

# Halloween

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Each year, as the last day of October nears, members of God's church begin making plans to avoid Halloween. Some plan a trip to the local mall to do some shopping, even though the malls teem with kids and their parents trick-or-treating. Others hope to escape to the movie theater to watch whatever happens to be in distribution at the time. A few seek out various other amusements from miniature golf to autumnal carnivals. Those of us with either less imagination or less motivation simply make ourselves appear to be somewhere else, putting the car in the garage, turning off all the lights at the front of the house, and creeping around on tiptoe so that no sound gives away our presence.

These plans coincide with a feeling of resigned dread that the holiday season—now stretching from mid-October to early-January—is upon us. We used to catch a break between the Feast of Tabernacles and the annoyances of the Christmas season, but no longer. Halloween has just become too big for kids, partygoers, and retailers alike, to pass over so easily.

Each year, roughly 65-70% of adults participate in Halloween, which includes wearing a costume. About 80% of households distribute treats to an average of 37 trick-or-treaters, and sadly, despite their best intentions, 7% of children eat all their candy on the first night.

In terms of retail sales, Halloween is second only to Christmas. Americans spend over \$3 billion on Halloween items and activities, with nearly \$2 billion spent on candy and the rest on costumes, decorations, and party favors. The average household shells out an average of \$81 to celebrate this evening, mostly on candy and decorations.

As a party day, Halloween is third behind Christmas and Super Bowl Sunday. Bottlers sell more beer around Halloween than around Saint Patrick's Day, when the beer flows like water. In many ways, Halloween is becoming a favorite of adults across America, a time when they can shed their inhibitions behind a mask and costume.

Many professing Christians have considered Halloween to be innocuous, an evening of innocent fun. However, there is a great deal more to this holiday than darling children dressed in cute costumes shouting for candy at the neighbors' doors. Once the facts are known, no sound argument justifies Christians observing this most unchristian holiday—an unholy mixture of rank consumerism with outright paganism, occultism, vandalism, hedonism, and demonism.

## Foundational Principles

Jeremiah 10:1-5 reveals a principle that we need to consider in terms of Halloween. The context is the heathen practice of idolatry. In this sense, it is ironic that Halloween comes primarily from the Celts, descendants of the Israelites.

Hear the word which the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the Lord: "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are futile [vain, worthless]; for one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax.

They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple. They are upright, like a palm tree, and they cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor can they do any good."

God commands us not to learn the way of the Gentiles, the nations who do not have the revelation of God. The Israelites were different from all the nations chiefly because God had revealed Himself to them and given them His law (Deuteronomy 4:5-8; Amos 3:1-2). The Gentiles invented their own futile, meaningless ways of worship because they did not have the truth.

This is the first reason why we should not keep Halloween. It adds nothing good, that is, nothing of God or godliness, to our character. Being devoid of God's truth, it is simply worthless and a waste of time.

Deuteronomy 12:29-32 provides a second reason to avoid Halloween. God says this to Israel just before they entered the Promised Land:

When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise." You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

Halloween is a custom of the nations. God Himself calls such things abominations, practices that He hates. If we strip away its façade of revelry and feasting, it is idolatrous false worship, honoring spirit beings that are not God. In addition, God never tells us to celebrate this day or in any way to honor the spirits of the dead.

Notice that He warns us not to be "ensnared to follow" the practices of the nations. A snare is a trap designed to catch an unwary animal. The trap itself is hidden, but what is visible is a kind of lure, an attractive trick designed to fool the prey into entering the trap. Once it takes the bait, the gate comes down, a hook comes out, or a spring slams closed on a limb, and it is trapped.

God is alerting us to the fact that heathen or ungodly practices—customs, ways of worship, traditions, celebrations—usually have characteristics that appeal to our human nature. They are the lures. We can become caught up in them before we are aware of it. God advises us to watch out for the hidden dangers, the appealing entrapments, that are designed into these holidays.

## **Halloween's Origins**

Many cultures have a form of Halloween in their tradition. It seems that most of this world's peoples desire to celebrate the dead. The holidays or feasts may vary from place to place, falling on different days and following different customs. The common denominator is that they all honor or remember the dead or unseen spirits.

Mexico has its "Day of the Dead" in which participants give out candies in the shape of skeletons and visit graveyards to commune with the dead by leaving them food. In Japan, they honor their ancestors with various celebrations. Certain African tribes set aside days to honor the unseen spirits, warding off the evil ones and placating the good. German, Scandinavian, Spanish, Italian, and many other cultures have a Halloween-type holiday.

In English-speaking countries, Halloween derives primarily from the Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced "sow-in"). Samhain, held on the three days around November 1, was a kind of New Year's celebration and harvest festival all rolled up into one.

The Celts believed that these three days were special because of the transition from the old year to the new. They felt that during this time the boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds relaxed or lifted, allowing spirits to cross over more easily. This idea, of course, terrifies superstitious people—that departed spirits could walk among us, especially those who died in the past year as it was thought these spirits desired to return to the mortal realm. For this reason, they believed they had to appease the spirits to make them go into the spirit world and stay there.

