

Pagan Influence and Demonic Doors

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A Bible Study by Eugene Prewitt

Every now and again I meet an earnest Christian that is concerned regarding some relic of Paganism that has crept into his church or home. From neck ties to Easter bunnies, from Christmas trees to concrete pineapple statues, from Egyptian-themed wall-paper to a rosary kept for illustrations, the influence of a Pagan past was felt in the present.

The concerned persons reasoned that Satan had access, by means of these rites and objects, to the churches or homes of the otherwise faithful.

Likeminded conscientious persons existed in the first century of the Christian church. They are commended, for example, for burning some \$100,000^[1] worth of spiritualistic literature.

And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. Ac 19:18-20

But it is a question worth asking whether the books would have been consigned to the flames if they did neither promote evil by their information nor encourage it by their existence.

In other words, should an ancient book on Mayan magic, found by a Christian archeologist, also be burned for its pagan past? Or is it harmless now that it is removed by time and language from an ability to promote the Mayan worship?

Just such an issue did arise in the first century church. And understanding the several passages in the New Testament related to the topic will settle also the issues related to Pagan sources today.

But before getting to that issue, let me offer a few observations.

First, many good and wholesome activities have their earthly origin in the creativity of some unbelieving person in some unbelieving people group.

Lamech, for example, was part of the cursed race of Cain that was destroyed by the flood. He may have been the first man to ever attempt polygamy. This practice the Law of God would forbid us to imitate. But his children introduced a few wholesome arts to the human race: ranching, harping and metallurgy.

And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. And Zillah, she also bare Tubalcain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: Gen 4:19-22

Second, Satan needed no pagan practice in the life of Job or Paul or Jesus to get access to them.

These two saints and our Savior lived on the earth where Satan is called "prince." Except where the evil one is prevented from working by order of God, he is free to work here. And so all men are warned with a woe regarding him.

Joh 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

Re 12:12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth

that he hath but a short time.

Thirdly, Satan finds access to hearts that cherish some sinful desire. His temptations exert their power through that means and he works “in the children of disobedience.” When Satan came to Jesus, however, he found no such cherished evil.

Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

Joh 14:30 For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

These three facts each reveal an important principle. First, activities are not made evil by means of being first cultivated by heathen persons. Second, Satan has access to men because they are on the earth – even if they have no connection with heathen worship. And third, Satan works inside of persons that disobey God’s law, even if, like Judas, they are numbered among the believers.

But what happened in the New Testament that promises to provide us with a model for dealing with traditional pagan symbols and rites today?

Christians had to go shopping.

In much of the Roman world vendors would gather in markets to sell their various products. As good pagans many of these honest traders made sacrifices to their false god’s and then, to avert financial loss, sold the meat at market .

It was understood by many persons that eating the sacrificial meat was a meaningful way to

participate in the sacrifice to the gods.

This ritual resembles the sanctuary so closely that it is difficult for me to conceive that it rose independently. All the human race was, four thousand years ago, familiar with animal sacrifices. We can not be too surprised that the descendants of Noah that took forbidden paths carried some form of their familiar worship ritual into their perverted religious experiment.

When these Christians were converted they were led to abhor idolatry. And then, as mentioned earlier, they went shopping.

Some took up the habit of asking vendors regarding the meats, whether they had been offered in sacrifice. This method, a very conscientious one, was flawed somewhat by the tendency of vendors to give the answer needed to make a sale.

The church, as a world body, made a decision regarding meat offered to idols. It was determined that Gentile Christians should abstain from eating it.

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. Ac 15:28-29.

It was James who suggested this solution to the question. After committee work, it read as given above. But when James first suggested it, he used a different phrase.

But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. Ac 15:20.

His suggested wording helps us understand what Paul had to say on this same question. It wasn't the meat itself that was the problem. Materially, a lamb offered to Moloch differs nothing from a lamb offered to the Most High.

In fact, Moloch exists only in the imagination of his worshippers. Food offered to idols of an imaginary deity is only superstitiously affected. Or is it so? Does Satan so treasure the gifts given to him by proxy that he haunts their resting places? Does someone ingesting a consecrated morsel ingest demonic harassment? Or, at the least, do such a one violate the Second Commandment?

These questions bear heavily on our subject. If an ancient connection to pagan worship defiles a symbol or relic of that worship today, certainly a fresh connection would do the same. In other words, if a relic of Mayan worship from 1100 years ago still charges the air around it with demonic activity, certainly a relic of Greek-goddess worship would defile a meal ninety minutes after it was offered.

What we are asking is "How does pagan ritual defile?" One camp says "by the event of association with idolatry." The other camp says "by the conscious association with idolatry."

The first camp argues that if it can be proven to be part of pagan worship that it ought to be taboo. The second camp argues that the earth is the Lord's and Satan is incompetent to consecrate any part of it to himself. Rituals only have meaning, this camp says, when the performer is considering the meaning of the ritual.

In favor of the second camp is the history of the sanctuary service. In Isaiah 1:12-14 God indicates how little He cared for the fat of fed beast and the pilgrimages of the Jews. Being unmixed with faith in a coming Redeemer these rituals lost their value and became bloody ends in themselves. Performed by unregenerate hearts they were nauseating to a Holy God.

The moral value of slaying a lamb while considering a Savior to come compares well to the moral value of eating communion while considering a Savior that came. How does God view the ritual of

communion, however, when the participant is not thinking about the death of Jesus?

