



Throughout history Christians have struggled to discern their posture in response to the negative, and even sometimes, evil influences of modern culture – seeking to be light in the darkness. In the last few decades Christians have become increasingly aware of a subtle deception taking place. While many parents have previously thought nothing of letting their children participate in the seemingly benign celebration of Halloween, the progressive decline of our culture has awakened the need for further inspection and spiritual insight on the subject. The following is a brief overview of Halloween and an encouragement for those who consider themselves Christians to possibly rethink their perspective, posture and practice.

OUR PERSPECTIVE

The History of Halloween

Rooted in the ancient pagan calendar celebration that divided summer and winter, Halloween began when the Druids (a pre-Christian religious order of pagan priests from the ancient Celts of what is now Britain, Ireland and France), established “fire festivals” to sacrifice to their pagan gods and celebrate the “Witches’ New Year.” The Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced sah-ween) commemorated the dawn of winter and it was on this night, according to pagan lore, the veil between the present world and the world beyond was pierced. The Druids believed Samhain, the *Lord of Death*, released evil spirits abroad to attack humans who could only escape by disguising themselves as a variety of evil manifestations (ex. ghosts, goblins, elves, devils, witches, etc.). According to the Druids, the waning of summer and emergence of winter made the evil spirits rejoice and play nasty tricks on people. This is where we get the modern practice of dressing up and saying, "Trick or Treat?" on Halloween.

Halloween traditions and celebrations have continued throughout the ages. Bonfires were said to deter evil spirits, as were carved turnips. Later, due to a disastrous turnip crop and the fact that pumpkins were native to America, this now widely-known substitution was made. These “lanterns” represented “night watchmen” and were believed to ward off evil spirits. Halloween was thought to be the most favorable time for incantations, divinations, spells, curses and other acts of the occult. Halloween was also thought to be the only day of the year where many felt freedom to invoke the help of Satan himself for answers to life. Practitioners of Satanism, witchcraft, divination and other demonic activities all believe Halloween to be a “high *holy* day.”

The Early Church’s Response

In direct response to the Druid celebration of Samhain, the world-wide Church moved a festival known as "All Saint's Day" from May to November 1st and renamed it "All Hallow's Eve" (from which came the name Halloween). All Saint's Day originated in the 4th century and was a celebration of thankfulness to God for His people - both living and dead. It was a time

of remembrance, reflection and hope. The original goal of moving All Saint's Day was to *infiltrate* the pagan religious holiday of Samhain and highlight the power of Jesus Christ over all other powers. It was to proclaim that only Jesus could protect people from the wickedness of Satan - not turnips, pumpkins, masquerades or sacrifices.

The *Christianizing*, or redeeming, of worldly activities is nothing new, yet the success of such practices could be up for debate. The desire to infiltrate the darkness rather than hiding from it is one of the marks of mature Christianity, yet, how do we respond to cultural activities that flow from pagan roots? Do we hide from them, ignore them, merge with them, attack them or cover them up with "seasonal fun"?

OUR POSTURE

Halloween Today

Over time Christians have completely forgotten about All Saint's Day and seemingly embraced a "modified" observation of Samhain in its place. It is time to return to a place of light-bearing.

In order to determine a tangible posture to Halloween there must come a unity and agreement among believers as to the fundamental truths regarding Halloween, paganism, Christianity and the interaction between them, based on the Word and Spirit of God. *Prayerfully* consider the following:

1. ***The origins of Halloween are clearly wicked.*** No one can deny the fact that the Druids were pagans who worshiped evil gods. Much of the modern practices of witchcraft, the occult, and the New Age movement have their roots in Druid practices. The original intent and practice of what we now call Halloween was and is evil.
2. ***Christianizing something doesn't change it.*** There is a difference between "Christianizing" (changing the *moral* effect) and becoming a new creature in Christ (changing something in its entirety). Taking the practice of Halloween and Christianizing it (dressing up as a Bible character rather than a ghost, for example) seems appropriate, yet, it cannot change the nature of Halloween – it is fundamentally a pagan celebration.
3. ***Christians are in the world, but not to be of the world (John 17:15-19).*** Outside of death, there is no leaving the world around us until the glorious day that Jesus returns. Some have tried to escape the wickedness of the world by *hiding* in mountain monasteries, retreats, etc., only to discover the problem has remained while they were gone. As Christians, we are supposed to be a peculiar people and should not be afraid to be peculiar in the eyes of our friends, family and neighbors. We are not supposed to be like the world; and we don't love or imitate the things of this world (I John 2:15).
4. ***Christians are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14).*** The only hope of illuminating the darkness and freeing those lost in it, is found in Christians who understand their purpose in life - to speak and practice the Good News and make

disciples in Jesus' name. Christians must be an example and *contrast* Halloween in beliefs *and* actions.

