

OCCULTIC MOVIES AND VIDEOS: AFFECTS ON CONFIRMATION STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Movies portraying the occult are too numerous to count. Television shows and videos also fantasize about the supernatural world. The number of confirmation age children encountering such movies and videos has only increased since the love for screens has become more apparent in society. What happens when our adolescent children stumble upon supernatural movies and videos? The thoughts and theories about the occult and paranormal world are blurred. Scriptural truths are questioned. The most terrifying thought is Satan, the ferocious enemy of all Christians, is afforded an opportunity he cannot resist. As pastors, teachers, and parents, it is our responsibility to examine if movies and videos having occultic or supernatural themes are affecting our 7th and 8th grade children's biblical knowledge. More importantly, we must continue to point them to the one who defeated Satan and gave us eternal life, Jesus.

THE BATTLE AGAINST SATAN

We are on a battlefield. From our hiding spot, we can watch our enemy approach. He is bigger than us. He is better armed than us. He is victorious after a thousand campaigns with barely a nick in his armor. And behind this enemy marches a mad force of eager slayers just like him; this enemy never travels alone. They sniff the air as though they smell our blood. If we are discovered, we will learn in a hurry how inferior our strength is. And we will not just be crushed. We will be humiliated. These killers mock as they dismember.¹

We carry out our day-to-day activities in a war-torn world. The nature of this war is not physical. It is not one nation fighting another for control over more territory. It is not one ideology against another. This war is not fought with conventional weapons. Nuclear weapons, aircraft, tanks, battleships, sophisticated missile targeting systems, and trained military do not pose a single threat to our enemy. In this war, boundaries cannot be divided or drawn-out around physical locations and places. This is a spiritual war. The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12 NIV 11).

While Paul references some of the physical enemies Christians face, they are not considered to be the ultimate enemy. Winger in his commentary on Ephesians correctly states, “Fellow human beings are not the enemy, but the victims and the tools of the enemy. Christians should be aware of the scheming of the devil.”² We are caught in an age-old battle against an enemy that has plagued us since the beginning of time. Satan has rallied his massive forces against God’s church. He marches confidently against us wielding power as the Prince of this

1. Allen Sorum, *2000 Demons No Match for My Savior*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2016), 22–23.

2. Thomas Winger, *Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture Ephesians*, (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 734.

World. Satan does not sleep. Satan does not stop. Satan does not compromise. Rather, Satan along with the rest of his demonic armed forces battle against us to fulfill their insidious purpose. “They want to make us suffer, to give us pain, to fill us with fear, to enslave us, to make us filthy in every way they can. But what is the demon’s main goal, their keenest desire? However wide their trail of destruction, however bitter the suffering they cause, and however deep the wounds, demons are not and cannot be satisfied until they take us away from our God.”³

3. Sorum, 121–22.

HOW SATAN AND HIS ATTACKS ARE PICTURED IN SCRIPTURE

Scripture uses pictures to describe our dreadful enemy. We are warned by Peter to “be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). As you watch National Geographic or the Discovery Channel, have you ever seen a pride of lions attack their prey? These massive and powerful animals utilize stealth, calculated attack patterns, and pure ferocity to bring down their victims. Kretzmann mentions how Satan operates as a lion: “For the most powerful enemy, the most mighty adversary, is the devil, the murderer from the beginning. Just as a roaring lion is intended to terrorize and intimidate the animals, as he goes forth to seek his prey, making them cower before him in cringing helplessness, thus the devil makes use of similar schemes.”⁴ Satan prowls for victims with his demons. In other words, Satan is on the hunt to drag people kicking and screaming away from God with his sharp teeth.

As Satan hunts for his prey, he shows great intelligence. He looks to attack the individual. “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus” (Rev 12:17). “He does not easily attack an entire congregation, but he singles out such as seem to offer the best chance for a successful onslaught.”⁵ In this writer’s opinion, two sections in Scripture showing us how Satan acts like a lion are his attacks against Job and Jesus in the wilderness.

4. Paul Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: New Testament*, 4 vols (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), II, 540.

5. Kretzmann, II, 540.

Satan's Assault Against Job

After a brief discourse with God, Satan tries to attack Job hoping he would cease following God. Job was righteous before God's eyes. He lived out his life of faith dedicated to God. "Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil'" (Job 1:8). Satan claimed that Job only worshiped God because of the blessings God had given him. In other words, Job's faith was fake and superficial. After Satan's conversation with God, Satan began tempting Job by taking away his wealth and blessings. First, it was Job's oxen and donkeys with his servants, then his sheep with more servants, and finally one of God's greatest blessings—Job's children.

Each possession was quickly taken away from Job. Before one servant was finished telling Job about the terrible event that had happened, another arrived to express another calamity. However, "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (Job 1:22). Satan was not finished with his onslaught. With permission, Satan attacked Job's physical health. "So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes" (Job 2:7,8). Job's wealth, children, and health were gone. Yet, Job still had a few more blessings from the Lord; he had a wife and friends. Satan's final strategy was to turn Job's support system against him. Immediately after Job broke out in sores, his wife said, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). When Job's friends arrived, rather than providing him with comfort they questioned if he did something wrong to offend God. "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they perish; at the blast of his anger they are no more"

(Job 4:8,9). “They believe that the righteous always prosper and the wicked always suffer. In doing so, the three friends unconsciously align themselves with the accuser’s position that human beings serve God only because it gets them something.”⁶ Satan had tactfully and swiftly struck against Job taking away almost every single blessing he had from his wealth and children to those who once supported him.

Application from Job

Does Satan still similarly attack God’s children? Absolutely! How often have we experienced one thing going wrong, then another, and so on in our own lives? If you are a pastor reading this, think of the member in your church that just cannot seem to catch a break. It is no different for our children that are preparing for confirmation. As seen in Job. Satan uses a blitzkrieg style of attack. He may not always attack our children with hardships as he did to Job, but Satan is clever and twisted, witty enough to overload Christian minds with other things such as disingenuous information.

Later on, a few quotations will speak about the sheer number of movies containing occultic themes. Could this be an attempt by Satan to overwhelm young Christians with false information? As will be shown later the evidence is undeniable. Satan and the demons eagerly work to try to darken the light of God’s Word and love. However, our children can be equipped against Satan’s attempts to darken their spiritual world with vast amounts of false information. This equipping comes from teaching and preaching the Word of God. It comes by telling these

6. Reed Lessing and Andrew Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the Lord: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 285.

confirmation age children about their Savior. After all, Jesus is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32).

Satan’s Assault Against Jesus in the Wilderness

The First Temptation

Satan also shows this same ferocity and strategy against Jesus in the wilderness. Scripture records three of the temptations Satan used against Jesus. With each temptation, Satan again demonstrates a well-organized and tactful plan. For the first temptation, as recorded in Matthew, Satan said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (Matt 4:3). This first temptation is aimed at Jesus using his power in an improper way contrary to God’s will. “The first temptation consists primarily in Satan’s attempt to get Jesus to use his own power to serve himself in time of need.”⁷ Wenzel also comes to a similar conclusion concerning this temptation: “Thus the heart of the temptation is this, that Christ used his divine power in order to escape human suffering.”⁸ Why would Satan want Christ to use his power to serve himself and escape his current suffering? Certainly, it was the Son of God’s right to do so. If Satan had convinced Jesus to act in this manner, salvation would have been lost.

The very same temptation came to Him on the cross, when He was asked to use His divine power to get down from the cross, the people tempted Him by saying that He helped others, but that He could not help Himself. Had Christ done so, He would not have been our Savior. And had Christ listened to the suggestion of the devil to help Himself by making bread of the stones in order to escape further suffering, He likewise would have failed to be our Savior.⁹

7. Jeffrey Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture Matthew 1:1-11:1*, (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 194.

8. Martin Wenzel, *The Wenzel Commentary: An Exegetical Study, Based on a Harmony of the Gospels*, (Bemidji Minnesota: Arrow Printing, 1986), 80.

9. Wenzel, 80.

On the surface, Satan tried to make this temptation appear as a fact. If you are hungry Jesus, eat! However, like all of his attacks, Satan is trying to rob God's people of their salvation.

