

Should Believers celebrate Halloween?

THE HISTORY OF HALLOWEEN AND A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The dominant theme of Halloween's draw is, of course, directly related to the morbidly supernatural, sufficiently sanitized for popular consumption. Thousands of people - many of them professing Christians - will engage in a hearty embracing of the evening with little thought as to the underlying significance of what they are doing. Unknown to most people, the underlying essence of our celebrations of Halloween is based upon modern Wiccan interpretations of pre-Christian paganism and involve occultist rites and practices that Christians should have no dealings with.

The Essence of Halloween: The Pagan Feast Of Samhain

Hundreds of years before the birth of Messiah, the Celts, inhabitants of Britain and Ireland, observed a festival on October 31st. Unlike modern-day Halloween, theirs was no children's holiday. The Celts and their priests, the Druids, celebrated Samhain, a festival that marked the eve of the Celtic New Year, which began on November 1. The Druids served as advisers to Celtic rulers, led them into ritual communion with their own gods and goddesses, and preserved their mythology and learning, much of which was quite sophisticated. Many of the contemporary **Wiccan** (witchcraft) community fully embrace many of these foundational pagan teachings, as well as a host of other pagan traditions from the ancient world.

The fall harvest was complete and winter loomed ahead. The Celts believed the power of the sun was fading. For the next several months, darkness would prevail. The Celts believed that during Samhain the veil separating the living from the dead was at its thinnest. They believed that on the evening of October 31, evil spirits and the souls of the dead passed through the barrier and entered the world of the living. Departed family members would revisit their earthly homes.

The thought was frightening -- and exciting! The Celts believed these spirits and dead souls could torment the living. Crops might be destroyed, babies stolen, farm animals killed. But this was also an opportunity to commune with the spirits and divine the future. The Devil, the lord of darkness, was ordinarily feared, but during Samhain, his power would be called on to foretell the future.

The festival was a series of ceremonies clearly aimed at invoking and tapping into supernatural inspiration and power. Through their casting of spells, induced dream states and sacrificial offerings at sacred hilltops with blazing bonfires, we can see that the Druids made Samhain an earnest time of search for contact with their gods and goddesses, a vital part of pagan thought and practice

The Druids were charged with appeasing the goblins and preventing harm to the people. Huge Samhain bonfires were lit to guide the way of the spirits. Various sacrifices -- including human -- were performed to assure a good year. Several ancient authors commented on the gory religious rites of the Druids.

It is believed that, like many pagan cultures around the world, the Celts left out food for the spirits, hoping that a "treat" would prevent an evil "trick."

Centuries later, descendants of the Celts continued to observe the Samhain festival by dressing as evil spirits. They roamed from house to house demanding food in exchange for the "spirits"

leaving the home unharmed. They carved demon faces in hollowed-out turnips and lighted them with candles. That night they also practiced many customs designed to divine the future.

To this day, it is quite clear that Halloween truly is a holiday based upon ancient pagan spirituality and that it is alive and well as seen in the diligence which many pagans and Wiccans put forth in observing it as a holy day, as one of the "Great Sabbats" of their religion.

Halloween and the Church: ALL HALLOWS' EVE

When Christianity began to spread through Europe in the third and fourth centuries, the pagan temples were torn down. But pagan worship never completely disappeared. The festival of Samhain remained a primary pagan festival. Belief in spirits may have waned, but many of the old Samhain traditions continued to be practiced especially by the children. Primarily in Ireland, children dressed as spirits went from house to house demanding a treat. If they received none, they performed an unwelcome trick. They were play-acting the part of evil spirits that had to be appeased; just as in the old Samhain festival the people believe they really did have to appease spirits.

It was made even worse in the eighth century when a decision was made by Pope Gregory IV that attempted to sanctify the season: he established the celebration of **All Hallowed Evening** (on October 31) followed by All Saints Day (on November 1) as a means to both honor the martyrs of the Church and assert its' authority. This led to the establishment of a Middle Age custom of celebrating "All Hallows" with parades of parishioners dressed as saints, angels, devils and other church icons around the churchyard and then through town. It was a compromise, and a serious one with major implications for our day. Over time, the condensed term of "Halloween" became the most popular form used to identify the evening celebrations. And while most of the pagan religious aspects of Samhain were largely discontinued, some of their elements were preserved by the Celtic peoples in their folklore that continued to be handed down among them for hundreds of years. Irish emigrants to American soil brought along with them their distinctive traditions, which included some of the practices that were found in Samhain. These practices were imported into American popular culture by the mid 1800's and used to celebrate Halloween. It is these practices that are based purely upon pagan spirituality that we now wish to look at.

