

Born to Win

Halloween

by Ronald L. Dart

Excuse me for asking, but what's wrong with you people? Why on earth would you dress up your children like witches, or hobgoblins, ghosts, demons, dead men's bones and then send out to commit extortion on your neighbors by demanding treats and threatening tricks if the neighbors don't come across? What could you possibly be thinking and why allow your children to go to the door of a house of a total stranger and accept gifts of candy? I thought we didn't want our children accepting candy from strangers. And anyway, it's gotten to the place where you have to take the candy and the apples and stuff down to the hospital to have them x-rayed to be sure there isn't a razor blade embedded in it somewhere. My, can't we afford to go out and buy some candy for our kids? Do we have to send them around the neighbor's house begging for it?

They call it 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. Considering that, I've got a question. Since this day, All Hallows Eve, 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 Eve to do good works? Couldn't that have gone either way? Couldn't we have made that choice? I mean, do we have to go to dead men's bones and all that stuff, or couldn't we have gone out and done good works instead of tricks or treats? Why don't we put together packages of candy and gifts and take our little angels to a nursing home somewhere and go around giving gifts to the elderly and the infirm? Why don't we teach our little angels to sing songs for the old codgers that would bring tears to their eyes? Why wouldn't we have, let's say, one of these cute little girls crawl up in the lap of an elderly lady and give her a big hug? Do you have any idea what a difference that would make in the life of an old person who hardly ever gets to see her own grandchildren because nobody will bring them in? Why is it that we don't teach our children how good it feels to do nice things for other people, instead of teaching them greed and extortion? Again, I say, I don't get it. If we had a choice of doing one or the other, who in the world made the choice of taking it one way instead of the other?

What you are allowing your kids to do by the way, on Halloween, has nothing to do with All Saints. It's the old Druid New Year *Samhain*, the night in which the doors of the abyss, the underworld with all their evil spirits, are released out into the world. I was rummaging around on the Internet trying to find something about Halloween and I came across one of these Internet magazines called *Samhain*, of all things. I found this little item in there and I thought you might find it of interest. It says this:

Samhain, 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 *Samhain* 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.

That sounds like lots of fun, doesn't it?

The rituals of *Samhain* have passed into modern mainstream customs as Halloween. The magazine continues:

Today, of course, 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 on Halloween night is electrifying.

I suppose that's true if you're a member of the *Samhain* group. Continuing to read:

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.

Shucks folks you can find even heaven or hell, it says, 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, such as Hercules and several more out of Greek or Roman mythology. The article continues:

This aspect of the underworld 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 thing into which artists delve for inspiration. The Delphic Oracles delivered their prophecies after breathing a mist that rose from the underground. Likewise, an artist weaves the phantoms of the ideal, buried in the deep unconscious that rise out of the abyss into her work. Thus *Samhain*, 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 think I 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, on line, inviting them to join *Samhain* 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 *Samhain* on Halloween, and to do so in the traditional *Samhain* customs! Covering your face with another persons 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 think is based on a great big lie.

Let's start with the idea of the underworld, or the place of the dead. Do you know where the place of the dead is? You've probably got one not that many miles from your house. It's a cemetery. The next time you visit a cemetery, maybe to place some flowers on a grave of a loved one, or to just make a visit to honor the tomb of somebody that you liked and respected, spend a little time walking around the place. Look at the flowers. Look at the care. Look at the grooming of the place. Read what is put on the stones in remembrance of people. This, where you are standing, is the place of the dead. And it may be one of the most peaceful and quiet places in your community. I mean you could sit 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 to do you any harm at all. It's not a place

of dread and evil. The fact of the matter is, there are more expressions of love per square yard in a cemetery than any other part of your town, by far.

I guess the place this really came home to me was when one day my old and honorable German Shorthair Pointer died. She'd been with me a lot of years and I loved her dearly. I couldn't bring myself to have that faithful old dog thrown out onto a trash heap somewhere, and where I lived it was not possible to bury her, so it didn't cost all that much to have her buried in a pet cemetery. I wasn't there when he actually put her in the ground but the guy told me where it was and said there was a little metal plaque that says this is where it's at, so I went out to see where my faithful old dog, Sugar, was buried.

Well, I stood there looking around at all the expressions of love in that place and I was moved to the core of my being. I stood there where dozens of cats and dogs were buried. It's awfully hard, when I thought about it, to think a lot of evil thoughts when you are surrounded by a bunch of clowns. And the fact is, cats and dogs are our court jesters at home. They give us more laughs than anyone we know, and more love than most. I really felt silly standing there in a way reading the sentiments of love placed on tiny tombstones, because here I was in a pet cemetery with tears running down my face.