Application from Christ's First Temptation

This temptation may seem a little more challenging for confirmation age children to relate to. All 7th and 8th graders do not have the power to transform stones into bread or other inanimate things into objects they desire. However, what was Satan trying to tempt Jesus to do with his divine power? In a sense, it was to take the easy way out. Scripture does not explain every last detail about the occult. Human knowledge of angels, demons, life, and death is completely dependent on what God chose to share in his Word.

It would be much easier and potentially more gratifying to listen to what society's opinions are concerning the occult. In some situations, some children and adults may even be ridiculed or frowned upon for holding what God's Word says rather than the popular thoughts of society. What do you mean that my grandma is not watching over me? You're telling me that you don't believe in ghosts, but you do believe the fairy tales from the Bible?

Behind such negative responses lies Satan offering the easy way out. Why do you suffer Christian? Just give in to what society thinks. With the first step, our children risk sliding down a slippery slope that only gets steeper until they finally fall into disbelief. That is why it is so important to teach our children that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Children, and sometimes we as well, need to learn to be content with the knowledge that God has shared in his Word. This includes what God tells us about the occult.

The Second Temptation

For the second temptation, Satan took Jesus to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’” (Matt 4:6). Satan is quoting Psalm 91: “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone” (Ps 91:11,12). Notice how Satan leaves out the key to properly interpreting this verse, “in all your ways.” Gibbs states,

“He fails to include that the LORD promised ‘to keep you in all your ways’ (Ps 91:11b), that is, to protect his people *as they live according to the ‘ways’ he has taught them*. The psalm speaks of God’s ‘protection from dangers that approach the righteous, not testing God to see if he will really do what Scripture promises.’”¹⁰

The devil failed in his first temptation to shake Christ’s confidence in God. Here the devil very deceptively misquotes and distorts Scripture to make Christ overconfident in God. Put God to the test! “Luther says that it is a serious trial of faith. For, if the devil does not succeed in robbing us of our confidence in God, he will go to the other extreme and try to make us cocksure and much too daring.”¹¹ Satan distorting Scripture for his purpose is nothing new. “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Lying and deceit is the devil’s native

10. Gibbs, 195.

11. Wenzel, 81.

tongue. What an image Jesus gives the reader to ponder! For those who are born and raised speaking English, after a while speaking in this native tongue is second nature. Born and raised English speakers can communicate with each other without much thought. Here Jesus tells us this is how it is for the devil to deceive. The effortless lying of the devil is already evident in the Garden of Eden, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). Now, Satan tries the same tactic on Christ. He tries to turn Christ’s unmistakable reliance on God into brass boldness to hold God to a promise he never made.

Application from Christ’s Second Temptation

This second temptation brings out another aspect in which Satan attacks. While Satan twists Scripture for his agenda, he also misleads the masses with his grotesque doctrine. In Paul’s first letter to the congregation in Corinth, he rebukes the members there for following those who preached a different gospel other than the one they accepted. Concerning these false preachers Paul wrote, “For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (1 Cor 11:13-15). The devil and demons have relentlessly tried to mislead people within the church dressed as “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matt 7:15). In his commentary on Revelation, Becker saw the imagery involving the locust as representing false doctrine.

But every false doctrine in the final analysis brings torment to the hearts and souls of men by cutting off or hindering the hope and comfort brought by the Word and by weakening or destroying the assurance of forgiveness and salvation...Anything that obscures that message, that blots out the light of that sun, brings terrible torment to the souls of men.¹²

12. Siegbert Becker, *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2013), 144,145.

Paul and the Apostles fought against false doctrine in the newly established church. Reformers such as Martin Luther dedicated their lives to defending the faith from those who would rather have Scripture serve under human reason and rule. Even today, the church continues to fight against those who seek to distort or abuse God's Word for their own social and political agendas. Soon those who come after this generation will carry on this fight as soldiers of Christ.

Consider the previous applications that have been made. Satan works relentlessly to barrage the world and our children's minds with false information or false teachings about the occult. Satan pleasingly presents this information. He dresses it up to look better and more appealing to us than what is known in God's Word. Finally, Satan will continue to use his cunning linguistic skills to confuse and deceive our children. Yikes! Satan is certainly a force to be reckoned with. However, the church does not stand or fall on human effort. It stands on Christ whom "the gates of Hades will not overcome" (Matt 16:18). It is vital that confirmation age children are consistently being equipped to go back to God's Word and rely on their Savior as a source of strength as they continue to be bombarded by false teachings and deadly doctrines that undermine God.

The Third Temptation

For the third and final temptation, Satan took Jesus to a high mountain "and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'" (Matt 4:8,9). With this temptation, the devil showed the full extent of his rule and power as the "prince of this world" (John 14:30). He offers Jesus wealth and glory.

The only requirement is Jesus would bow down and worship him. This temptation brings to the forefront another picture Scripture uses for Satan. “Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads” (Rev 12:4). Becker tentatively suggests, “that the seven heads and the seven crowns represent the devil’s desire to substitute himself for God as ruler of the universe. The ten horns, since they obviously bear neither logical nor natural symmetry with seven heads, may serve to present himself as a substitute for the God of the covenant.”¹³ Brighton supports what Becker claims:

The dragon’s seven heads reflect his deceptive claim that *he*, and *not* the Christ, is the spirit who has all the knowledge to supervise all earthly matters. Each head is crowned with a diadem reflecting his deceptive claim that he possesses all royalty and lordship. The ten horns point to the boastful claim that the dragon has supreme earthly power...By such an appearance the dragon boasts that he has all wisdom and all power over all the peoples and kingdoms on the earth.¹⁴

In this temptation, the devil is not as crude and open about his desire to dethrone God. Christ is still hungry. Christ is still in his humiliation. Wenzel suggests all the devil wanted “was the acknowledgement on the part of Christ that he was a lord but not His lord.”¹⁵ Here the devil offered again an alternative to trusting in God. God has not helped you so “now let the devil do something.”¹⁶ When reading this one must ask, where would such acknowledgment lead? It starts by suggesting that the devil is a lord with power, rather than a defeated enemy. It continues with a reliance on the devil when it appears that God is not doing enough or anything at all. It

13. Becker, *Revelation*, 182.

14. Louis Brighton, *Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture Revelation*, (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 328,329.

15. Wenzel, 82.

16. Wenzel, 82.

ends with worshiping the devil as he wants to be, in place of God as the ruler of this world. The devil is so fixed on taking souls from God: he is willing to hand out earthly glory and power.

“The devil controls the world’s resources, but they are meaningless to him. He is a spiritual being. Physical riches are only valuable to him for the reason that he can use them to gather humans into his congregation of the dead, the spiritually dead. He will gladly exchange his world’s wealth and pleasure for you.”¹⁷

Application from Christ’s Third Temptation

One point should be mentioned concerning each of the temptations having been analyzed. Satan was paying attention to his target. Satan is not omniscient. However, he and the demons are astute observers. Satan knew God blessed Job greatly. Satan knew Jesus was suffering a great deal as he was in the wilderness and assumed Jesus would be prone to fall into sin, even though the devil was proven wrong.

With Christ’s third temptation, Satan’s endgame becomes clear. He wants to dethrone God. Whether it takes years of work or mere minutes, he wants God’s glory for his own. Satan will use anything and everything at his disposal. Is there truly a growing threat with movies and videos that portray false ideas about the supernatural and the occult? Yes. Confirmation age children are exposed to these films. They leave impressions in the children’s minds. Frankly, it gives the devil an opportunity. As stated earlier, the devil and demons do pay close attention and most certainly have recognized this opportunity. The lion will not waste a chance to pounce on its prey. He will not rest. He will not stop. This is the devil Scripture warns us about. However, once again our hope is found in the greater “Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Rev 5:5). The next section will deal with how occultic movies and videos are prevalent in our entertainment and accessible to confirmation age children.

17. Sorum, 36.

THE DEVIL IN ENTERTAINMENT

Our young men and women face an ever-growing mountain of challenges in today's world. The problems are multiplied for young Christian men and women as they prepare to finish their catechetical training, the day when they will stand in front of a congregation in God's house and boldly confess their faith in Christ. They will begin applying God's Word to their own lives as they continue to build on the basics they were taught in their grade school years. For some young men and women, they will not have the benefits of an entire Lutheran grade school education. Instead, they may have had only one or two years to shape their fundamentals. Regardless, the importance remains the same. These children will soon be outwardly recognized as a part of a congregation and serve a role within the body of Christ.