5. We are devoted to Christ, not bound by legalism (Colossians 2:9-3:17). The decisions we make regarding Halloween need to be based on our commitment to Christ and not a *religious obligation*. Whatever we do regarding Halloween needs to be **for the glory of God and His love for people**. Here are some common motivations for celebrating Halloween:

- Fear (“What will others think if I *don't* celebrate Halloween?”)
- Pride (“I don't care what others think of whether or not I celebrate Halloween!”)
- Indifference (“I know the origins and evil surrounding Halloween. It's just not important to me.”)

Have we lost our focus on becoming more like Jesus? In Him there is **no** fear, pride or indifference.

6. We are not to participate in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness (Ephesians 5:8-20). The definition of “participate” is to identify with, associate with or resemble something. Kinda' sounds like fellowship, huh!? Again, as Christians we're supposed to know better than to *fellowship* (identify) with darkness - we are to be lights in it!

7. We send a signal to our children when we fear offending them or any anyone else more than obeying God (Acts 4:19). Some parents make decisions regarding Halloween based on *emotional* concerns (“I can't stop my kids from participating in Halloween. They'll be crushed!”) instead of discernment from the Bible and the Holy Spirit. We are to raise our children in the fear of the Lord, not the culture around us, and teach them to view Halloween for what it is (a not-so innocent festival devoted to witchcraft).

October 31st is a great opportunity to touch those who live in our communities with the light of the Good News. We can't hide our children from Halloween (nor the world for that matter), but we can *equip* them to live obediently at all times with a heart for the lost. Trying to shelter our children from Halloween or judging those who participate in Halloween is not the answer.

The Bottom Line: So then, what do we do during Halloween?

The real question is what would Jesus do during Halloween? Consider the following:

- ☛ Jesus stood as a light in the darkness. He was a total contrast to the world around Him ...and we need to have the same *peculiar* character.
- ☛ Jesus hung out with sinners. He was scolded more than once by religious leaders for eating with Gentiles or talking to Samaritans. We need to have the same compassion *without* compromising our faith.
- ☛ Jesus made disciples for God's Kingdom. He was clear with His disciples regarding which Kingdom they should serve. We need to do the same with our children.

- ☛ Jesus engaged in spiritual warfare. He confronted and cast out powers of darkness. We need to do the same - with prayer, fasting and intercession.
- ☛ Jesus never missed an opportunity to extend His Father's Kingdom. He took every opportunity to proclaim and explain salvation in and through Him. We need to view Halloween with the same attitude - an opportunity to reach people with the light of the Good News.
- ☛ Jesus always spoke the truth in love. He preached the need for repentance with a heart of compassion. We need to stand up for righteousness with the truth of God's Word and a broken heart – this is how we reach the world around us for His glory.

Walking it Out

Each year my own kids ask, “What are we doing this year for Halloween?” They knew we weren’t going door to door, but they also didn’t know what dad had *concocted* as an alternative. By following Jesus' example each of us can make it through any circumstance in life. However the practical "real-life" application of living out Biblical truths demands a bit more than a quick investigation on Halloween and is often even more difficult to define. The following questions and answers could help some determine what God desires for His children/disciples when facing such practices as Halloween.

Q. Should my kids participate in Halloween activities at school?

A. For what purpose would we allow a child to celebrate (participate in) a festival involving spiritual darkness, ghosts, goblins, witches, death and the occult? Many schools want us to believe Halloween is simply a "harvest festival" or innocent celebration. Even with the attempt to mask the origins and components of Halloween, it remains the same dark celebration. If we are to hold to this conviction, however, we must teach our children how to disagree without being *disagreeable*. We don’t condemn others for not sharing in a conviction. We influence with love and truth.

Q. Is it okay for my kids to dress up as long as the costume is not evil?

A. Though most “dressing up” is done with innocent motives, it is important to consider the original purpose and message of Halloween costumes when making this decision: fear of spiritual darkness and the demonic, forced a person to masquerade as something other than themselves to appease the Lord of Death. The bigger question is... What are your motivations?

Q. What about churches that have “Haunted House” or “Fright Night Parties?”

A: Any church claiming to be Christian while presenting such activities is ignorant of the origin and intent of Halloween. To encourage fear, darkness or *monstrous* death is not Biblical nor is it an example of God’s heart toward humanity and simply shows a lack of spiritual maturity.

Q. What if my kid’s grandparents or other relatives think I’m crazy for denying my children "a little Halloween fun"? I mean – come on, I did it!

A. Anyone, family or friend, who would encourage a child to participate in something that violates your convictions or breeds fear (in the name of candy) is not concerned with your child's emotional or spiritual well-being. You may want to tell them, **with love**, the truthful

origins of Halloween. Their views and opinions about Halloween shouldn't hinder your thoughtful parenting.

Q. How do I communicate to my kids who have participated in Halloween that they will no longer be doing so?

A. Our children look to us to be an example of Jesus. By explaining to them our newfound understanding of Halloween as something that doesn't glorify God and that we will no longer participate in it *as we did before*, we teach them repentance – turning from behavior that is contrary to God's truth to pursue Him and His purposes. This is huge because repentance is where a relationship with Jesus begins, and is maintained.