The Celts did this by putting out food and treats so that, when these spirits came floating by their houses, they would pass on. They thought that, if they did not appease the spirits, they would play tricks or put curses on them. Whole villages would unite to drive away the evil spirits, ensuring that the upcoming year would be good. Others among them would hold séances or conduct other kinds of divination by incantation, potion, or trance to contact dead ancestors in hope of receiving guidance and inspiration.

An interesting aspect of this transition time—the three days of Samhain—is that it was considered to be "no time," a time unto itself. Thus, it became a tradition that the order and the rules by which people lived were held in abeyance during them.

All laws went unenforced. The social order was turned upside-down—the fool became king, and the king became the fool. Men dressed as women and vice-versa. People took on different personas, dressing in disguise and acting the part. No work was done during this period of total abandon, for it was a time for revelry, drinking, eating, making and taking dares, and breaking the law. In a word, it was chaos.

Then Roman Catholicism arrived on the scene and "converted" the pagans. It also decreed a day to honor departed saints: May 13, All Saints' Day. The priests instructed the "converted" pagans to keep All Saints' Day, but they continued to celebrate Samhain because it was so much more fun than attending church to pray for the hallowed saints of yesteryear.

To keep them in the fold, in AD 835 Pope Gregory IV officially authorized moving All Saints' Day to November 1 to coincide with Samhain. He allowed the pagan "Christians" to keep their old customs as long as they put a gloss of Christianity on them. Thus, they kept Samhain in the name of Christ to honor the departed saints.

Like Samhain, All Saints' Day began the evening before, which was called All Hallows' Eve, All Saints' Eve, or Halloween. Since then, Halloween has evolved into its present form, in which nothing

remotely Christian remains. It is known for all its pre-Christian Celtic practices—particularly the recognition of the spirit world in the form of fairies, witches, ogres, goblins, demons, ghouls, vampires, etc.

Today, "trick-or-treating" is the most recognized of Halloween activities, and it is simply a form of extortion. Children, whether they know it or not, are acting as the spirits who will play a trick or put a curse on the one who does not pay up in food or treats. Divination and séances are also commonly held on October 31. Finally, Hooliganism—tricks resulting in vandalism—often reaches its high point on Halloween. For many years, Detroit was the scene of "hell night," in which rampaging young people trashed large areas of the city, setting fires, smashing cars and windows, looting, and generally creating havoc.

The Celtic feast of Samhain still survives in Halloween. It has simply reverted to our ancestors' Celtic practice.

### **Simple Idolatry**

The Bible plainly denounces all of these practices in many places. For instance, God forbids spiritism, witchcraft, and the occult in numerous passages. Notice Deuteronomy 18:10-12:

There shall not be found among you anyone . . . 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 [a necromancer]. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives [the heathen] out from before you.

God considers these things to be idolatrous; they honor demonic spirits, and thus He calls them abominations or detestable things, things that He hates. Interestingly, He says these practices are a reason why He sent Israel in to dispossess these people. We do not want to practice customs that ultimately bring on God's wrath and destruction.

In Leviticus 20:6, God likens spiritism to prostitution, the physical counterpart to spiritual prostitution, idolatry. To God, witchcraft and occultism are similar to sexual immorality, but one is physical and the other is spiritual. Which is worse—physical or spiritual prostitution? Both defile the purity God desires in our flesh and in our spirit (II Corinthians 7:1). This linking of spiritism with sexual sins and idolatry occurs elsewhere (Exodus 22:16-20; I Samuel 15:22-23). Witchcraft is equated with them because it is both prostitution and idolatry.

When a Christian meddles in spiritism of any kind, whether witchcraft, sorcery, divination, consulting a medium or fortune-teller, or even reading a horoscope, he undermines his relationship with God—just as a man who visits a prostitute damages his relationship with his wife. Someone else is coming between the two covenanted parties, causing division. Occultism puts a wedge between God and the Christian; he might as well bow to an idol. It produces the same result: to drive him away from God.

The New Testament takes the same approach as the Old:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, . . . of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told

you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.  
(Galatians 5:19-21)

The apostle Paul speaks of adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and licentiousness—all with at least overtones of sexuality—then he mentions idolatry and immediately thereafter sorcery! It cannot be just a coincidence that they all fall in this order. Those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God because they are not fulfilling their covenant with God.

"Sorcery," intriguingly, is *pharmakeia* in Greek, from which we derive our words "pharmacy" and "pharmaceutical." Diviners, enchanter, witches, and sorcerers employed drugs and other potions to put them or their clients "in the spirit" so their "magic" would work. The drugs, then, came to stand for sorcery of all kinds. For the same reason, drug use is part of the celebration among the more serious Halloween devotees today.

The Bible's teaching on this is consistent. Spiritism, the occult, is a form of idolatry, a kind of spiritual prostitution. Its end is separation from God and eventual destruction.

Paul writes in Ephesians 5:8-13:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), proving what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light.

God's truth shines on ungodly practices and exposes them for the darkness and evil they are. This is why all we need to know which is the one right and good way, because the light that shines from them will expose the unfruitful works of darkness and give us wisdom in how we should behave.

We were once dead in our sins, living in darkness, asleep to the things of God. Now, however, God has revealed His truth to us, and the truth in turn has revealed the evils of Halloween and spiritism of every kind.