In contrast stands Satan and the demons. Each one of them is willing to do whatever it takes to snuff out faith before it ages and burns with greater intensity. Each one equipped with great intelligence. Their intelligence is used to pinpoint weak spots in a Christian's armor and exploit it. Temptation after temptation is dangled before the spiritual eyes of each Christian enticing a child of God to bite. So, what "bait" is Satan using to hook our 7th and 8th grade children as they undergo and strive to finish their catechetical training? According to one website, "NSPCC¹⁸ ChildLine recently released a report that found a tenth of 12 to 13-year-olds fear they may actually be addicted to pornography. 10% of children in the 7th grade have stated they are watching enough porn to be concerned they may have an addiction issue and not be able to stop."¹⁹ Videos and games advocate violence as advancements in graphics and design blur the

18. National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

19. "The Detrimental Effects of Pornography on Small Children," Kristin MacLaughlin.
<https://www.netnanny.com/blog/the-detrimental-effects-of-pornography-on-small-children>.

lines between virtual space and reality. Sexual immorality and violence are obvious concerns for Christian parents, teachers, and pastors. However, society's interest in the occult and supernatural may not initially appear on our radar of things to watch out for. The truth, however, is the fascination with the occult has been problematic for thousands of years dating back to the reign of King Saul. "He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, 'Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her'" (1 Sam 28:6,7).

Historically, theologians and pastors have warned against different ways society interacts or dabbles in the occult. Many people did and still do look to horoscopes to predict the future. Even during his ministry Becker wrote,

Of the 1700 or so daily newspapers in America over 1200 carry regular astrology columns, and the same practice is followed by many of the popular magazines. It is estimated that over \$150,000,000 is spent per year on personal horoscopes, that more than 10,000 men and women in America make their living by casting horoscopes and that 175,000 part-time practitioners of astrology are active in the United States.²⁰

Ouija boards, for example, are commonplace in many game stores. A person can even purchase their own board on Amazon for roughly twenty dollars. Schuetze also points to the entertainment industry's rising interest in the occult. "In an industry where entertainers are constantly trying to outdo each other with bizarre and shocking acts, some see the occult as just another way to attract attention and make money."²¹ Popular movies such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *The Exorcist* have become classics. Numerous spin-off movies have been created from *The Conjuring*. The *Paranormal Activity* movies presented viewers with a different thrill as they

20. Siegbert Becker, *Wizards That Peep A Journey Into the Occult*, 2nd edn (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2010), 7–8.

21. John Schuetze, *Angels and Demons Have Wings - Will Travel*, The People's Bible Teachings, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 70.

watched supernatural activity take place in a home via video cameras. Netflix offers viewers shows such as *Evil* or *Supernatural*. There are also popular television shows such as *Ghost Hunters International* which returned to its show time slot on A&E in 2019. This show features men and women investigating known haunted areas in search of paranormal evidence.

Concerning this show, A&E executive VP and head of programming Elaine Frontain Bryant said this, “It feels like it’s a time in the country where there’s a trend for people to be spiritual without being overly religious. I think paranormal programming can feed that, while being

entertainment-forward.”²² Is it possible for people to be spiritual without being overly religious?

In short, the answer is an emphatic “yes!” This spirituality without religion can show itself in

two ways. The first is a society that goes through the “motions” of worship without much

thought. In other words, people may think themselves religious or spiritual from their outward

actions, however, in truth, they are all shallow acts to God. “The Lord says: These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught” (Isa 29:13). The

other result is an over interest and fascination in the occult. Again, something the Lord speaks

directly against “When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and

mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?

Consult God’s instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to

this word, they have no light of dawn” (Isa 8:19,20). What a danger for Christians! Comments

like Bryant’s show the entertainment industry is well aware of society’s spiritual curiosity. No

22. “A&E Bringing 'Ghost Hunters' Back From the Dead in Big Paranormal Push,” Michael O'Connell. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/ghost-hunters-revived-at-a-e-is-adding-5-paranormal-series-1220972>.

the entertainment industry intends to spoon-feed society until it is satisfied. However, this is nothing new.

Besides rock music, the movie industry has also dabbled in occult themes. It started in the 1960s when the devil made his debut in *Rosemary's Baby*, a sacrilegious movie about a woman who supposedly conceived through the power of the devil. A few years later, *The Exorcist* entered theaters. Once producers discovered that 'Satan sells' on the silver screen, they flooded the market with occult movies such as *The Omen*, *Friday the 13th*, and others.²³

Concerning this topic Sorum also states,

Horror movies are popular in many countries. There is also an international market for music that explores occult themes. Bookstores offer horror literature and occult fiction. Check the best sellers right now: more than one will have an occult-related theme. Clothing and makeup styles associated with the occult are sold, and not just in specialty stores. Or would you like to dress up as the devil or a witch next Halloween? No problem. Amazon offers about one hundred different versions of Ouija boards, including a pink version for girls. Are these family-friendly board games for fun and entertainment? You can find a Tarot card reader in your city. YouTube videos will show you how to conduct séance table tilting. Human interest in the world of spirits and the occult fuels a portfolio of these 'entertainment' industries.²⁴

Now throw young, impressionable minds into the mix. With the internet and smartphones in the hands of most children, it is impossible to shelter them from some of these movies or other sources of entertainment. One statistic shows that as of October 31, 2019: "Just over half of children in the United States—53 percent—now own a smartphone by the age of 11. And 84 percent of teenagers now have their own phones."²⁵ Nothing stops a child from googling a video showing a seance or looking up the ingredients needed for some type of spell. Titles such as *REAL POSSESSION* and *VIDEO OF GHOST* lead little sanctified eyes to view something they

23. Schuetze, 71.

24. Sorum, 10,11.

25. "It's A Smartphone Life: More Than Half Of U.S. Children Now Have One." Anya Kamenetz. <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/31/774838891/its-a-smartphone-life-more-than-half-of-u-s-children-now-have-one>.

should not be watching. All the devil needs is a moment. He led the entire human race into sin with just one brief question, “Did God really say?” (Gen 3:1). He piled sorrow after sorrow on Job’s shoulders as the next tragic story arrived before the previous one was finished being told. The devil even used the brief time of forty days to fight toe to toe with the Son of God. The devil is powerful and smart. He understands human tendencies and emotions well. Is it a stretch to think this master manipulator is working to blur the lines between what Scripture teaches about the supernatural together with what the entertainment industry says? Of course not! As society is entertained by supernatural shows and movies, behind the cinematic curtain Satan stands ready to expose anyone too scared or just a little more curious than others. The prowling lion stalks with the rest of his pride as they hunt for those who begin stray from God’s pack. He looks to steal away the seed of faith that has been planted in the hearts of Christians both young and old. So what can parents do to protect their children’s growing faith? How can pastors equip these families?

While it is unlikely to expect the entertainment industry to stop making films about the occult, the first step may be attempting to understand how 7th and 8th graders view this situation. To acquire their viewpoint, I interviewed eight children at two different schools. Two children were in 7th grade and two in 8th grade: in each grade, a boy and a girl were interviewed. Each child was asked the following questions:

- Have you recently/or can you recall a time when you watched a movie, show, video, or read a book that mentioned angels, demons, or ghosts?
- Pretend that you had just asked your parents to go see the newest horror movie or that you wanted to watch a video about the supernatural and occult, what would they say?
- How would you summarize what you watched or read about the occult?

- Compare and contrast how you feel before you watched a video/film about the occult with how you felt after you have watched the video/film.
- What is appealing about watching these movies/videos for you or your friends?
- How would you define ghosts or spirits?
- Why do you define it in this way?
- What is your all-time favorite scary movie, video, or book and why?
- Have you ever tried to mimic anything you watched or read?
- As you watched or read things about the occult, do you relate in any way to the characters?
- Rate on a scale weakest to strongest (0-10) the following things: God, Angels, Demons, Devil, Us.
- Have you covered what the Bible teaches about angels and demons at some point during your schooling? What do you remember from it?

Since there is a large number of questions, the answers will be presented combined under various headings.

