tax advisor.

A God Adored

Taken from an article written by Ronald L. Dart

A piece of music first made me think about it—probably an old hymn. It may have been this short couplet:

Waves rolling in on every shore,
Pause at His footfall and adore.

Adoration is not mere love. It goes far beyond that. I had asked myself long ago if I loved God and I assured myself I did. But I began to wonder. And it was no longer music that asked “do you love me?” It was the Scripture itself. And I realized that all those who had written the great hymns about the adoration of God had themselves gone to the Scriptures to examine themselves with the question Jesus asked Peter: “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?”

In a man’s lifetime, he may go through many stages in his relationship with God: A God feared, a God dreaded, a God respected, a God obeyed, a God loved, a God adored. And these stages often surprise us. It surprised me.

I took botany to avoid biology. I didn’t want to have to cut up a frog and endure the smell of formaldehyde. I found myself looking through a microscope at thin strands of spirogyra, a kind of freshwater algae. They looked like canes of bamboo with joints between cells and a nucleus in each cell. That was cool, but under the guidance of the instructor, I looked more carefully and saw that where the strands were parallel and close to each other that the wall of the cells began to bulge toward one another. Then, to my utter astonishment, the

walls touched, opened up and the nucleus from one passed into the cell of the other and joined with the other nucleus. I looked up from my microscope, open mouthed, and exclaimed, “Plants have sex!”

What fascinated me then and puzzles me now is how the two filaments were able to sense the presence of one another and by what intelligence they carried out the mating process. It struck me with total awe toward the intelligent designer of this little piece of life. Awe is “an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, fear, or wonder produced by that which is grand, sublime, and extremely powerful.” And that describes how I felt.

We go through stages in our relationship with God. Knowing about God is one of those stages. But how we feel about God is another thing. That takes us back to the shores of the Sea of Galilee and a short walk with Jesus. I know Peter was stricken with self-doubt after denying Jesus while the Master was being tormented on that long night. And it drove the knife in deep when Jesus asked him, “Simon, do you love me?” He didn’t just ask him once, Jesus asked him three times.

And when I put myself in Peter’s shoes, I can imagine how uncomfortable that question would make me. How can you truly love someone you hardly know? How can you adore someone you have only heard about and have never even seen? And yet, from that one small moment peering through a microscope at what God had made, I felt great admiration, perhaps the beginnings of real love.

Genie in a Bottle

By Linda G. Gallia

I received a prayer message from a friend the other day. It was one of those sweet emails meant to give encouragement and make people feel good. It said: “God our Father walk through my house and take away all my worries and illnesses; and please watch over and heal my family. In Jesus’ name. Amen. This prayer is so powerful. Pass this prayer to 12 people including me.”

I sat gathering my thoughts for a few moments about why this little prayer disturbed me. My concern was that prayers such as these might cause us to believe things about God that could actually hurt us. When people ask God to

take away all their worries, illnesses, and trials, and it doesn’t happen, they often lose faith in God. I realized I could not pass on this prayer because it could cause someone to lose faith if he thinks God will wave a magic wand and make his life perfect and trial free.

God never tells us he will take away all our trials and worries, but he does tell us he will always be with us and help us through them. God tells us he will never forsake us or leave us, but he doesn’t promise we will not have trials in our life.

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The Man Who Asks ‘Why?’ Can Gain *Understanding*

By Ronald L. Dart

King Solomon once wrote, “Wisdom is the principle thing: therefore get wisdom: and with all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote you: she shall bring you to honor, when you embrace her” (Proverbs 4:7, 8).

I recently saw a bumper sticker that proclaimed, “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me!” The person who wrote that bumper sticker may consider me an infidel, but that doesn’t settle it for me. I want to know why God said it. Because only then can I even begin to claim to understand God.

The Spirit cried through Jeremiah, “Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23, 24).

Understanding vs. Knowledge

Understanding does not necessarily come with knowledge. We may teach our children what happened when David fought Goliath. A good teacher may even go as far as to prepare maps and slides for older children and show them where it happened. A teacher with historical leanings will take time to explain when it happened. But the teacher to be desired and remembered is the one who, having answered all the first questions, goes on to explain why it happened. The answers to who, what, when, and where convey knowledge, but the answer to “why” conveys understanding.

