

Witchcraft in a Mordern Guise

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IN REVIEWING the sins of the flesh (in *Galatians 5.19-21*) the apostle mentions witchcraft, often today translated sorcery. He actually uses a word which we have in English, although for us it has a much nobler meaning.

The Greek word is a form of our word 'pharmacy'. Obviously, no Bible translation would use this term, because for us it denotes a healing profession, not a sin of the flesh. So in what way were the sorcerers and witches of olden times involved in pharmacy?

For them, a large field of expertise was the preparation of drugs and potions with mood-altering, consciousness-altering properties; now known as psychoactive, psychotropic drugs. They prepared hallucinogens, opiates and aphrodisiacs both to heighten and suppress emotions. Some were designed to dull the senses and banish care; to disengage from the world in order to float along in sublime indifference and peace. More commonly (the experts tell us) they prepared euphoric drugs to send people soaring into ecstatic dreams and trances, or to amplify love or deepen hatred. In *Galatians 5* 'witchcraft' refers to shamanistic pharmacy.

Opium (weaker in those times) was used both for pain relief and euphoria. It was the ancient Sumerian 'joy plant'. Cannabis was a very well-known hallucinogen. Jimson weed also was in use as a fantasy producer.

To seek these artificial sensations is listed as a work or sin of the flesh: something base, carnal and injurious. The imbiber effectively says – 'I don't want to be a human being. I don't want my mind to be in charge. I don't like rationality. I don't want responsibility. I want exciting sensations, or detachment from reality.'

All this is sought today to a greater degree using even more powerful versions of these drugs. But the level of mood tampering attainable by first-century people was of the same order as that which may be achieved by alcohol, and by heavy, relentless beat music. Amplifiers, tweeters and woofers now produce the high-decibel excitement and compelling power of rock, securing strong emotional effects. Tremendous skill goes into the production of fascinating, irresistible band arrangements designed to get hold of the emotions and carry listeners along. But it is mood-manipulating 'pharmacy'.

Hearers may take no potion, but they succumb to sensations, getting outside themselves, and either dulling or exciting the mind. Many come to depend on it for well-being.

Are we hooked on 'pharmacy' music? Is the mood-affecting rhythm vital for us? Is it so important to us that we overlook the lyrics that are sensual, anti-moral and anti-God, little realising that the musical vehicle is tampering with the mind, bringing us under addictive power, and becoming our chosen alternative to joy derived from the Holy Spirit. Does not the apostle also say in 1 Corinthians 6.12, 'All things are lawful unto me...but I will not be brought under the power of any'?