WHERE THE INTERVIEWED CHILDREN HAVE ENCOUNTERED OCCULTIC THEMES

Of the eight interviewed children, it appears at least three had some type of contact with these movies or videos in the past year. One movie that was identified was *Truth or Dare* which was released in 2018. This movie takes place as the demon Calax torments a group of college students playing Truth or Dare. However, “Tell a lie, you die. Fail to do a dare, you die. Refuse to play, you die.”²⁶ As the film progresses, the film highlights curses and priestly abuse. Nuns were being abused by a priest at a Spanish mission. One nun named Inez “summoned a demon called Calax, leading to the priest's death but also a curse. Inez put an end to it by cutting out her tongue and placing it in an urn after reciting an incantation, which is what Olivia found to be broken at the mission.”²⁷ Now years later, these college students were led to the same Spanish mission and tricked into playing Truth or Dare to put them under a curse. After reading a few different synopses, it is clear this movie establishes there is no escape. As these college students try to flee from playing the game, the demon follows, finds, and kills them if they break the rules. There is no mention of God or any other supernatural beings. The only context where God might be found is being associated with the priest who abused the nuns.

The interviews revealed another interesting source of videos which demonstrated or talked about occultic activity. This source is YouTube. While YouTube is usually thought of as having comedic or helpful how-to videos, it has become a big part of entertainment. “YouTube overall and even YouTube on mobile alone reaches more 18-34 and 18-49 year-olds than any

26. “Truth or Dare Synopsis.” <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6772950/plotsummary>.

27. “Truth or Dare Synopsis.” <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6772950/plotsummary>.

cable network in the U.S.”²⁸ Also, “YouTube gets over 30 million visitors per day.”²⁹ These statistics were recorded back in 2017, and needless to say, YouTube has only grown bigger.

Within YouTube are people who are known as influencers.

To put it simply, a YouTube influencer is someone who builds a substantial following on the video platform of YouTube, thereby helping to set trends and provide information for others looking to purchase a specific product or service, for example. Some of the most popular YouTube influencers are a mix of performing artists, visual artists (including makeup artists), or athletes of some kind. Creating videos on YouTube allows them to share their skills and make them easily accessible.³⁰

On YouTube, these influencers along with anyone else can create their channel where they can post their newest videos. People who are interested in these videos can subscribe to their favorite channels to watch old videos or receive alerts when new videos appear. The reason for this brief explanation is one of the interviewees identified a channel on YouTube known as *ImJayStation*. Perusing his channel, one will find videos in which he attempts to buy and interact with things on the dark web. However, a disturbingly large number of videos fall under two sections: 3 a.m. Challenges and 3 a.m. Challenges Gone Wrong. These videos intersect with the interviews because one child mentioned these types of videos as a popular thing known by friends and other classmates at school. What is the 3 a.m. Challenge?

The 3 a.m. Challenge is a recent social media dare that is making its way around on YouTube. In this particular online challenge participants attempt to perform a specific task at 3 in the morning, they attempt things like calling strangers on the phone, calling God or even playing with fidget spinners, to see if a ghost or spirit from the “other side” respond on camera. According to some of the various videos posted, if you spin a fidget spinner three times in a row right at 3 a.m., you will get a phone call from a stranger or potentially other creepy things may happen in the room. Many of these videos have gained millions of views on YouTube. Why 3 a.m.? Apparently, some people call it the

28. “36 Mind Blowing YouTube Facts, Figures and Statistics – 2017 (re-post).” Ed Flahive. <http://videonitch.com/2017/12/13/36-mind-blowing-youtube-facts-figures-statistics-2017-re-post>.

29. “36 Mind Blowing YouTube Facts, Figures and Statistics – 2017 (re-post).” Ed Flahive

30. “How to Become a YouTube Influencer.” Cori Hundt. <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/become-youtube-influencer-699>.

“the witching or devil’s hour.”³¹

The same source identifies *ImJayStation* and another popular YouTuber Ruby Rube as popular sources to find these videos. One video was mentioned in particular during an interview. In this video, a man talks with the devil while trying to buy something on the black market. Granted most of these videos are found lacking and unconvincing. Some of the children interviewed readily identified these videos as being fake. However, there is still some disturbing content. Also, Satan does not need star cinematic quality to carry out his work. If these videos portray Satan and the demons as some kind of joke, the child risks taking the prowling lion and enormous dragon that Scripture warns about less seriously. If the video is convincing, now it appears that nothing is stopping Satan and his demons from attacking or doing what they please. Finally, regardless of the warnings, these videos present a challenge to the viewer to see if they can do the same thing and get the same result.

On a reassuring note, while some of the children interviewed have rubbed shoulders with occultic movies or videos, most of them did not have an active interest in the content. What is a little more disturbing is these children have seen videos like the 3 a.m. Challenge because they have friends who are interested in them: friends who attend the same Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Grade School.

31. “The 3 a.m. Challenge: What Parents Need to Know.” <https://netsanity.net/3-m-challenge-parents-need-know>.

HOW THE ENCOUNTERS AFFECTED THEM

Fear

The children interviewed expressed a variety of ways these encounters affected them. At least six of the eight children expressed feelings of either fear or confusion. The level of fear was different for each child. Some expressed simply being creeped out, while others were not able to go to sleep after watching a movie or video that showed occultic and supernatural activity. Some of the children even began actively avoiding such movies and videos out of fear of having such terrifying nightmares again. It appears that a single question was the driving force behind much of the children's fears and nightmares. What if? What if what I just watched happens to me? What if I am the one all alone in the dark with shifting shadows and hearing creepy noises? What if the things I have watched on a screen jump out and invade my personal life? What if I am not safe? Behind the what ifs, we find Satan once again at work. Just like Job, Satan tries to cut off and isolate God's people.

Our Children Do Not Need to be Afraid

Scripture speaks that we are not alone. "And call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me" (Ps 50:15). King David beautifully expressed this when he wrote: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Ps 23:4). Paul told the Christians in Rome, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38,39).

Finally, Jesus himself reassured and continues to reassure his children when he said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10: 27-30). What amazing and powerful words of comfort! When God’s children are filled with fear and surrounded by eerie darkness, the focused spotlight of God’s love shines down from heaven and illuminates their whole world. With pierced hands, the Savior holds trembling, weak, and feeble-hearted children in a bond that is greater than metal or steel.

Although nothing, including angels or demons, can separate someone from God’s love, this does not mean that Satan quits or is lazy. “Satan hurries because his time to hurt humans is short [Revelation 12:12]...But they are like roaring lions in search of prey [1Peter 5:8]. They are not lazy killers...They wanted every moment that could be called theirs to torment humans.”³² Such an effort to undermine God’s love is visible in the fearful way the children responded to watching these videos. By filling little minds and hearts with what ifs. These feelings of fear, paranoia, and unease paralyze a heart. As noticed earlier, these movies either do not mention God or cast him in a bad light. Many of the 3 a.m. Challenge videos do not mention God. If they do, it is usually something silly such as calling God or God sending the person in the video a text message saying that he has subscribed to their channel. As for a movie such as *Truth or Dare*, the teenagers are left to combat the demon Calax on their own. Additionally, in a sinister way, the nuns were left to dealing with an abusive clergyman on their own. Since God was not helping, they turned to murder and demons. Figuratively put, what was observed in the children

32. Sorum, 31.

was many of them were left looking over their shoulder to make sure there was nothing behind them.

Needless to say, there is work needing to be done. Pastors, teachers, and parents have the privilege of pointing these children back to God's Word. There it is made crystal clear that Satan lost, the demons lost, all the forces of evil that tried to mass against God lost.

Curiosity

Another interesting way the children reacted was confusion and curiosity. Is this believable? How can this happen? Why did this happen? A few children dismissed their confusion by understanding what they watch on screen can and probably was edited. However, a few of them admitted that if something similar were to happen to them in real life, it would be much harder to dismiss. One child mentioned how he or she tried finding more information online about a video they watched, so they could understand the backstory a little better.

