



THE CHRISTIAN AND HALLOWEEN



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The Christian is faced with many difficult choices and decisions throughout the duration of his Christian life. This is especially true when it comes to participating in various cultural activities that are very popular in our country. The culture of any people group is ultimately based on and reflect their religious beliefs. Cultural practices are unquestionably linked to that culture's system of beliefs and therefore must be judged critically and carefully. While not all aspects of a culture may be inherently evil, all aspects must be evaluated under the scrutiny of Scripture, either by explicit statements or implicit ideas, principles, and conclusions which God wants us to make. Inevitably, there will be some aspects of our culture that will be viewed as not being compatible with the body of Christian faith and practice and therefore would not truly honor and glorify God.

One such aspect of culture that every Christian would be wise to evaluate is the celebration of the holiday known as Halloween. Of all the holidays celebrated during the course of the year, this one is unquestionably the darkest of them all. What should be the response to this holiday by the modern Christian family? Is this holiday something to be concerned about at all? The discussion of this topic should begin with an understanding of its roots and origins.

ROOTS AND ORIGINS OF HALLOWEEN

In the times before Christ and the Christian era, a group of people called Celts (or Celts) lived in modern day Ireland, The United Kingdom, and Northern France. This people group consisted of different tribes, each having their own king as well as Druids. The Druids functioned somewhat as priests, or witches of sorts for each people group. The culture of the tribes was based on and held together by its religious beliefs and practices, all of which were void of the worship of Jehovah.

The Celts held to two major seasons of the year: Light and Dark. The season of Light was marked by the celebration on the eve of May 1st known as "Beltane." This festival celebration signified the beginning of more daylight, summertime, and harvest time. The season of Dark was marked by the celebration on the eve of November 1st known as "Samhain" (Sa-wein). This festival celebration signified the beginning of darkness, winter, and the end of the harvest. It also signified the beginning of the New Year.

Of these two festivals, it was the festival Samhain that received the more attention. Samhain was believed to be the time of year when the barrier between the dead and the living was the thinnest and that there could even be interaction between the dead and the living. On this night (October 31st) it was believed that the spirits of all who died the previous year and were confined in the realm of the dead were allowed to return to their former homes to visit the living. Some people offered food for these dead spirits as a way to appease them and keep them from performing curses upon their homes or livestock. Others would carve out gourds or turnips and place a candle in them as a means to ward off the dead. Druid priests would offer various sacrifices, including human sacrifices, in order to appease their gods. Costumes of animal heads and skins would be worn in hopes of keeping these evil spirits from harming them.

THE CHRISTIAN ERA

The life and ministry of Christ is surely the greatest time period of history. Jesus Christ, God's Son, came to earth, lived a perfectly sinless life, and died on the cross, winning the victory of sin, death,

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and hell. Satan himself who is the lord of death could not hold Christ in the bondage of death. Christ put death to death and proclaimed victory over death through His resurrection life. In the whole scheme of things, Christ has already defeated Satan, but the power of Satan has not been erased from this earth as of yet.

By AD 43 the majority of Celts were conquered by the Romans. The process of “Christianizing” them began, though there were still some Celts who practiced their religion along with its festivals. The Church sought to Christianize many of their pagan special days, including the feast of Samhain. In May of 609, Pope Boniface IV initiated a celebration called “All Saints Day” in an attempt to honor the beloved dead. In the middle of the eighth century, Pope Gregory III moved this day to November 1st as an attempt to erase the Celtic ideals of Samhain that was still practiced in the Roman Empire and replace it with the Christianized ideals of honoring the dead of the Church. Later, in the ninth century, Pope Gregory IV established All Saints Day on November 1st as a holy day of obligation. All Saints Day, otherwise known as All Hallows, included festivities on the evening before, called All Hallows Eve, which later became shortened to Halloween. The triad of All Hallows Eve, All Saints Day, and eventually all Soul’s Day (November 2nd) was known as “Hallowmas” and would be celebrated with bonfires, parades, and dressing up in costumes.