Q. What if I still think its OK for me or my children to participate in some of the more innocent activities of Halloween such as "trick-or-treating" or school costume parties?

A. God gave all of us the free will to choose what we believe. As you consider your choices, evaluate the "innocence" of trick-or-treating or costume parties based on what we now know regarding Halloween. Also, look at the motives for your decision-making. Are they marked by any of the following?

- Fear ("What will others think if I *don't* celebrate Halloween?")
- Pressure ("Everybody on our street really get's into it!")
- Rebellion ("Nobody is gonna tell me what to do!")

Q. Is it OK to have parties on Halloween to give our children something to do?

A. The question is not whether parties on Halloween are appropriate, but *what is the purpose for having a party on Halloween?* If it is to simply satisfy our fear of being rejected or to hide from the worldly activities around us, we're missing the *opportunity* not only to be peculiar but to reach people with the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ through replacement practices (see "Our Practice" section in this reader).

Q. So what CAN I DO on Halloween? How can I reach people on such a dark night?

A. The positive side of Halloween is that people are looking for something to do and it is virtually the only occasion that brings people to the doorsteps of our homes without much effort on our part. Name another "holiday" that brings strangers desiring to interact with you on your porch? By providing a physically and spiritually peculiar place on Halloween we can attract those seeking truth and discourage those seeking only mayhem.

OUR PRACTICE

Light Night

A safe place in the neighborhood is always a vital need in every community. With the disintegrating values of our society, each year finds more and more people/kids looking to be found playing the "trick" rather than receiving the "treat." In this *mischief* we have more and more parents looking for a safe place to participate in what they would consider the "good" side of Halloween... THE CANDY!

There are many different possible *replacement practices* on October 31st. What if Christians were to offer several alternatives? Here are some examples (though there are possibly many more!):

- ✦ **STAYING AT HOME:** Be hospitable to your neighborhood. While waiting for trick-or-treaters, pray with your family for the neighborhood and community as a whole, and for the safety of children on the street that night. Other ideas for the night on the home-front could include the following:
 - Turn on every light in the house allowing your home to be a *symbol* of a light in the midst of darkness.
 - Make it a goal to either give out the best, the biggest, or the most candy of any home on your block as a witness of peculiarity.
 - Include with the "treats" a simple message about God's love and Jesus. I've had one family create their own personal tract, another handed out invitations to church to those they personally knew.
 - Give out candy that has double meaning and serves as your family's prayer for each person it is given to. Here are a couple of examples:
 - *3 Musketeer* candy bars: When giving them out say, "All for One, One for all!" What you are subtly praying is that they would discover that that Jesus' death and resurrection, as "one" sacrifice, covered the sins for "all."
 - *Lifesaver* candies: When giving them out ask, "Who wants a lifesaver?" What you are subtly praying is that they would discover that Jesus is their "lifesaver" and has saved their life through His death and resurrection.
 - Involve your own children. Have your kids at the door handing out the candy. When they open the door to friends, they can be ready with an answer (loving and truthful) as to why they were not out on the streets. Several times it opened the door to further conversations on the playground in the following days (*and a number of invitations to church as well* ☺).

- ✦ **GATHER WITH FRIENDS:** Strategically pick a family to partner with in a small gathering for fun and relationship. It could include:
 - Meet together with friends to bring a concentrated prayer focus in a neighborhood; praying for each other and for the safety of those coming to the door, and binding the works of darkness in your community.
 - Encourage families to gather at homes on Halloween and throw a type of "block party." Rent a bounce house. Project a movie on the garage door. Have games for your neighbors. Offer hot coffee to-go, or pass out water bottles to parents walking their kids.
 - Throw a themed party with another Christian family and invite some *friendly religious skeptics* over for a "fiesta" or "50's" night of fun. Let a dialogue naturally begin about your "friends from church." Allow seeds to be planted. *Remember:* a conversion always begins with a conversation.
 - Play a board or card game. This opens the door to a "get-to-know-one-another" evening of funny stories, dreams and life accounts.
 - With any gathering make sure to take the time to pray for the snacks or the meal and the safety of kids out on the streets. **NO ONE** objects to a prayer for children's safety on Halloween night.

- ☛ **GATHER THE COMMUNITY:** Some churches, including The Sanctuary, have created “the place to be” on Halloween. It takes significant resources to really pull this off, and it can be done! Through the use of invitations, game booths, prizes, candy, activities for all ages, food, and raffles, some churches have, essentially, made large carnival-like environments. One of the keys to success in an event of this kind is to be sure that every Christian family that attends brings, or at least invites, an unchurched family as well. At the event, volunteers not only help to facilitate, but also pray for the community and the safety of children on the street that night.

The final question in this widely-debated subject could very well be...

Is God concerned about Halloween?

I think He is ... because He loves lost people (John 3:16)!

So let's be light to a dark night by seizing the opportunity to be His reaching hand to families in our neighborhoods and communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Marty Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Marty Walker
The Sanctuary 2013

** Special thanks to Pastor Rick Allen for his teachings on Halloween and our response to it!*