Dangers of Curiosity

While such curiosity is not inherently wrong, it can quickly lead a person down a dangerous path. God has given mankind the gift of reason that is used in service to God's Word. People are naturally curious about the world they live in. Curiosity and reason have been driving forces that pushed mankind to explore the heights of the heavens above and the depths of the seas below. However, curiosity and reason have their time and place. When such curiosity is employed as one watches a video or movie with supernatural themes they unknowingly risk walking into the lion's cage. Cleverly the devil tries to appeal to reason. He tried to reason with Jesus as he tempted him in the wilderness. Jesus why are you out here hungry when we both know you have

the power to even change these stones to bread? In a similar style through such videos or movies, the devil appeals to some viewers' curiosity and reason. How could a nun summon a demon, and is it possible that anyone could do the same thing? Why doesn't God just save them, or is he not able to? Is there more information about angels and demons out there to explore and where else should someone look? Such questions can leave a person vulnerable diving for answers while being exposed to the murky deep end of the supernatural swimming pool. They are no longer satisfied with what God has chosen to tell his people in Scripture. Or as Schuetze phrases it, "They walked into the devil's cage and the 'lion' sank his teeth into their lives."³³ There was a small population that identified feeling excited or thrilled by watching such movies and videos, but that was the end of it. In a sense, it was like riding a rollercoaster and once the ride was ended the emotion associated with it was finished.

33. Schuetze, 90.

THE PARENTS

To this point, the thesis has addressed where the interviewed children have rubbed shoulders with occultic and supernatural themes and how it has affected them. It is worthwhile to briefly look at how these interviewed children responded to the second question. Pretend that you had just asked your parents to go see the newest horror movie or that you wanted to watch a video about the supernatural and occult, what would they say?

Like before, it appears that there is not one solid answer but a diversity of situational responses. One child believed their parents felt they had enough maturity to make his or her own decision. A few children simply stated that their parents in no way, shape, or form approved of them watching such a movie or video. The parents would not want their child to have nightmares or felt the content of the movie was inappropriate. Other children identified their moms being against watching such things while their dads would not have as been as worried. One child stated mom does not participate in anything scary, while the dad enjoys scary stuff. Other children felt that their parents might respond with a milder approach by asking what the movie or video is about and explaining it is not real or why they can or cannot watch it. On a very reassuring note, one child thought that his or her mom would want to explain the movie to keep the child from being confused about what the Bible says. Another more moderate approach identified was the child would have to wait until he or she was older or go with a friend and not alone.

Based on the eight interviews, one set of parents would give the child permission to watch the movie or video, three sets of parents would be absolutely against it, and four sets of parents might give the child permission under some type of condition or after an explanation. Also, six of the children identified their parents as answering the same way while two felt

their mom and dad would react and answer differently. It is written in Proverbs 22:6

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” Concerning this verse Ehlke comments,

Certainly the Lord wants parents to help develop their children’s gifts. Early training will ensure that they use those gifts for a lifetime to the glory of God. But the Book of Proverbs focuses more on spiritual matters. It’s most likely that ‘his way’ is the way that God wants him to go. The verse, then, does contain a beautiful assurance. One’s childhood training in the Bible is never entirely forgotten. It’s always there as a reminder, a corrective, and a directive on the path to heaven.³⁴

What takeaways can be gleaned from the interviewed children’s responses? For parents, this is a huge opportunity to instruct their children. Ask questions about why and what the child wants to see. Show them how the film or movie may contradict or possibly support what God’s Word says. Such discussions can help a child piece together puzzling thoughts and questions in their mind and lead to a nurturing and helpful talk. As stated earlier, one child felt their parents were aware that such videos or movies could be confused with what the Bible teaches. Another child’s parents did not want him or her to have really bad nightmares.

This active interest is important, especially when put in comparison to the first part of the new perspective Sorum proposes. “But the devil and his demons are tremendous in terms of their power and their number. Their appetite, their desire, their tireless plotting for our harm and humiliation is beyond our knowing; we cannot grasp it.”³⁵ Parents do serve as spiritual watchdogs over their children. While the devil and his demons would want to use such videos and movies to entice children, instead a very fruitful opportunity is presented. Where God’s

34. *The People’s Bible: Proverbs*, ed. by Roland Ehlke, John Jeske, and Gary Baumler, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998), 213.

35. Sorum, 24.

Word may be discussed, children are trained, and knowledge and love for God's Word are instilled and grows in the child's heart.

THE CHILDREN'S KNOWLEDGE

Can these movies or videos influence a 7th and 8th grader's Scriptural knowledge? Based on the previous discussion, it is only natural to move forward and find out how well the interviewed children understood what Scripture does say about the occult, ghosts, and demons. Three questions, in particular, were used to measure the child's understanding. The first was how would you define ghosts or spirits? With the follow up why do you define it in this way? The second was to rate on a scale weakest to strongest (0-10) the following things: God, Angels, Demons, Devil, Us. Finally, have you covered what the Bible teaches about angels and demons at some point during your schooling? What do you remember from it? Before the children's answers are discussed, it is proper to review a few things regarding angels, Satan, and demons.

What Scripture Says

Angels, Demons, and God

Angels were beings created by God at some point during the six days of creation. Angels are not eternal, rather they are created beings that carry out God's commands. "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb 1:14). Angels are not to be worshiped by men. In the Apostle John's vision, he is about to worship an angel when the angel says to him, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!" (Rev 22:9). The dogmatician Johann Gerhard supports this point. "The many great benefactions of the angels toward us are apparent. Should we, then, pay them honor by invoking them? By no means. In Rev. 19:10, John

was about to worship the angel but received this response: ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers and all who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.’”³⁶

Where did demons come from? God did not create demons. “The devil was not created the devil at first, but after he had received his angelic power, he changed his nature into that of a demon and became a wicked demon.”³⁷ Instead, demons were at one point angels, but they sinned and fell away from God’s grace. In other words, they became fallen angels. “The existence of two classes of angels, good and evil, is due to the fact that some of the angels did not remain in the *status originalis*, but fell away from God into sin.”³⁸ “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment” (2 Pet 2:4). As indicated in 2 Peter, these angels have been already judged. There is no second chance for demons. They cannot be brought back into God’s grace and mercy. “The evil angels are those who by their defection from God became evil and can nevermore become good (in malo confirmati).”³⁹

Among these demons is Satan. As mentioned earlier, Satan is a powerful enemy against God’s children and the church. It is Satan who shoots “flaming arrows” at God’s soldiers. (Eph 6:16). Satan is identified throughout Scripture as a prominent figure allied with the gates of hell who actively wages all-out war against the Church. However, it is not mentioned anywhere in Scripture that the devil himself has more power than any of the other demons. They all are

36. Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: On Creation and Predestination, On Providence, On Election and Reprobation, On the Image of God in Man Before the Fall*, ed. by Benjamin Mayes and Joshua Hayes, trans. by Richard Dinda, (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), VIII–XI, 37.

37. Gerhard, VIII–XI, p. 33.

38. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, 505.

39. Pieper, I, 505.

doomed to judgment. They all including Satan cannot compare to the power of God. “Gregory is correct in writing (Moral, bk. 2) ‘The devil has from himself the will to harm, but his power to harm is from the Lord. What he hungers to do unjustly, God lets happen only justly. He does what he can with God’s permission. He does not do what he can if God forbids it.’”⁴⁰

The devil is not omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent, (all-powerful), or omnipresent (everywhere). These attributes are ascribed to God alone. “You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways” (Ps 139:1-3). “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2: 9-11). “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Matt 18:20). The devil and other demons cannot hope to overthrow or overpower God. Also, since the other angels who did not fall are still connected to God as his servants, they too would prove more powerful than the devil and demons. Gerhard provides a very good summary of these previous thoughts.

If anyone wishes to reduce what has been said about angels into a summary, he can say that angels are understanding [intelligentes] and powerful spirits, created good, just, and holy by God, the Creator of all good things, to the end that they glorify Him and that God uses their ministry. However, some of them abandoned the primeval origin of their own free will; by their own fault lost the goodness, righteousness, and holiness with which they were created; and became enemies of God and of the human race and are being kept to be tormented by eternal fire. Yet the rest, who have persisted in the truth, have been confirmed in goodness and have been endowed by God with a crown of eternal happiness that will never be taken away.⁴¹

40. Gerhard, VIII–XI, 38.

41. Gerhard, VIII–XI, 40,41.

While the devil and demons are lesser to God and his angels, they still contain a great deal of power. Satan is capable and also able to equip others to perform signs and wonders. “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie” (2 Thess 2:9). During the plagues in Egypt, Pharaoh’s court magicians were able to replicate the first few plagues that God had performed through Moses. During the wilderness temptations, Satan took Jesus to different places and in one instance, showed him the wealth and splendor of all the kingdoms of the world. Demons also have the power to cause physical and emotional harm. “There are in the Bible, however, many examples of physical and emotional troubles brought on by the devil and demons. Luke tells the story of an evil spirit that had crippled a woman for 18 years [13:11]. Paul pleaded with the Lord three times to remove from him a painful ‘thorn,’ a health trouble of some kind [2 Corinthians 12:7].”⁴²

However, the most common way demonic power is thought about and portrayed is through demon possession. Throughout Christ’s ministry, he and his disciples encountered numerous demon-possessed people. Why this happened so frequently in Christ’s ministry is unclear, however, Gibbs suggests, “One might cautiously suggest that the great adversary and accuser threw his forces into the fray in unprecedented fashion during the time when the Son of God was bringing God’s royal reign near and driving back the old evil foe.”⁴³ In every situation, the possessed person was helpless against the affliction caused by these sinister spirits.