Halloween in America

Irish immigrants in the mid-1800s brought to America the Halloween customs we're familiar with - costumes, trick-or-treat, carved Jack-o-lanterns, etc. Unfortunately, they also brought "tricks" with them which often involved breaking windows and over-turning sheds and outhouses.

Even though the practice of actually performing a trick if no treat is given has faded, the custom of children going "trick-or-treating" has become an established American tradition. Only in recent years have parents hesitated to send their children into the streets because of the increased danger of accidents, poisoned food, and menacing strangers.

Nonetheless, despite the dangers associated with trick-or-treating, Halloween is celebrated more than ever. In fact, the night is the second most popular party night of the year (after December 31) for "baby-boomer" adults. Many adults look at it as the one night of the year they can dress up and act foolish.

But while children and adults innocently imitate ancient Celtic customs, darker practices persist. Witches and Satanists still consider Halloween to be one of the strongest times during the year to cast a spell. On Halloween most witchcraft practitioners participate in a ritual called "drawing down the moon." In this the chief witch of the coven (group of witches) becomes, they believe, a channel for the moon goddess. During this ritual the participants, both male and female, are 'sky-

clad" -- that is , naked. Stonehenge, the mysterious ancient stone formation in England, is often the site for bizarre gatherings of occultists, some of who believe they are modern-day Druids. (Many people believe that Stonehenge was a Druid religious site.) And evidence persists that some Satanist and voodoo groups offer sacrifices usually animals.

The Bible very clearly instructs Christians to have nothing to do with the practices of darkness. Halloween is a rite with pagan, demonic roots. The Celtic people who lived over 2,000 years ago, feared the evening of October 31st more than any other day of the year. It was the eve of the Lord of the Dead. To celebrate, the people built bonfires, wore masks and costumes in order to prepare for the arrival of spirits. Fire rituals and divination were part of their celebration. Pagan priests even offered human and animal sacrifices.

The Harm Of Halloween

Halloween is a dangerous day and here are the reasons why...

HALLOWEEN IS FOCUSED ON VIOLENCE

Halloween accentuates mutilation, murder, blood, guts and gore. It even glorifies it! The truth is, millions of people will be exposed to some of the almost endless string of TV programs, videos, community and church activities that GLORIFY MUTILATION, TORTURE, and BIZARRE MURDERS this Halloween.

HALLOWEEN IS HARMFUL BECAUSE OF ITS FOCUS ON VIOLENCE.

Don't you see the paradox? When we read of a violent murder any other time we gasp. But we laugh, tease, call it fun and glorify the same things when Halloween comes. Halloween's focus on VIOLENCE breaks down the inhibitions of our children toward murder. They have difficulty separating between fantasy and fact. And that is taking its toll on our society.

HALLOWEEN IS HARMFUL BECAUSE OF THE EMPHASIS ON FEAR

An article in The Milwaukee Journal entitled "Haunted house fun: It could become nightmare for kids." It started out "IT'S JUST FOR FUN, you know that. But to a young child, a trip through a "haunted house" created for Halloween could be a nightmare." Fear is no joke. Fear is a powerful and often damaging emotion. The writer of the article quoted developmental psychologist Marvin Berkowitz of Marquette University. Berkowitz said "Some haunted houses can frighten an adult." Children must "go in with the right mental set. Make sure they know it's going to be a fun scare, not a real scare." The article went on to say, "even the most careful parents can misjudge their child's reaction. If the child is horrified, if the kid's traumatized and shrieking, you hold him and comfort him. Give him physical security." The question is, why expose your child to such traumatizing influences? They serve no useful purpose. In fact long lasting emotional problems can develop as a result of the frightening experiences that are encountered at Halloween activities, such as going through a "haunted house."

