

Halloween In Perspective

Introduction. In a few days, our dark neighborhood streets will be flooded with candy-starved children dressed up as cartoon characters, sports figures, movie stars, witches, ghosts, and goblins. How did this strange activity begin, what does it represent, and should Christians participate in its customs?

I. *The Origins Of Halloween*

- A. There is little agreement as to the "true" origin of Halloween. There is so much folklore, myth, and tradition involved, that the true origins of this festival are difficult to determine. It is thought that the origin of Halloween goes back to 2,000 B.C. to a practice of the ancient Druids in Britain, France, Germany, and the Celtic countries. The celebration honored their god Samhain, lord of the dead. The Celtic people considered November 1st as the day of death because it was their end of autumn and beginning of winter.
- B. The Druids believed that on this particular evening the spirits of the dead returned to their former home to visit the living in search of bodies to possess for the next year. It was their only hope for the afterlife. The Celts believed all laws of space and time were suspended during this time, allowing the spirit and living world to intermingle.
- C. Naturally, the living did not want to be possessed, so on the night of October 31st, the Celts wore animal skins and animal heads to hide from these evil spirits, and Druid priests sacrificed to appease the spirits. Villagers would extinguish the fires in their homes in order to make them cold and undesirable. They left food for the goblins at the edge of town, hoping that these "otherworld" creatures would take the food and leave.
- D. As with other holidays, the Catholics attempted to appease the pagans by incorporating it into the church. "All Hallow's Eve" refers to the night before the religious holy day called "All Saints Day." Catholics originally observed "All Saints Day" on May 13th but this festival was transferred in 835 to November 1st. While Catholics began the practice of setting aside days to honor particular departed "saints," they started to have more martyrs than could be commemorated in the days of the year. As a result, they picked "All Saint's Day" as a day when they would honor all "saints" and martyrs everywhere who had performed great acts of faith and service.
- E. Halloween was not widely observed in America until the potato famine of Ireland brought Irish immigrants to the new world around 1840. With them came tales of elves, fairies, and spirits (both good and

bad). More of our Halloween tradition comes from Irish folklore than anywhere else.

1. In Ireland, large turnips would be carved as lanterns, evolving into the pumpkin carvings of jack-o'-lanterns in America.
 - a) Some myths claim that jack-o'-lanterns were used by the Europeans to either scare away demons or to house the spirits of the deceased.
 - b) There was also a popular story of a man named Jack, who tricked the devil and was forced to live in a pumpkin for eternity.
 - c) Keep in mind however, that pumpkins were a new world product. The turnips were simply a "poor man's lantern" in Ireland.
2. Trick-or-treating resembles the late medieval practice of souling, when poor people would go door to door on All Saints Day (November 1), receiving food in return for prayers for the dead on All Souls Day (November 2). By the late 1800's, so much crime was connected with Halloween that trick or treating was discouraged, and schools and churches were encouraged to arrange parties instead. The gore was dropped and the festival took on more of a family harvest theme. With this, Halloween became secular and the religious connotations were dropped.
3. Starting with the 1930s, Halloween again began to resume the traditions of trick or treating, mischief, etc., but this time without the religious background. In many communities, the emphasis is still on the fall harvest, and many groups have "fall carnivals" rather than "Halloween carnivals."
4. Today, Halloween is the second largest selling holiday, amounting to more than 2.5 billion dollars in yearly sales.

II. **Guidelines For Today**

- A. Halloween has been associated with the occult throughout its history, and to a degree that stigma still exists today.
 1. The word "occult" is derived from the Latin *occultus*, which means "hidden, secret or mysterious." It almost always has to do with the spiritual, unseen world, the world where the devil and demons supposedly hold sway and bear influence.
 2. Because of this tie-in with the occult, some mistakenly believe that Halloween is Satan's birthday, and the day that witches celebrate above all others. It is believed that Satan and his witches have their greatest power on this night.
- B. "Witchcraft" is a title commonly linked with those in league with evil spirits and their practices.
 1. The Old Testament mentions witchcraft and sorcery several times. It is always mentioned in a negative, condemning way (Exodus

- 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:9-14; 1 Samuel 15:23; 28:3, 9; 2 Kings 9:22; 23:24; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Isaiah 8:19; Micah 5:12; Nahum 3:4).
2. The New Testament speaks of witchcraft and sorcery too, but not as much. It is condemned when spoken of as well (Acts 8:9, 11; 19:18-19; Galatians 5:20; Revelation 9:20-21; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15).
 3. It is quite plain from the scriptures that anything related to this system is a "work of the flesh" and Christians should not have any contact with it, not because there is any power in a seance, ouija board, or black magic, but because it is a successful tool of the devil in drawing one away from God and encouraging one to put their trust in something other than God.
- C. Halloween is now largely considered a secular holiday. Like any other day, one can make it what they wish. Some believe that they should not participate in Halloween. Others have concluded that they can celebrate it without its darker overtones (cf. Romans 14:5).
- D. There are a few principles that we need to be reminded of as Halloween approaches.
1. God hates violence (Psalm 11:5). Of all the sins that could have been mentioned, God only recorded two reasons for destroying man by the Flood, and one of those reasons was violence (Genesis 6:13). Much of Halloween is based on making light of horrifically violent acts. Do not use Halloween as a night to poke fun at or be entertained by something that God hates.
 - a) Halloween may not be Satanic in and of itself, but allowing our children to dress up as murderers and characters from slasher films is inappropriate.
 - b) We all like a good scare once in a while, but we must be careful that we are not desensitizing our children by exposure to violence.
 2. You are to flee from Satan and have nothing to do with him. God commands you to resist the devil (James 4:7), not celebrate him. It is God's desire to transmit His glory to the world through His children (Matthew 5:13-16; 2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Peter 2:9).
 - a) I have heard of college-age Christians who put on a haunted house and painted "Satan Rules" and "666" all over the walls. We are not exempt from 1 Thessalonians 5:22 on any night, including Halloween.
 - b) Dressing up as a devil or a demon pokes fun at something we need to respect because of his danger (1 Peter 5:8). It also humanizes the devil, making him seem far less dangerous.

3. Over the last several years, costumes, particularly for teenaged girls, have become downright immodest and ungodly. A recent movie indicated that girls had one night to dress trashy with impunity: Halloween. God is not pleased with immodesty (1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:1-4).
4. Finally, young people must remember the "Golden Rule" at Halloween as at any other time, and refrain from any kind of "tricking" at the expense of others (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31), such as eggings and "rollings" of property.

Conclusion. A good rule of thumb as to whether a Christian can participate in any activity, recreation, sport, or holiday is the words of Paul (Philippians 4:8). Can I participate in a way that will let me pursue what is noble and think pure thoughts? If not, then I should refrain.

We can actually use these holidays as times to be good examples of what is proper religiously by leaving out the religious aspects. Do you not think these times could actually generate opportunities for us to teach the lost the truth of God's word?