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but human beings are not cats. It is healthy for a young person to have a deep streak of inquisitiveness and curiosity. Children who continually ask “why” may be annoying at times, but they are firmly embarked on the road to understanding and truth. God be merciful to the unthinking person who squelches that natural childlike inquisitiveness. Curiosity is a great gift, and through the exercise of this gift, even a child may come to know God.

Nor does it hurt for a preacher to be more than a little curious. Not long ago when I had developed what

one listener thought was a particularly unique theme in a sermon, she asked me, “Where in the world do you get all those ideas?” I didn’t have a ready answer, because I had been thinking about the subject for months and had felt more than a little frustrated that it took me so long to find a way to articulate the idea. But when I reflected on it for a while, I began to realize that one of the reasons I take the approach I take in sermons is because I am continually asking the question why.

David and Goliath

The whole incident of David and Goliath, for example, becomes much more interesting when one asks why David fought Goliath. His presence at the scene of the battle was incidental—he was not a soldier, and he did not come to fight (1 Samuel 17:12-19). The normal reasons for battle seem absent in this case. David only expresses idle curiosity about the reward for the person who was to fight the Philistine and even some amazement that there should have to be a reward (verse 26). David doesn’t seem to be the sort of man who fights just for the sheer love of fighting. His brother suggested that pride may have been a motivation, but David seems to deny it. Some men fight to prove that they can overcome their fear, but David didn’t seem to have any fear to overcome.

There were two aspects of confidence expressed by David in this encounter: his total confidence in God. This man was defying God, and it was necessary that he be punished for it. It was as simple as that. The second factor was David’s confidence in himself. He had already met and defeated two dangerous animals, and this Philistine seemed to present no greater challenge.

Why did David do it? The answer seems to be given in David’s response to Goliath in Samuel 17:45-47. David said, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied. This day will the Lord deliver you into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from you. . . that all earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear:

November Reading Program

Nov 1: Matt. 20-21	Nov 16: Acts 1-3
Nov 2: Luke 18:15-19:48	Nov 17: Acts 4-6
Nov 3: Mark 11; John 12	Nov 18: Acts 7-8
Nov 4: Matt. 22; Mark 12	Nov 19: Acts 9-10
Nov 5: Matt 23; Luke 20-21	Nov 20: Acts 11-12
Nov 6: Mark 13	Nov 21: Acts 13-14
Nov 7: Matt 24	Nov 22: James 1-5
Nov 8: Matt 25	Nov 23: Acts 15-16
Nov 9: Matt 26; Mark 14	Nov 24: Gal. 1-3
Nov 10: Luke 22; John 13	Nov 25: Gal. 4-6
Nov 11: John 14-17	Nov 26: Acts 17-18:18
Nov 12: Matt 27; Mark 15	Nov 27: 1 & 2 Thess.
Nov 13: Luke 23; John 18-19	Nov 28: Acts 18:19-19:4
Nov 14: Matt 28; Mark 16	Nov 29: 1 Cor.1-4
Nov 15: Luke 24; John 20-21	Nov 30: 1 Cor.5-8

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for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give it into your hands.” David fought in the name of the Lord and by His authority. Not only that, he fought as a witness of God’s saving power.

Doubtless there is even a deeper symbolism in this account when one understands that David is a type of Christ and that so many of his words in the Psalms project forward to Christ.

We will leave it to the reader to meditate on any further connection between this event and the work of Christ while we go on to ask “why” about something else.

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Sometimes people ask God for the wrong things and when they think he doesn’t deliver, they decide God doesn’t exist and/or God has left them. There are people who put God in a box. Whenever they have a problem they bring him out and expect him to take all their problems away. But is that the way God works? God helps us through things in our lives for our own benefit to help us to become more like Jesus. Jesus had many blessings and gave many blessings, but He also had trials and troubles along the way which even ended in his death for us.

The ironic, almost humorous, thing about all of this is that the Bible tells us the opposite of what we seem to want to hear. James 1:2-5 says we are supposed to be happy when we encounter difficulties and frustrations in life—we are to “count it all joy!” Wow! That’s quite different from what we like to hear and often pray for. Why does James tell us to be happy about our trials? Because trials produce patience, and patience produces wisdom. How often do we pray for wisdom? Sometimes we do, but do we understand how we are going to acquire it? Frequently wisdom comes from trials and experience.