But there is another aspect relating to fear. Dr. Grace Katterman M.D. says in her book, *You and Your Child's Problems: How to Understand and Solve Them* "a tragic by-product of fear in the lives of children as early as pre-adolescence is the interest and involvement in supernatural occult phenomena."

HALLOWEEN IS HARMFUL BECAUSE OF ITS FOCUS ON THE OCCULT

The two most frequent ways children are introduced into the occult are through rock music and Halloween. Halloween is one of the two Holidays that public schools celebrate. They choose Halloween (and Valentine's Day) because supposedly there is no "religious" significance. How wrong they are about Halloween. To be sure, there is no Christian significance to Halloween but it is obviously a religious day. Our forefathers recognized Halloween's association with the occult. The Pilgrims banned celebrating Halloween in America. The ban lasted until 1845. At that time multiplied thousands of Irish emigrants flooded into New York because of the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-46. They brought Halloween with them and gradually it spread throughout the rest of the count.

A Sobering Thought (found from an internet website on the biblical analysis on Halloween):

I know of someone that met a practicing witch a couple years ago- he mentioned their conversation but the thing that grabbed me the most was when she said - "I love this time of year the most (ie: Halloween) because this is the time when BOTH Christians and Witches worship the same god".

It often amuses pagans and Wiccan to see many people around them who would never think of involvement with witchcraft or paganism any other time of the year jump head first into Halloween participation.

Origins of the Symbols of Halloween

JACK-O-LANTERN

The Irish also did something that has become the indelible symbol of Halloween in America - they made jack-o-lanterns. The original jack-o-lanterns were potatoes or turnips carved and illuminated by Irish children and used to light Halloween gatherings. They commemorated Jack, a shifty Irish villain so wicked that neither heaven nor the Devil wanted him. Rejected by both the sacred and profane, he wandered the world endlessly looking for a place to rest, his only warmth a glittering candle in a rotten potato" (*Ibid.*). Hence, the jack-o-lantern finds its historical place in the history and religion of the Celtic people.

Further, the same can be said for the use of orange and black as traditional Halloween colors. "Even the traditional colors of Halloween reflect its Celtic origin. Orange is the color of the autumn harvest, black the symbol of death" (*Ibid.*, p. 30).

BROOMSTICKS AND WITCHES

This image (however cartoon-like) shows an actual ritual in which witches mount broomsticks (symbol of the male organ) and leap high around the fields on them to "teach" the crops how high to grow. In our drug-conscious society, it should be noted that the flying witch actually related to the fact that witches believed they could fly great distances to their feasts by smearing their bodies with "flying ointment." This ointment actually contained drugs like bella-donna, aconite and cinchona and gave them psychedelic "trips" so that they thought that they flew distances. Are these images we wish to convey to our children?

BLACK CATS

The black cat is also both the witches' "familiar" or magic helper, and is the chief totem (idol) of

the goddess of Wicca, Diana. In legend, she turns into a black cat to commit incest with her brother, Lucifer. It is also a form of the Egyptian goddess, Bast.

GHOST AND SKELETON

These relate to the belief that spirits of the dead were roaming throughout the land. They induce fear in children.

SKULL AND MASK

The Druids wore masks, skulls and costumes, even offered human sacrifices on October 31st, to ward off evil spirits.

BOBBING FOR APPLES

In AD 43 the Roman Empire was in solid control of the Celtic people. As a result of this control the idol worshipping Romans introduced another ceremony honoring their false gods to the already demoniacal Druid New Year's celebration. It was in honor of their goddess of fruit trees. They would try to grasp fruit, floating in water, without the use of their hands. This is the origin of BOBBING FOR APPLES according to the Atlanta Journal & Constitution, Associated Press quote, October 16, 1977.

TRICK OR TREAT

The Druids went from house to house asking for a contribution to their demonic worship celebration. If a person didn't give, their trick was to kill him. The people feared the phrase "Trick or Treat."

Therefore, it is inappropriate for Christians to celebrate Satan's high holy day or to celebrate with those who practice witchcraft and use occult symbols such as witches, black cats, ghosts, jack-o'-lanterns, etc. This time can be used to make children aware that Halloween is an alliance with the powers of darkness and that it is now our privilege to live as children of light.