1Co 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

So what about the meat offered to idols? What if I can eat it without even knowing it was offered to idols? Would my ignorance make the meat more sinister or render it harmless? Knowing the answer could settle our question regarding pagan influence.

As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. . . . To us there is but one . . . Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge [that idols are nothing] sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend. . . .

What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? [No,] but I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: 1 Co 8:4-13; 10:19-29.

The passage is clear that idols are nothing. Food offered to them is lawful to eat if it can be eaten without any regard to the idol. But heathen persons have regard to their idols. By their regard to they idol they transgress God's law and demons highly regard this sacrifice to themselves.

Thoughtful consideration of the whole will show that the church voted to abstain altogether from such food for the benefit of the infant gentile Christians. A life of abstaining from meats in the market would be preferable to causing such a one to stumble back into idolatry.

Then should I be concerned with pagan rituals and symbols abounding today? Just to the extent that persons around me associate those items with pagan worship, to just that extent I should refrain for the benefit of my weak brethren.

This brings to the last portion of this short article. The final thought is a simple piece of logic.

Do we think the devil is a child? Haunting empty homes and meaningless rituals because of sentimental memories of some favorite wicked person? Is he afraid of crucifixes and of the syllables "I-aye-ous" or "yah-shu-ah" or "Je-sus" or "Hay-suse" (Greek, Hebrew, English and Spanish names for the Son of God)?

No, no. The devil is an artful foe. He plays games with teenagers and their Ouija boards if he can lead them, this way, to seek supernatural powers outside of Christ. But the board itself is nothing

more to him than a screwdriver is to me.

And the devil is comfortable in churches – even in churches where Jesus is. The devil moved the church where Jesus read Isaiah 61 to grab the Savior and lead him to execution (and the Father allowed him to escape. Lu 4:14-30.) Satan is willing to go one-on-one with Jesus, though he always loses. That is what he did in the wilderness. (Lu 4:1-13). He is willing to hang out with a holy apostle if he can in this way confuse the minds of men. That is what he did Acts 16.

The devil may not like sacred music, yet it was David, not Saul, who chose to flee when the evil spirit of the latter threatened the holy heart of the consecrated musician (1Sa 18:10-11; 19:9-10).

Then how can we make the devil leave if he is so hardy? It is easy, but it has nothing to do with ritual. We scare the devil when we resist his temptations in the power of God.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Jas 4:7

This is still true. We can banish the forces of evil each hour. The hangings on our wall or around our neck won't do it. But choosing to obey God's words, depending on God's power, trusting in Christ's forgiveness – these simple things bring God's super-power into our life and make the devil tremble.

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. Jas 2:19

Employment, yes, Satan finds

For idle hands and idle minds.

Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to

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the power of temptation. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foot-hold; some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power. But Christ declared of himself, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." [John 14:30.] Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept his Father's commandments, and there was no sin in him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble. {GC88 622.4}

It is true that Christ at one time said of himself, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." John 14:30. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold; some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power.

These books contained rules and forms of communication with evil spirits. They were the regulations for the worship of Satan, directions for soliciting his help and obtaining information from him. The system of magic, or sorcery, then extant, was the same as that which in this Christian age and nation is known as Spiritualism. In Paul's day many were deceived by this Satanic delusion, and many are deceived today by the same power. Satan finds access to thousands of minds by presenting himself under the guise of departed friends. The Scriptures of truth declare that "the dead know not anything." Their thoughts, their love, their hatred, have perished. The dead do not hold communion with the living. But Satan--true to his early cunning, when in the form of a serpent he deceived the mother of our race--employs this device to gain control of the minds of men. {ST, February 18, 1886 par. 5}

And "magical books" have not been confined to the apostolic age, or to nations that are called heathen. The freedom of the press has been taken advantage of to spread abroad the influence of this baleful literature. Could all the modern productions of this class -all the publications of Spiritualism--be treated as were these magical books of the Ephesians, one of Satan's most successful avenues by which to gain access to the souls of men would be cut off. {ST, February 18, 1886 par. 6}

Voices that I was surprised to hear were joining this rebellion and those with whom I had labored in past years without any evidence, or any sure knowledge of any change in Sister White, were hard, bold and decided in denouncing her. And of all those so free and forward with their cruel words, not one had come to me and inquired if these reports and their suppositions were true. I was represented as telling things untrue, when I made the statement that not a word of conversation had passed between me and Brethren Jones and Waggoner nor my son Willie upon the law in Galatians. If they had been as frank with me as they were in talking with one another against me, I could have made everything plain to them in this matter. I repeated this several times, because I saw they were determined not to take my testimony. They thought we all came to the conference with a perfect understanding and an agreement to make a stand on the law in Galatians. {11MR 233.2}

After hearing what I did my heart sank within me. I had never pictured before my mind what dependence we might place in those who claim to be friends, when the spirit of Satan finds entrance to their hearts. I thought of the future crisis, and feelings that I can never put into words for a little time overcame me. [Mark 13:9, 12, 13 quoted.]-234- {11MR 233.3}

But although Solomon had had great light, he became lifted up in himself, and imagined that he was wise enough to keep himself, so he separated from God. Then he made alliances with the heathen nations around him, and married idolatrous women, and bowed at pagan shrines, and worshiped after the manner of the heathen. {RH, March 29, 1892 par. 8}

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[1] That is, roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a ton of silver.