

HALLOWEEN



LOOKING AT THE FACTS....IS PARTICIPATION IN THIS "HOLIDAY" AN OFFENSE TO GOD?

HISTORY:

Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, the Celts, (inhabitants of Britain and Ireland) observed a festival on October 31.

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 fall harvest was complete and the 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 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.

HOW TRICK OR TREAT ENTERED IN:

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 have commented on the gory religious rites of the Druids.

It is believed that, like many pagan cultures around the world, the Celts left food out 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. Young people roasted nuts in Samhain fires to see which would crack first – and tell them who they would marry. The person who retrieved the apple by his mouth from a tub of water was assured of a lucky year. Obviously, some of the customs (like "apple bobbing") have remained with us, strictly as amusement.

ALL HALLOWS EVE:

When Christianity began to spread through Europe in the third and fourth centuries, the pagan temples were town 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 the evil spirits that had to be appeased; just as in the old Samhain festival the people believed they really did have to appease spirits.

In the 700s, the Church decided to combat this festival by replacing it with a celebration of the Lord of life. Instead of honoring evil spirits and the souls of the dead, the Church chose to recognize the saints – or hallowed ones – who had lived godly lives. The Church seemed to be saying, “All right, if you must have a day to celebrate the dead, then celebrate those who died and are now with the Lord.”

So November 1 came to be called All Saints’ Day, also called All Hallows’ Day. The evening before was called All Hallows’ Evening. From that, we got the modern name of Halloween.

But pagan customs continued. And with the growth of witchcraft in the Middle Ages, additional symbols became associated with Halloween – black cats, witches, bats, and skulls.

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. The Jack-o-lantern is simply an American version of the hollowed-out turnip, mentioned earlier. The pumpkin did not grow in Ireland, but in Britain. 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 not 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 the occultists, some of whom 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, but possibly human babies.

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO HALLOWEEN?”

Witches and Satanists are, of course, a small minority. Few people who celebrate Halloween these days ever think about the darkness that underlies most Halloween practices.

A child dressed in a black pointed hat and matching gown – with a wart carefully drawn on her nose and trick-or-treat bag in her hand – is hardly thinking of death or the spirits of departed relatives. Nor should she be. She’s thinking of candy and fun.

Merchants also look forward to October 31. The sale of candy, costumes, decorations and party goods make Halloween one of the major retail seasons of the year.

Does the Bible have anything to say about celebrating Halloween?

In Corinth, meat that had been sacrificed to idols was sold in the market. People who bought it then ate it in honor of the particular pagan god. Speaking of his freedom to eat food that a pagan had dedicated to an idol, the apostle Paul said, "Everything is permissible" (1 Corinthians 10:23). After all, he didn't believe the pagan gods really existed.

If we apply Paul's statement to the celebration of Halloween, then one could argue that Christians can dress in ghostly costumes and practice the tradition that have been passed down from the ancient Celts. After all, the supernatural powers they tried to appease don't have power over those who belong to Christ.

The Bible says that Jesus destroyed the power of death, when He went to the cross. by Jesus' death and resurrection, anyone who gives his or her life to Jesus doesn't need to fear evil.

But Paul didn't stop with a statement of his freedom. He said, "Everything is permissible" – but not everything is beneficial" (1 Corinthians 10:23)

It is in this light that Christians need to examine how to observe Halloween.

THREE REASONS TO EXAMINE HOW WE CELEBRATE THIS TIME:

1. What may not hurt you may hurt others: Look at 1 Corinthians 8:4

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 realize he has this freedom. "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (1 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 may not be so sure.

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)

The 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 focusing 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 not harmless, even if the people in witch costumes are only play-acting..

ALTERNATIVES:

As Christians, we have plenty to celebrate! While the world around us focuses on activities honoring fear and death, we can celebrate the One who brings life. Some ideas would be:

1. **Light the night.** Open up your yard to a big neighborhood party. This is a perfect time to give God's love. Be creative about decorating. Minister to them with prayer and the Word of God. To learn more about this alternative, go to: www.lightthenight.net

2. **Celebrate All Saints Day**

There is good biblical basis for looking to those who have faithfully followed God in the past. Hebrews 11 has a roll call of believers who have set examples for us. With nearly 2000 years of Church history, we can well remember many faithful believers whose lives can encourage us in our walk with the Lord.

3. **Have a different kind of party.**

You can have a fall harvest party, an All Saints' Day party etc. Have children or others come dressed as a Biblical character.

4. **Hold a Bible study** on what God says about the occult and witchcraft.

5. Gather for a prayer and praise time.

During this night when Satanists and witches' covens meet to cast their spells and perform grotesque rituals, it seems appropriate for believers to gather to praise the one and only God.