I came to realize that this is not an evil place, in fact, I can't even think of the possibility of evil around a cemetery where all these good friends of families are. You can read what they write, "Our Beloved Pal Shorty", and all the different names they gave these pets. These are expressions of love. In fact, in the pet cemetery the expressions of love were almost more gushing than anything you'll ever read in a human cemetery. I realized that even a pet cemetery is a place of love. Evil couldn't exist in the presence of that much love. It's just not possible.

And so, from that time to this, whenever I do an interment in the cemetery, I read my scriptures and I remind the friends and family there, that a cemetery is not a place of death, it's a place of love. Expressions of love and honor are found on every hand and I entreat them not to just go away, not to flee this place, but to spend some time here and to walk among the tombstones and see where the families are buried and see the little short graves of children and understand the love that went in to putting them there and the tears that were shed when these children died.

Then look at the ages of the very old that are buried nearby, who lived into their 90s and nearly to 100 and understand how much went into these people's lives and realize that expressions of love and honor are found on every hand.

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. Since my visit that day to a pet cemetery, I've never felt uncomfortable in a graveyard.

You know, you really ought to teach your kids this early on. They have nothing to fear from the dead. There's no way in the world a dead person is going to hurt them at all. There is no evil dwelling in a cemetery, whereas there might be evil living right next door.

And that brings me very naturally to the next big lie of Halloween. It is the lie of the appearance of evil—of what evil looks like. It's a lie that causes everyone to look in all the wrong places for evil, while they overlook completely the evil that is right under their nose. It is a lie that evil looks like all those masks and costumes of Halloween. It is a lie that evil looks like a skeleton, or a woman with a wart on her nose and a broom to ride. It's a lie. The whole thing is a lie.

Well, okay, what does evil look like? Well, it's in the Bible. It tells us very clearly what we ought to know about this, but people don't think about it very often. It's in 2 Corinthians 11:12. The apostle Paul is talking about some of the frustrations he had with people who were fighting his ministry and undercutting him from time to time and he talked about how he had gone out of his way and been very careful to avoid any occasion of legitimate criticism from these people. He says in 2 Corinthians 11:12–14:

2 Corinthians 11*KJ2000*

¹² But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them who desire occasion; that when they glory, they may be found even as we.

In other words, they are not going to be able to say they are working like I am.

2 Corinthians 11*KJ2000*

¹³ For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

¹⁴ And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

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

2 Corinthians 11*KJ2000*

¹⁵ Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Do you realize what he's saying here? He is 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? Well, the unfortunate thing is, you 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. Never even bat an eye. And 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 to cause us to completely overlook it when it stares us straight in the face. Evil can even be religious. You know a good case can be made that it was not the witches they burned at Salem that were evil, but the people who burned them were evil.

So what should we do about Halloween? Well, I try real hard to ignore it. We go out to dinner and a movie and by the time we get home all the little extortioners have usually gone home with their ill-gotten goods. And since we have no children, we don't have to worry about what they are going to do on Halloween. I suppose we could all get together as a society and try to ban Halloween, but bad ideas have a way of getting stronger when you try to ban them. Living in a free society, that's not going to work. We could try to move it indoors into a church or a mall where we can keep an eye on the little rascals, but when we do that we still leave a lot of the bad lessons of Halloween untouched. Isn't there some way we could go about this where we could reverse the effect of Halloween, where we could somehow begin to do things right that are uplifting. We could begin to teach our own children the real lessons they ought to learn about this kind of thing. Well, yeah, I think there is.

What if we turned Halloween back into what it was supposed to be originally? All Hallows Eve. In other words, it's the evening before All Hallows or All Saints Day. We could even call it "Good People's Day", or "Hero's Day". What if we dressed our kids up in good costumes and taught them to do good works. Kids are little hams and they love to dress up and perform. Are we so dim that we can't teach good lessons from that? That we can't take advantage of that somehow, to do something worthwhile, to teach some good habits?

Take Jesus' admonition—that it's better to give than to receive. Now He didn't say this as some abstract thing. He's saying that it is genuinely, really and truly better to do that. Now maybe you believe that and maybe you don't. And maybe the reason you don't believe it, if you don't believe it, is because you haven't really given it a try. Why don't you consider this: get together with some of your neighbors, contact the director of a nursing home somewhere nearby, and arrange for your kids to go down there and put on a little show for the nursing home people? Have them take along gifts of fruit, even candy for the old folks. They are notorious for their sweet tooth, these old ladies and old men. 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 very often. The kids are too busy to bring them by. So they don't see them very often. Maybe your own kids could go down there and you could go and your friends could go and let some of these old folks hug your kids since they can't hug their own grandkids.