As believers, we can take this opportunity to provide a creative alternative to this celebration of darkness. In ancient Israel, the majority of Jewish festivals occurred at the same time as pagan festivals. God did not simply tell his people not to engage in pagan festivals, He provided an alternative. During every major pagan festival, the Hebrew people would take part in a God-given alternative, a festival celebrating the same general subject but with a completely different focus.

What Does The Bible Say?

As a parent of children, you have a responsibility to follow the biblical admonition to protect and train them with Scriptural principles. Children need to be taught that there is no such thing as a "cute" witch or a "friendly ghost". Scripture is very clear that Christians are not to celebrate pagan rituals. The Halloween season is a golden opportunity to make this clear to the children.

The uninformed Christian has no idea that there truly are demonic spirits, which are contacted and activated as people call out to them in jest or in seriousness. Every act around Halloween is in honor of false gods, which are spirits in the realm of the Satanic. Those who have been deeply involved in witchcraft and who are now free, declare that even those who say they worship spirits of nature are in actuality contacting the satanic realm without knowing it.

Allowing children to participate in the celebration of Halloween may appear to be quite harmless on the surface, but the spiritual implications are far from Christian. In today's world, fortune-telling, ouija boards, ESP, telepathy, horoscopes, voodoo, clairvoyance, yoga, hypnosis, magic, transcendental meditation, Eastern religions, reincarnation, metaphysics and many other practices are expressly forbidden in Scripture. They are related to the occult and satanic forces. Therefore believers should have nothing to do with them.

There are many people who say "it's just for fun" or "it's once a year" but how much can be and is learned in a short time frame. Repeated year after year, the celebration of Halloween can leave a significant impact.

THREE REASONS TO EXAMINE HOW YOU CELEBRATE HALLOWEEN

1. What may not hurt you may hurt others.

Paul said that it wouldn't harm a Christian to eat meat sacrificed to an idol. After all, the pagan gods that the meat had been sacrificed to weren't real gods. In the same light, he probably would say that Christians are not prohibited from dressing in costumes and going trick-or-treating or attending Halloween parties. After all, "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one" (I Corinthians 8:4).

But Paul went on to say that by doing what the believer was free in the Lord to do, the believer may be distressing another believer who doesn't realise he has this freedom. "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (I Corinthians 8:9). The weak ones would be those who still had problems with the idea of eating the food sacrificed to idols.

During Halloween, little children in particular are the weak ones. On TV, in movies, in school, and with their playmates, many children today are exposed to occult influences. We may be opening our children to these influences if we approve of these things in Halloween fun. We adults may be fully aware that we are only spoofing witches and ghosts, but the young many not be so sure.

If we have given our lives to Jesus Christ, then our eternal destiny is safe in the hands of Almighty God. But that's not true of most of the people around us. There is a valid reason for most people to fear a "lord of death" even if they don't take him seriously on Halloween. We who have found life in Jesus should be careful that our freedom doesn't keep others from finding that same eternal life.

2. Some permissible things may hinder your Christian growth.

The Bible encourages us to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:1-2). This one night of the year, most eyes are not fixed on Jesus but on a darker image. The Christian's "race of faith" leads him to eternal life, to a joy that has no shadow. Should we really be focussing on the devil, witches and other dark beings, even for one night?

3. God says, "Don't imitate evil!"

"When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who...practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium, or spiritist or who consults the dead (Deuteronomy 18:9-11).

If our children dress as witches and sorcerers, if we hang cardboard ghosts in our windows, if we entertain with tales of ghouls and haunted houses what are we doing but imitating that which is evil? We need to make it clear as Christians that witches and evil spirits are not funny and are not harmless, even if the people in witch costumes are only play-acting.

What does the Bible say:

"Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God." - Leviticus 19:31

"When you come into the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of the nations. - There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer" - "Or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead" - "For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh, and because of these abominations Yahweh your God drives them out from before you"
~ Deuteronomy 18:9-12

"The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so." - Deuteronomy 18:14

"He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger." - 2 Chronicles 33:6

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." - Romans 12:9

"Avoid every kind of evil." - 1 Thessalonians 5:22

"Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God." - 3 John 11

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." - Matthew 5:13

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." - 2 Corinthians 2:15

"This is what the LORD says: Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them. For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel." - Jeremiah 10:2-3

"My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge." - Hosea 4:6a

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." - Ephesians 5:1, 8-11