



A Pastoral Perspective on Halloween

As you know, Halloween is quickly approaching. Not only are schools, households, and communities stocking up on candy to pass out, but they are also gathering costumes and decorations that represent characters ranging from cute Disney princesses all the way to gruesome witches and vampires. You may be wondering if Christians should celebrate Halloween or whether you should permit your children to participate in the festivities. Here at RBF, we want to inform you of the background of Halloween and guide you toward developing a Christian response.

The Origins of Halloween

The celebration of Halloween originated as a Christian festival in Europe that later became mixed with pagan and superstitious rituals. The early Christian church established “All Saints’ Day” as a remembrance of the church’s martyrs. “All Hallows Eve,” the evening before “All Saints’ Day,” commenced the remembrance. We get the name “Halloween” from the contraction of “All Hallows Eve” into “Hallow-e’en.” As Christianity spread throughout Europe, the celebration of Halloween was confronted with many competing pagan holidays and festivals. For example, the Celtic people of Europe, who were pagan Druids, celebrated their Samhain (pronounced “sow-en”) festival from October 31 to November 2. Instead of countering these pagan beliefs and providing a Christian alternative, “All Hallows Eve” simply became a way of “Christianizing” the pagan Samhain festival. In this way, the festival remained pagan, but with some Christian symbolism.

The Samhain festival marked the final harvest and beginning of winter. The Celts believed that the division between the living and the dead lifted during Samhain, so that the spirits of the dead could walk among the living. Due to this belief, some engaged in divination and communication with dead spirits regarding expectations for the new year. Others, inspired by superstition and fear of death and haunting spirits, would send away the deadly spirits with possessions, food, and drink, believing their treat would ward off the spirits who haunted them. They also believed the spirits would trick them, if treated unsuitably. Despite the dark, superstitious practices of Samhain, the festival was also a time for revelry, where young people would collect food and drinks from houses for parties.

Halloween became an American holiday in the late 19th century, after the arrival of immigrants to the States from the British Isles. It attracted many young Americans, who borrowed some of its customs without adapting all of its pagan and superstitious origins. Some of these customs include the practice of “trick-or-treat” and dressing up as fictional characters (demons, witches, monsters, vampires, mummies, ghosts, etc.).

A Christian Response to Halloween

Today, most Americans do not associate Halloween with its original pagan rituals. However, it is still a day where many children and youth dress up in spooky costumes while adults participate in acts of drunkenness and debauchery. Of course, some may not choose to participate in this way and may dress up as friendly characters merely to gather candy in their neighborhood. But knowing the background of Halloween and the popular ways of celebrating Halloween today, how should Christians respond?



1. Christians should not respond to or follow the superstitions and pagan practices of the Samhain festival. Deuteronomy 18:10-13 says, “There should not be found among you...anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord.”
2. Christians can live in light of what Christ accomplished when confronted with superstitious and pagan beliefs. According to Colossians 2:15, Jesus Christ has victory and has triumphed over demonic rulers and authorities. Therefore, a Christian can trust in Christ’s authority over evil spirits and have freedom from threats and fears that arise from superstitions.
3. Whether or not a person decides to participate in Halloween activities is a matter of conscience before God.
 - a. Some people may wish to participate in Halloween because it is fun to dress up with friends, get candy together, and socialize. With the knowledge that candy, costumes, and community are God’s provisions, and not evil in themselves, Christians have the liberty to participate in gatherings during Halloween because “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). However, when a Christian freely participates in Halloween, it is important to dress up and participate in ways that honor the Lord by keeping oneself from being polluted by the world and by setting oneself apart as holy (James 1:27; 1 Peter 1:14-16) Today, the concerns that arise during Halloween may have to do less with superstitions and divination, but more so (among teenagers and adults) with drunkenness, debauchery, pranks, and vandalism.

It is also important to participate in a way that does not discredit one’s calling as a witness and ambassador of the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). Halloween can be a wonderful opportunity for Christians to be present among people and show mercy and love to non-believers that may live with fear of death and unbelief towards their Creator.

If a Christian participates in Halloween activities, this does not mean that he or she is following Satan and evil spirits. There is freedom in Jesus Christ to dress up and get candy on Halloween, but one should practice freedom with godly wisdom by participating in ways that honor the Lord, avoid sinful behavior, and protect children from lack of supervision.

- b. Knowing the origin of Halloween, other Christians may be convicted or will perceive that their participation in Halloween is associated with superstitions, divination, and immoral behavior. If so, he or she must listen to his or her conscience and flee from the things that are not holy to God, just as Paul taught the Corinthians to flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14). Paul’s teaching regarding food sacrificed to idols is helpful as you consider your Christian response to Halloween. For further reading, take a look at 1 Corinthians 8-10.



Questions to Ask Yourself

As you consider whether or not to participate in Halloween, here are some questions that you can ask yourself.

1. If I participate in Halloween, will I cause myself to stumble into sin?
2. If I participate in Halloween, will I be acting in ways that hinder the gospel?
3. If I participate in Halloween, will I cause other Christians to stumble into sin?
4. If I do not participate in Halloween, am I judging my brothers and sisters who are participating?
5. For children and youth: Did I ask my parent's permission to participate in Halloween? Am I obeying them?
6. For parents: Are we explaining to our children our approach to Halloween?

Additional Reading

For additional reading from a Christian perspective on the topic of Halloween, consider the following articles:

1. Allen, Travis. "Christians and Halloween." Grace to You.
<http://www.gty.org/resources/Articles/A123#.Tp3W9Jwu40M> (accessed November 30, 2011).
2. Challies, Tim. "Halloween – Trick or Retreat?" <http://www.challies.com/articles/halloween-trick-or-retreat> (accessed November 30, 2011).