I know some teens who make an annual pilgrimage to put on a show in a nursing home and they go down and sing songs and go around and shake hands with these people and touch them and sit down and talk with them. And they and the old folks get to cry a little together and the visit means so very much.

You know, doing good and knowing you've done good really touches your heart. Makes you feel good.

These are the days when we talk a lot about self-esteem. We even brag about self-esteem, even build a false self-esteem. But you know, when you really touch somebody's life and you've made their life better and you see their eyes water up when you leave and they are so sorry to see you go, that does something very real for your self-esteem. It's astonishing, in a way, to think of how small the difference is between extorting candy from strangers and then on the other hand putting on a show for them and actually giving them something.

I can imagine there are people in your community that would fall flat on the floor in the doorway if a kid walked up and said "We've come by to give you a gift on Halloween."

You know Halloween when I was a boy was a night of mischief. We never called it *Samhain*. I didn't know anything about *Samhain*, I just knew about Halloween. But it was a night of the celebration of *Samhain* nevertheless. It was a night for pretending we were demons, mischievous spirits, and poltergeists. It was a night for soaping up windows, playing tricks on homeowners. Where I lived in northwestern Arkansas, back in those days, the big thing was to go and turn over outdoor toilets. The town I lived in was about 5,000 in population, had a sewer but around the edges of town the people were a little bit poor or lived a little bit outside the range of the sewer system and a lot of them had outdoor toilets. You know they say "room and a path" instead of "room and a bath".

Well, us mischievous guys, we'd go out during the night and we'd turn these things over. It was great fun! Well at least it was great fun until the night we turned over one that had a man in it at the time we turned it over. Truth is that most of our exploits were in our imaginations. And most of the stories we told about Halloween and all the bad things we did never happened at all. In fact, I think if you get a bunch of guys together telling stories like that, they'd be hard put to know for sure whether they really did that or whether it just got bigger with the telling over the years. Now I'll have to say that at some perverse level there was something resembling fun involved in all that. But I can't help thinking how long it took me to learn the very real fun of giving joy to others. Because it really is fun, it makes you feel good.

I am frankly a little annoyed at my parents and my church for winking and nodding at the mischief of Halloween; for chuckling over all this stuff. The least they could have done was disapprove. The most they could have done was to have taught me a better way. And of all people, the churches ought to know that and they ought to be doing it. The mischief gave me no joy. Learning to give some pleasure to others might well have given me great joy. And the high that comes from giving can become addictive, just like doing evil can be addictive.

You know, for several years back in the late 80s and early 90s the city of Detroit was gripped with a wave of arson at Halloween. In 1994 there were over 180 fires set on what they called “Devils Night” or Halloween. It became an absolute epidemic of evil feeding on evil. Well the citizens of Detroit got together and decided to try to do something about it. Merchants donated radios, citizens from organizations and lodges, took to the street in great numbers and they organized themselves to visit every nook and cranny of Detroit once every hour. The next year the city declared victory over the devil and the number of fires was reduced to a record low and they dubbed it “Angels Night”.

That’s interesting; they stepped across from the evil to the good. They had the right idea—drive out evil with good. Change the name, change the conduct, stop calling it Halloween and call it All Saints Day or Good Peoples Day, call it Good Actions, Good Deeds Day.

Saints are holy people, they’re good people and we can teach our children to imitate the example of good people by doing good works. I honestly believe that kids can learn that good works can be just as much fun as mischief and a lot more satisfying.

In the twelfth chapter of the Book of Romans, Paul said this, beginning in verse 9:

Romans 12

KJ2000

⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

You know you can’t judge by appearances, but we do know the difference between good actions and evil actions. We need to learn, even as little children, there is absolutely no reason, if it’s better to give than to receive, that we can’t learn that as children. If it’s better for adults, it’s better for kids.

Romans 12

KJ2000

¹⁰ Be tender loving one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another;

¹¹ Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

¹² Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; constant in prayer;

¹³ Distributing to the necessity of saints [...]

Looking out for good people out there in the world and considering people that are old perhaps and can’t take care of themselves in the way that they used to do, and to distribute, that is to give to the necessity of these people.

Romans 12

KJ2000

¹³ [...] given to hospitality.

Learn what’s it like to feed someone, to bring someone into your home, to be kind to people.

Romans 12

KJ2000

¹⁴ Bless them who persecute you: bless, and curse not.

¹⁵ Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

Learn the lessons of sympathy, of empathy and of caring about other people. You think children can't learn this?

Romans 12

KJ2000

¹⁷ Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

¹⁸ If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men.

And you don't do that by turning over his outhouse.

Romans 12

KJ2000

¹⁹ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.

²⁰ Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink: for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head.

And then comes this marvelous, fundamental Christian teaching:

Romans 12

KJ2000

²¹ Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart; and don't forget—you were born to do good.

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