The Church, in seeking to erase the pagan, Celtic ideas, substituted their own day, while retaining some of the practices associated with Samhain. This practice continued for centuries, and these three days are still celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church today.

MODERN PRACTICE

When the Pilgrims and Puritans came to the new world in the 1600s they banned the celebration of Halloween because of its pagan roots and emphases. In his book, *Halloween: An American Holiday, an American History*, Lesley Bannatyne states,

As for Halloween in the New England Colonies, there was no mention of its whatsoever. There could be no greater anathema to the Puritans than a pagan celebration of the spirit world. Ritual celebration and Catholic theology were seen as manifestations of an unfathomable evil, and the Puritans could not reconcile these beliefs with their own God.¹

It wasn’t until about 1845, when the Irish Catholics came to America because of the potato famine and persecution in Ireland, that the practice of celebrating Halloween began again. By 1900, the holiday was widely practiced in America.

It is no secret that Halloween is a widely celebrated holiday in America today in a variety of ways. The celebration of Samhain is still practiced by the Wicca community as one of its primary holidays of the year. Hollywood has capitalized on the darker side of the holiday, featuring movies each year that depict gore, glorify death, and capitalize on fear. The commercial industry also capitalizes on the holiday, selling candy, costumes, and a host of other items associated with the day. Halloween is big

¹ Lesley Bannatyne, *Halloween: An American Holiday, an American History*, accessed through google books on 9/20/16, no page number available. https://books.google.com/books?id=oNmZBAAAQBAJ&pg=PT37&lpg=PT37&dq=william+bradford+halloween&source=bl&ots=u633v8ELjk&sig=CFMVznAA8_6PCJUzAlMSmm5Cuds&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjovOH90J7PAhXFwT4KhrkZDdQQ6AEIWTAN#v=onepage&q=william%20bradford%20halloween&f=false

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business, as is evidenced by the consumer items available as early as late August. According to a forbes.com article dated October 26, 2015, the revenue projected for the 2015 Halloween season was \$6.9 billion². This was down from 2014 and from its highest amount in 2012 of \$8 billion.

In many American communities, children can be seen walking around neighborhoods the evening of October 31st, knocking on doors and holding out bags to be filled with candy. They are dressed up in a variety of costumes from sports players, to superheroes, to movie stars, to witches, and a host of other things associated with evil, darkness, and death. While the words “trick or treat” are often spoken, there is really no threat of a “trick” being played on the home that does not give a “treat.” Yet there is the expectation underlying the practice that homes must give candy or other goodies to all those who come to their door. Pumpkins are also often carved out into spooky or silly faces and candles are inserted to make them glow for the evening.

The question must be raised as to whether or not the paganism of the holiday has been erased, as the old Church first intended by instituting All Saints Day. The church did a similar thing regarding Christmas, which also has some pagan roots to it, but those roots have essentially disappeared in light of the unquestionable focus on the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Can the same thing be said about Halloween? The answer to that question, frankly, is a difficult one to answer.

How does our society view Halloween? The general society views Christmas or Easter as obviously Christian holidays, celebrating the birth and resurrection of Christ respectively. Whatever pagan roots were originally there have long been forgotten. However, the same thing cannot necessarily be said with regards to Halloween. Death, fear, and occultism have always been a large and predominant part of the Halloween tradition, stemming back to the time of the Celts. Any attempt made by the early Church to replace those ideals largely failed. This is not to say that everyone who participates in Halloween is celebrating death, fear, and the occult. But at the very least, there is a certain amount of association with those things simply by condoning and participating in the day.

And yet, there are many who naively participate in the Halloween festivities. It is not their intention to honor death, fear, or the occult. They focus on candy, parties, and dressing up in funny costumes. This was my practice as a child. I had no knowledge of Samhain until I entered the ministry and had children. My wife and I had to come to some conclusions regarding our view of Halloween before our children became old enough to know what it was.

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES

As with any discussion, the Scriptures must be called to bear on this subject. What principles does the Scripture give with regards to the topic of Halloween?