Peter also spoke about the subject of life’s trials and told us to “greatly rejoice” when we experience them. Why would anyone be happy about these things? I certainly don’t like it when another trial comes along and I have to alter my life in order to deal with it. Sometimes we create the circumstances ourselves and then have to

deal with them. I try to learn from my mistakes as well as my successes. Don’t most people? I don’t believe Peter and James were speaking only of trials that have to do with religion or church. It’s all about life and how to see life through God’s eyes. People have trouble seeing anything through God’s eyes (1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 94:7-24). David and Samuel had to learn this lesson for the same reason all people have to learn it. Peter tells us the end result is our salvation.

Many Scriptures tell us God will be with us if we trust Him and are faithful to Him. It’s a two way street. We have to meet him halfway. He won’t do it all because it isn’t good for us (Ephesians 4). The only way we can win is by building endurance through practice in running the race. Remember the old saying “no pain, no gain?” The godly life requires endurance so we can ignore the things that drag us down. And we can learn to see things from God’s perspective.

Children have to learn to see things from an adult vantage point and appreciate the correction their parents give them. Parents who really love their children don’t allow them to coast along without any correction and they also do not shield them from every difficulty. God realizes, as our heavenly Father, that these things will bring about the character He is trying to produce in us. It is for our “profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

We should be passing this along in this country. We have gotten too soft and too fat, and we want God and the government to attend to us and promise to take care of us

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on Halloween night is electrifying.” I suppose that’s true if you’re a member of the Sanhaim group.

It continues: “An important factor is the opening of the abyss. Although Christianity has absorbed the shell of the concept of hell or in its hell myth, the pagan underworld is not simply a pit for the torment of the unconverted. In many cosmologies, Paradise, as well as torment, can be found in the underworld.”

You can find heaven or hell in the underworld. According to Homer, the underworld is a vague shadowy place where the dead have only a dreamlike awareness. Heroes descend to the underworld and always return with some essential knowledge or prize. “This aspect of the underworld” the article continues “is the most illuminating one as far as the archetype’s origin is concerned. The dark, terrifying realm of night and death that hides the solutions to the dilemmas of legendary heroes, is in the same dark terrifying abyss into which artists delve for inspiration . . . Thus Sanhaim, past and present, is a symbol of imagination unbound. The purpose of this magazine is the same. Join us. Open the gates of the underworld. Inhale the oracular mists and speak with the voice of the abyss.” Uh, no thanks! I don’t want any of that!

A lot of people are concerned about pornography on the Internet, but naked ladies are not the only hazard your kids face on the Internet. Here’s a magazine, online, inviting them to join Sanhaim and to speak with a voice of the abyss. But that would be seen as cool, I suppose, by parents who allow their kids to observe Sanhaim on Halloween. And to do so in the traditional Sanhaim customs—covering your face with another person’s face, dressing yourself up like animals or like creatures or like demons. What you may not know about Halloween, with all its witches and hobgoblins and spirits and demons, is that the whole thing is based on a great big lie.

Start with the idea of underworld, of Hades, of the place of the dead—a cemetery. The next time you visit a cemetery to place flowers on a grave of a loved one, or to make a visit of honor to the tomb of somebody whom you liked and respected, spend a little time walking around. Look at the flowers. Look at the care. Look at the grooming. Read what is put on the stones in remembrance of people. This place of the dead may be one of the most peaceful and quiet places in your community. You could park on a tombstone and talk to

the people there without any fear of interruption, no arguments, no nothing. It’s peaceful and it’s quiet and there is not a soul in that cemetery that is going harm you. It’s not a place of dread and evil. There are more expressions of love per square yard than any other part of your town.

Whenever I do an interment in the cemetery, I read my Scriptures and I remind the friends and family that a cemetery is a place of love. Expressions of love and honor are found on every hand and I entreat them, not to flee this place, but to spend time walking among the tombstones and see where the families are buried. Look at the little short graves of children and understand the love that went into putting them there and the tears that were shed when they died. Then look at the ages of the very old who are buried nearby, who lived into their 90s and nearly to 100. Understand how much love and honor were in these people. Evil would be totally out of place in a cemetery. And, as I said, I like no place better for peaceful reflection, than a cemetery.

Teach your kids this early. They have nothing to fear from the dead. There’s no way a dead person is going to hurt them. There is no evil dwelling in a cemetery, but it could be next door.