When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day

42. Sorum, 102.

43. Gibbs, 453.

among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (Mark 5:2-5).

The Apostle Mark also records how a demon treats a child it has possessed. “Jesus asked the boy’s father, ‘How long has he been like this?’ ‘From childhood,’ he answered. ‘It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us’” (Mark 9:21,22). Regardless of how Satan or the demons demonstrate their power, it is shocking and dangerous for God’s people. “The damage demons do shocks us; it takes our breath away. Demons delight in depraved demolition of all things decent and all things living. If demons can destroy anything that God values or loves, watch them: they’ll do it.”⁴⁴

The power demonstrated by Satan and the demons all the more emphasize mankind’s need for a Savior. After the fall, all people are born aligned with Satan and his demons against God. “We must never forget that every unbeliever is completely in the power of Satan, until God’s grace and power delivers him from the power of Satan and translates him into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13).”⁴⁵ While mankind on its own not only cannot stand against the devil’s forces, through sin mankind is allied with Satan. However, Jesus came into the world to destroy the devil’s work. Jesus has won salvation for all people as God through Jesus reconciled “to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col 1:19). Schuetze highlights this thought well in his comment, “As James 4:7 tells us, ‘Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.’ Satan bet

44. Sorum, 49.

45. Pieper, I, 509.

everything he had on Calvary and lost. Because of what Christ did for us, we don't have to gamble on our salvation. We can be sure of it because of Christ."⁴⁶

Death

Another important topic to briefly mentioned is the common understanding of death and what the Bible says happens to the body and soul after death. Death is a result of sin. "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen 3:19). And also, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12). Death is inescapable. "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart" (Eccl 7:2). Death was brought into the world immediately after the fall of man. This sad result is already seen in the genealogy listed in Genesis Chapter Five, where almost every generation ends with the recurring phrase, "and he died" (Gen 5:5). Only Enoch is recorded to have not died, but instead "Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away" (Gen 5:24).

While numerous films and videos portray death, many of them fail to connect the basic truth that has already been addressed. Death is a constant everyone will experience. Some movies such as *The Lazarus Effect* present fantasies where people can overcome death.⁴⁷ Death was brought into the world because of mankind's fall. It is a consequence. Death was never

46. Schuetze, 73.

47. In the movie, a group of researchers have built a machine that they hope will bring living things back from the dead. After testing it on animals, an unfortunate lab accident happens and kills one of the researchers. The recently deceased researcher is placed into the machine and brought back to life. However, she is not the same as she was before her death.

intended to be an obstacle for mankind to eventually overcome. While movies and videos point to man's cleverness, Scripture points to Jesus as the answer to death. It is beneficial for our confirmation age children to hold on to what Scripture says about death and how it was defeated over the alternative thoughts and solutions that movies and videos provide.

Ghosts and Spirits

When a person dies there is a separation between body and soul. "And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Eccl 12:7). Then the soul faces judgment. "Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb 9:27). The result is either eternal bliss before God's presence in heaven or eternal torment in the fires of hell. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world'" (Matt 25:34). "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matt 25:41). On Judgment Day, all souls will be reunited with new bodies. From there believers will enjoy heaven with their glorified bodies, while unbelievers will spend eternity in hell with their bodies. "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1 Cor 15:51,52).

Unlike what many movies and films portray, the souls of the deceased are not left to wander the earth until they fulfill their unfinished business. The souls of the dead are not engaged in the affairs of the world. Nor are the souls of the dead being punished for some type of crime they committed in their previous life. Unfortunately again, many movies and videos show

an active interest in ghosts. How can a ghost be invoked? How can people communicate with ghosts or spirits? Videos such as the 3 a.m. Challenges dare the children watching them to attempt such things. As it will be shared later, when something supernatural happens, it is possible that the devil or demons are behind such schemes. When children are encouraged by these films and videos, they can become tools used by Satan which serve as a direct highway to him. With these thoughts in mind, let us take a look and see if films and videos have become more than a mere means of entertainment and infiltrated the Christian thinking of some of our confirmation age children.

How the Children Defined a Ghost and Why

The interviewed children were asked how they would define ghosts or spirits and why they defined them that way. Three of the eight children interviewed described a ghost as a person who comes back from the dead. One child emphasized a difference between ghosts and spirits. Mainly, while ghosts were just people who came back from the dead, spirits have more control and could conduct greater activities such as possession. When they were asked why they defined a ghost or spirit this way two of the three children pointed to popular media and horror movies as the source of their answer. The other child referenced gaining his or her understanding from what other friends thought. The problem is already apparent. Remember, each one of these children had several years of Lutheran grade school education. Most of these children did not express an active interest in movies or films that showed occultic activity. Yet, a portion of them had received enough influence too from other sources to arrive at the previously stated conclusion.

Out of the remaining five children, three identified a ghost or spirit as a fictitious thing. One child mentioned picturing a ghost as someone who is wearing a sheet over them like a

costume. The child also said that his or her picture of a spirit was similar to a cartoon. In particular, the animation of a spirit starting to leave the body of the cartoon character but then coming back. The other two children defined ghosts as not being real. But one mentioned that spirits were still real. The reasons why the children choose these definitions yielded more interesting results. One child stated that he or she believed in God and what he said in the Bible. The other child did not understand why ghosts or spirits were not real, but he or she just knew it. As mentioned before, it can be understood correctly that ghosts and spirits are not real in the context of people coming back from the dead because of some terrible thing they did or unfinished business. What is even more excellent is that one of the children actively compared the question to what they knew in Scripture. One child was not able to vocalize why he or she did not believe in ghosts and spirits. However, this knowing could very possibly be coming from the child's knowledge that was prompted by faith in what God says in his Word. The slight downside was of the three children, none of them explicitly said that angels and demons were spiritual beings. However, after reviewing their answers, it is the personal opinion of the author at least one child did imply this indirectly. While he or she may have not said point-blank, angels and demons are spiritual entities. The child was successful in placing the question in context with God's Word. It could be understood as the child mentioned his or her belief in God and his Word, that this also included the teachings concerning angels and demons.

The last two children mentioned both provided answers that did not fit with the previous categories. One child defined a ghost or spirit based on an action. The child defined a ghost or spirit as something that can possess someone. When the child was asked why he or she defined it this way, the reply was this is an activity a spirit can do. This is a fair answer. It was mentioned earlier that Christ and his apostles dealt with many demonic possessions which the Bible records

during their ministries. Also, demonic possession is a popular topic for many horror movies such as *The Conjuring*. When asked, the other child stated that there are angels and the devil has spirits: they are not good things since they are workers for the devil. He or she defined it this way because the Bible says the devil has spirits and such. Like last time, this other child also put the question in the context of God's Word. He or she acknowledged the fact there are angels and demons but did not mention a person coming back from the dead and haunting others or a certain location.

The variety of answers shows a general murkiness concerning this topic. This is understandable: there are many things about angels and demons God has not chosen to reveal to us. People are not sure what death is like since it is not normal for a person to experience death and come back to life. This, of course, is not meant to dissuade someone from believing in the resurrections recorded in Scripture, rather they should be thought of and highlighted as miracles. Yet, some general truths can be accurately applied. After death, people do not come back as ghosts. Instead, they go to eternal life or death. Angels, Demons, God, the saints triumphant, and those suffering eternally right now make up the spiritual world. Excluding the saints and those suffering; angels, demons, and God are left. All three can affect the physical world. At God's command, angels have slaughtered whole armies. "That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies!" (2 Kgs 19:35). God created a dry path for the Israelites in the Red Sea (Exod 14:15-22). Demons are recorded in Scripture affecting people with physical, emotional, or spiritual torment.