- It is very clear and obvious that God does not advocate, nor condone the practice of any kind of witchcraft, necromancy, or other occultish practices (1 Samuel 28; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8).
- It is also clear that such kinds of activities were common amongst the Pagan societies, and that Israel and the Christian Church were to remain distinct and separated from those practices (Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Ephesians 5:8-11).

² <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kellyphillipserb/2015/10/26/halloween-spending-to-top-6-9-billion-in-2015-filling-sales-tax-coffers/#400899fb4a93>

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- Throughout the Bible, there are clear spiritual meanings to the idea of “darkness” and “light.” Darkness is antithetical to the Light of God (1 John 1:5). Christians were once in darkness, but are now in the light of the Lord and are to walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8).
- There is also the very real possibility of “guilt by association” when Christians choose to participate in things clearly viewed as elevating death, darkness, and the occult (King Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 17-20; 1 Corinthians 10:20)

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF PARTICIPATION

Recently, I have come across two articles that have been written with the intention of arguing for Christians to participate in Halloween festivities, at least to some degree³. The emphasis that both articles have is on generosity. They argue that Christians have the opportunity to be generous in their giving out of candy to those who come to their door, as a means of communicating the generosity of Christ in providing salvation.

Another argument is put forth that this is a unique opportunity where the mission field of your neighborhoods come knocking at your door. To ignore or disregard that opportunity would communicate our lack of desire to interact with our community.

A third argument includes the idea that Christians are called upon to be light in a dark world. Matthew 5:16 says to let our lights so shine before men, that they would see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. We are salt and light in this lost world, and it is important for us to shine the light of Christ into the darkness of the Halloween season.

Admittedly, there is some validity to aspects of each of these arguments. And that is what makes this whole discussion very difficult to be dogmatic about. Each Christian family may hold its own positions and choose to participate or not participate, but the position and subsequent decision should not be handled lightly and thoughtlessly. Wrestling through the various nuances and ramifications of any decision with regards to cultural elements is difficult.

CONCLUSION

It appears clear that the historical vestiges of Halloween have not been erased, nor smoothed over with cosmic “white out” allowing an overwhelming Christian emphasis to emerge. As much as the Christian church throughout history has sought to overpower the darkness of Halloween with the light of Christianity, this is one holiday that has not seemed to submit.

It is also clear that Jesus Christ wants us distinct from the world, though not isolated from the world. He prayed in John 17 that we would not be removed from the world, but kept and guarded from the evil one. The Christian responsibility is to determine in his own context whether or not participation in Halloween festivities in any way will be helpful or detrimental to his Christian testimony, and also to his own Christian affections.

³ <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-frankensteins-and-more>; <https://redeeminggod.com/3-reasons-christians-must-celebrate-halloween/>

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Decisions always have consequences. Decisions such as this should not be made lightly, nor without proper biblical, and even extra-biblical study. Bring truth to light on this important topic. Should you decide to participate in some way in Halloween festivities, be prepared to address various consequences, even unintended ones, that may accompany that decision. Should you decide to refrain from participation, be prepared to explain to your children the reasons, and prepare them for whatever ridicule or teasing may come their way.

Let me present an alternative to the celebration of Halloween. In 1517, a young Augustinian monk had been wrestling with various aspects and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. He had been reading his Bible, and come to some conclusions that he wanted to raise for public discussion. On October 31st of that year, he nailed 95 statements to the door of the church in hopes of discussing them in light of Scripture. He knew that others would see those statements as they went to church on All Saints Day. However, he did not realize that those statements would spark what is now called the Reformation Period. The man's name was Martin Luther. Luther's 95 statements (theses) were written for those in his own community, but word quickly reached the Pope of Luther's challenges to the Roman Catholic Church.

If you know your church history, you know that Luther converted from Roman Catholicism to true Christianity. He was saved through the reading and understanding of the true gospel, as Romans 1 and other passages communicated. For those in certain arenas of Christianity, October 31st is celebrated, not as Halloween, but as Reformation Day. This day changed the course of Christian history for the good of the church, and for the glory of God. There is nothing occultic or dark about this celebration. I commend it to you for consideration.