The next big lie of Halloween is the lie of the appearance of evil—what evil looks like. It’s a lie that causes everyone to look in all the wrong places for evil, while overlooking the evil that is right under their nose. It is a lie that evil looks like all those Halloween masks and costumes. It is a lie that evil looks like a skeleton, or a woman with a wart on her nose, riding on a broom.

What does the devil look like? He looks exactly like an angel of light. Aw, he doesn’t look like some red demon with a pitchfork and pointed tail? No! Satan would be absolutely indistinguishable from an angel of light if he came and stood at the foot of your bed. He would look the same. He would probably be wearing white, have a face that was beautiful to look upon, have a voice that was soothing and encouraging. He would be just like the real thing.

Paul says, “Therefore it is no great thing if his servants are also transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.” He’s saying that Satan has servants or ministers in the world! And if you look at them you would think they are ministers of righteousness, whereas they are evil to the core. So what does evil look like? Unfortunately, you

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really can't tell by looking whether something is evil or not. If we use the Bible as a guide, evil is handsome, perhaps even beautiful. The complexion will be fair and smooth and even, angelic in appearance. Evil can lie with total equanimity. When caught in the lie, evil is so smooth that he can talk you into accepting the lie and not holding it against him. Evil is a super salesman. He can convince you that black is white and white is black. Evil can charm the pants off of you.

All the horror movies, all the stuff on television, and Halloween, seem almost perfectly designed to get us looking in all the wrong places for evil, and cause us to completely overlook it when it stares us in the face. Evil can even be religious. A good case can be made that it wasn't evil witches they burned at Salem, but evil people who burned them.

When I was a boy Halloween was a night of mischief. It was a night for pretending we were demons, mischievous spirits, and poltergeists. It was a night for soaping up windows and playing tricks on homeowners. In those days in Northwestern Arkansas, the big thing was to turn over outdoor toilets. There were many. During the night we'd turn them over. It was great fun! At least we thought it was great fun until we turned over an outhouse that had a man in it. But this mischief gave me no joy. However there is a real joy in giving—it makes you feel good.

Frankly, I am a little annoyed at my parents and my church for winking and nodding at the mischief of Halloween; for chuckling over this. They should have disapproved and taught me better. Learning to give some pleasure to others would have given me great joy. And the high that comes from giving can become addictive, just as doing evil can be addictive.

So what should we do about Halloween? We could begin to do things that are right and uplifting. We could begin to teach our own children the real lessons they ought to learn about evil and Halloween. We could even call it "Good People's Day" or "Hero's Day." What if our kids dressed in good costumes and we taught them to do good works? Children love to dress up and perform. Are we so dim that we can't teach good lessons from that? Take Jesus' admonition—that it's better to give than to receive. If you don't believe it, is it because you haven't really tried it? Consider getting together with your

neighbors, contact the director of a nearby nursing home, and arrange for your kids to go there and put on a little show for the elderly residents. Have children take gifts of fruit, even candy. Life in a nursing home can be pretty bleak for old people and, shamefully, they don't get to see their own grandchildren and great grandchildren. Let some of these old folks hug your kids since they can't hug their own grandkids. Doing good and knowing you've done good makes you feel good. "Let love be without pretense. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Romans 12:9).

There is more to be learned about Halloween and the evil that comes with it. To learn more call now or return the enclosed card to get your *FREE* copy of Ronald L. Dart's radio broadcast, *Halloween*' and his sermon, *Halloween, Ghosts and Spirits.*'

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no matter what we do or do not do. People are afraid to offend other people with the truth.

David knew he had to meet God halfway and he couldn't do it on his own. David accepted that it wouldn't be easy. Evil people may walk over us or try to drag us down with them. He didn't always pray for his enemies to be blessed. Notice how David prayed in Psalm 141:4-10. He prayed they would be caught in their own traps and that God would protect him from their evil behavior.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prayed a much different prayer than the one I received in my email and was asked to pass along (Matthew 6:9-13). Trials provide the opportunity for us to learn how to love others (Ecclesiastes 4:8-12). Isn't that the "golden rule?"

Our prayer should be that God will protect, guide, provide for us, and be with us no matter what comes our way. This doesn't mean God will not bless us and give us good things, but we shouldn't expect him to be our "genie in a bottle."

Born to Win

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That the man of God may be proficient and equipped for every good work.