When it comes to witnessing or experiencing supernatural activity, the question must be asked, what purpose would God and the angels in his service have in scaring people or

instigating an interest in the occult? Ultimately they don't. God does not have tolerance for those who dabble with the occult. "Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (Rev 22:15). This just leaves the devil and demons. "Demons are not content to be unclean themselves. Their desire is to make everything and everyone they touch repulsive, unapproachable, and shameful to God and to people."⁴⁸ Behind every little and large supernatural activity that would undermine God's Word or harm faith, demons are at work.

This brings to light a key point of application. As stated earlier, Satan wants to dethrone God. Here the demons, including Satan, want to defile and doom Christians to eternal life in hell away from God. They will use any means necessary to achieve these goals. Can someone watch horror thrillers and occultic movies sheerly for their entertainment value? Sure, this author is willing to admit that. However, it may not be the wisest place even for the strongest Christian.

Now, what about our younger children? Confirmation is just the beginning of a Christian's life. By no means do they know everything Scripture says or perfectly apply God's Word to their lives. As it has already appeared and will later, these movies and videos have caused some confusion among our children. We do not want to give Satan this foothold to implant more confusion into young impressionable minds. Since Satan will not stop until he has dethroned God from that child's heart and led him or her into eternal damnation. Satan does not need much to work with or lots of time. Again, it does not matter to Satan how he gets the child to this point. The movie or video could spark an unhealthy curiosity in the occult and it could also work to blur who exactly is the strongest and weakest when it comes to the supernatural world.

48. Sorum, 26.

What the Children Identified as Strongest to Weakest

For a visual aid, please refer to the charts in the Appendix on pages 45 and 46. Under Group One, some similar patterns are found. Every child rated God as the strongest being. Most answered this way because they felt that God is all-powerful. He has control over all things and there is nothing above him. One child also mentions that the devil flees before the presence of God. It is also noteworthy to recognize that all four children under Group One rated the devil as having more power than other demons. One child rated angels and the devil as having the same strength. He or she mentioned that both angels and the devil fall under God's control. Also, one of the four children rated us (people) as being stronger than the devil and demons. The reasoning mentioned behind that was that we could be thought of as midway between the devil and God.

The second group, Group Two, also demonstrated some similar patterns. Again all four children rated God as the strongest being. As before, the reasons given are similar. God is omnipotent. He is untouchable. Nothing can stop him since God has the power to create this amazing world. Similar to Group One, three of the four gave the devil a higher rating than demons. One child did not provide a rating for demons. One child did rate, with some hesitation, the devil as being slightly stronger than angels. One child also rated us as being stronger than demons but not the devil. The reasoning provided was that people can overcome or resist the devil's demons and temptations but not doing what the devil says.

Praise be to God! All eight children recognized God is in total control of all things. This is huge and growing increasingly important as more occultic movies and videos portray God as an inactive being, or at best only able to provide temporary help. The devil will do whatever it takes to keep people from worshipping God. As state earlier, the devil was even willing to try to tempt the Son of God into worshipping him. "In this final and climatic temptation, Satan presumes

that the Son will worship and serve someone, so he seeks to turn Jesus aside from wholehearted worship and service of God his Father.”⁴⁹ Such movies like *Truth or Dare* and *The Conjuring* encourage looking away from God and finding other solutions. Videos like the 3 a.m. Challenge and television shows such as *Ghost Hunters*, present the supernatural world as a place we can contact and look to.

Every child with only one exception rated the devil as being stronger than demons. Along the lines of Scripture, this could be understood properly. As said earlier, God’s Word does specifically identify the devil as a vicious enemy and threat. However, there should be caution in giving the devil too much power. Often, horror movies portray a type of Yin and Yang relationship between God and his church and the devil as the leader of the demons. Movies like *The Exorcist* and *The Conjuring* display scenes where a clergyman squares off against a demon through an attempted exorcism. However, Scripture does not implicitly state that the devil is the leader of the demons. There is a difference between recognizing Satan as an enemy of faith with incredible power as the Prince of this World and Satan as the leader of all evil forces. If one views Satan as the leader of all the demons, that person risks opening the door to other false ideas. Such concepts would be Satan is the ruler of hell. Another false concept would be at times Satan has the upper hand over God. A memorable scene from *The Conjuring* shows how every cross that was set up in a house by a priest was knocked down. Movies such as *Truth or Dare* portray the devil and demons being victorious in reaching their insidious goals. What Scripture does tell us is that Satan lost and shares the same eternal torment with the other demons. “Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and

49. Gibbs, 196.

his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven” (Rev 12:7,8).

The previous verse also shows angels are more powerful than demons due to their connection to the eternal and all-powerful one true God and they have not been tainted by sin. A few children identified us (mankind) as being stronger than the devil. Ultimately, mankind is nowhere close to the power that demons have. Unfortunately, such television shows like *Supernatural* blur this line.

The story revolves around two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester as they follow their father's footsteps, hunting down evil supernatural creatures such as monsters, demons, and even fallen gods while trying to save innocent people along the way. Continuing the "family business" after their father's death, the brothers soon discovered that the "hunt" doesn't just involve slashing and hacking monsters and demons but also dealing with more powerful creatures such as angels, reapers, and even Death.⁵⁰

However, one child identified people (believers) do have the ability to cause the devil to flee from them. “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas 4:7). This power does not come from within a person, rather it is from God. When the believer submits himself to living in faith motivated by God’s love, the new man in that person will resist temptation. This does not mean that the person is perfect. Believers still sin daily. Yet, when a believer looks to God and his Word during temptation, the devil is forced to flee. As before, there seems to a general murkiness in some of the relationships that exist between the devil and demons, and mankind with the supernatural.

50. “Synopsis of Supernatural,” Tilsen K, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0460681/plotsummary>.

What the Children Recalled Learning from School

The interviewed children were asked if they had talked about what the Bible teaches concerning angels and demons and to recall a few big points. Since there are a variety of answers, the best way to share the results is to simply record what each child said.

- “God sends angels to protect us. Demons work for the devil.”
- “It was not talked about much. I don’t recall learning much about it.”
- “It is covered and it is talked about in 7th and 8th grade confirmation. Angels are with us, and demons can hurt us. We don’t want to get involved with them.”
- “It was mentioned last year a little bit, nothing early on though. Someone asked a question about being able to see hell and demons when we are in heaven. I remember the pastor saying no, why would we see or want to see sadness in heaven with God.”
- “Yes, we cover it every year since third grade. God is the most powerful and the devil has no power over us and he runs from God.”
- “Yes, angels are not people, people do not become angels. Demons are evil angels and the devil is an evil angel.”
- “Yes, that Satan and his fallen angels fell when they rebelled against God and was sent to hell. There was a war in heaven, so now the Devil wants to make as many people suffer as he does right now whether it be tempting, lying, or possessing. God knows what the devil wants to do so he gives us his Word.” The same child also referenced the story of Balak.
- “A little bit, that they are not real in a way and God can put them in people.”

Some answers are better than others. Some are more descriptive while others seem vague and wanting. Like all believers, each child is unique in his or her knowledge of Scripture and

there is room to grow. But this growth can be and is some cause already hampered by how entertainment portrays the occult. It is the hope and prayer of the writer that as one reads the answers the interviewed children gave, they come to realize each child's knowledge is unique. Some have had more contact with the way entertainment portrays the occult than others. Other children were able to recall what they had learned from Scripture more readily. Still, others were able to mention specific passages to support what they believed and why. As for backgrounds, each child came from a uniquely different home. Some parents supported the child's decision-making skills when it concerned what and what not to watch. Others were completely against their children watching anything involving the occult. Still, other parents were identified as taking an active role in asking what and why their child was interested in watching such a movie or film. Even these statements can be considered over generic or simplistic, compared to just how individualistic and distinct each child and their backgrounds are.

WHAT THE PASTOR CAN DO TO HELP

The first helpful action could be to regularly educate parents and the other lay members of a congregation about Scripture's teachings concerning the occult, angels, and demons. Pastors are called to feed God's people his Word while loving and caring for them and their spiritual wellbeing. Jesus' words to Peter were "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17). One way pastors feed their sheep is through Adult Bible Studies and Bible Information Courses. This would be an excellent environment to talk about what Scripture states concerning the occult and supernatural beings. Such a study provides flexibility for the pastor to answer popular questions or address confusion movies and films may cause a layperson. Satan is working hard to undermine faith. He understands human emotions and tendencies very well. There is no doubt Satan delights in any perspective that makes people curious about him or fear his power. One way Satan's attack on confirmation age children is thwarted is by parents who understand what Scripture says and take an active role in what their children watch. As a pastor educates parents on the occult, he equips the child's spiritual and physical watchdogs to efficiently and better carry out their role. As he educates the congregation, he raises a congregation where individuals act more like a pack. They stand together watching and protecting each other from ways Satan may try to attack.

Another important action would be that the pastor keeps himself, to the best of his ability, up-to-date about what the confirmation age children in his congregation or the church's school are watching. Movies and films that portray the occult are numerous and found everywhere. "Evidence of a wide interest in the spirit world lies in the fact, for example, that horror films in America have earned more than 8.3 billion dollars in one ten-year period. America's film industry responds to this interest by producing between two hundred to three hundred new horror

movies a year.”⁵¹ It is also important to find out what forms of popular media children are interested in. It was the opinion of this writer that many children would be interested in either books or movies about the occult. Instead, he found out that the majority of children interviewed had more contact and interest in YouTube and videos online. By showing an active interest, a pastor may come across some valuable information. For example, during the interview, some children identified knowing about or watching some of the 3 a.m. video challenges. They also shared their opinions about the videos. Such open questions and answers can help a pastor identify if there is a concern that should be raised. Also, like with parents, it provides an opportunity for spiritual growth and understanding.

Finally, Christ is always the emphasis of our preaching and teaching. This should never change! However, in a classroom setting it would be beneficial to emphasize what the Bible says about angels and demons when they do appear in Bible stories. A far number of children interviewed had some very good takeaways from what they learned about the supernatural. On the other hand, a few did not seem to have much if anything to share. It should be noted it is possible the children that had little or nothing to share simply forgot or did not pay as close attention as others. Ultimately, again all these different steps can and should be done out of love. By no means should a pastor turn into a spiritual policeman interrogating members and their children about what they watch and why.

51. Sorum, 9.

CONCLUSION

Confirmation students, like all believers, are targeted by Satan. The devil is not a pushover. He does not waste opportunities to tempt someone and he not lazy. He isolated Job from all of his earthly comforts and supports. The devil was bold enough to face-off against Jesus in the wilderness. As the entertainment industry keeps pumping out movies and videos with supernatural and occultic themes, there is no doubt Satan waits patiently to try and steal the seed of faith in a believer's heart. He will attempt to lead others to fear him or invoke him into their lives. The devil will try to obscure the light of God's love and twist God's Word to serve his purposes. The greatest thing a pastor can do for a child is to share God's Word.

“The devil is called the master of a thousand arts. But what shall we call God's Word, which drives away and brings to nothing this master of a thousand arts with all his arts and power? The Word must indeed be the master of more than a hundred thousand arts. And shall we despise such power, profit, strength, and fruit?”⁵²

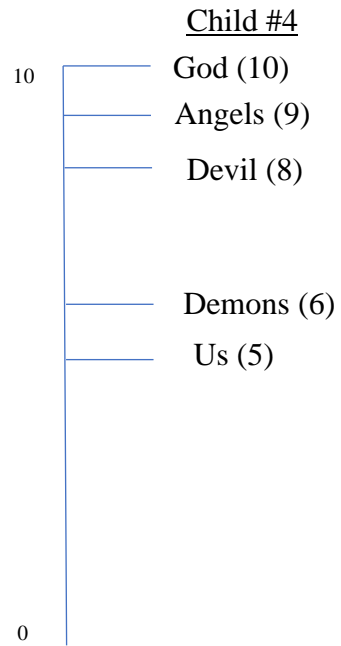
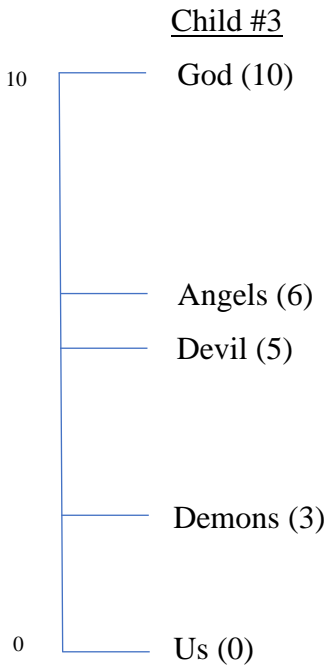
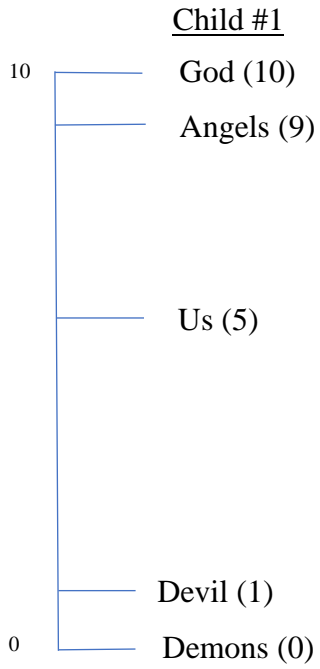
The devil and demons are fierce enemies that will fight to the end. Yet, God has provided his people with his armor. With the shield of faith, the assaults of the devil are stopped. Believers then go on the offensive with the sword of the spirit, which is God's Word. “Whenever you can apply the gospel to your own heart, there is a holy invasion. There is a storming of the beaches. The kingdom of Christ has arrived, and woe to any unclean legion that tries to drive it back!”⁵³ As believers continue to fight these fierce enemies with the Word of God, continue to pray. Pray for our children as they grow up in a world that increasingly continues to commit the oldest sins in the newest ways. Pray that God will continue to preserve their faith, even as Satan and demons lurk around every dark corner ready to steal it. Pray that they may continue to grow in Christian

52. Sorum, 59.

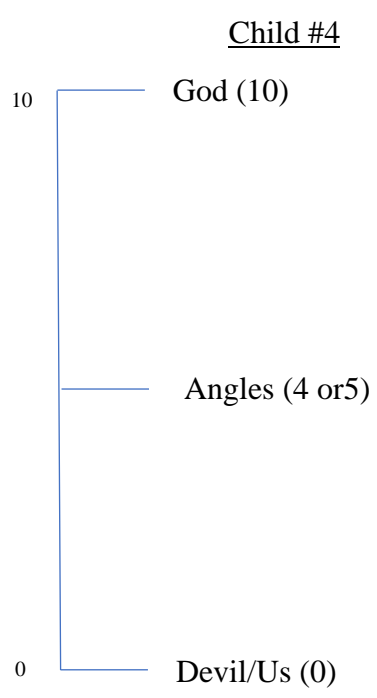
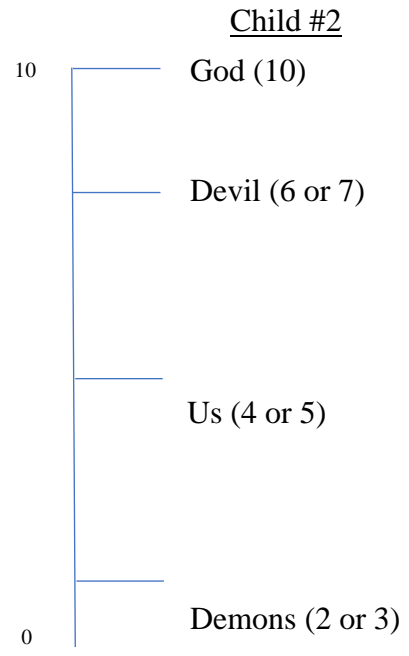
53. Sorum, 129.

maturity and wisdom learning to discern in a God-pleasing way what they watch on screens. As the occult continues to permeate into entertainment, may we continue to point little eyes to the truth found in God's Word. Let us continue to look forward to the day when our ears are greeted by the loud trumpet's blast. On that day Christ will be visible to all declaring victory as a triumphant king over sin, death, and the devil. Until then may we continue to pray the same prayer that the Apostle John said, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

APPENDIX (GROUP ONE)



APPENDIX (GROUP TWO)



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