

# Handling Halloween

OCTOBER 30, 2011



I want to talk about Halloween.

Did you notice the Arktoberfest ad on the front of the church that says, "Halloween at His Place"? I know some of you did! We've had both positive and negative reactions for using *that* word. Halloween is *definitely* a top disputable matter among believers.

In Romans 14, Paul addresses the *disputable matter* of eating meat previously sacrificed to pagan gods. Some saw nothing wrong with the low priced meat; others saw it as a compromise of their faith. And because shady butchers would present sacrificed meat as un-sacrificed (to sell it for a better price), the *hardliners* avoided meat altogether and condemned those who didn't.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? - *Romans 14:1-4 NIV*

We need to be sensitive to the huge spectrum of approaches that believers take in regard to celebrating Halloween. For instance ...



How many of you don't like evil looking Jack-O-Lanterns? What if it looks friendly? What if it's funny? What if it has a puppy *in* it (instead of a face carved *on* it)? What if it's Jesus?

There's no one-size-fits-all approach. Hopefully, we start with the same Biblical principles, but then we add in our background, our convictions, and our taste (or lack thereof). But there are some things we all need to be aware of in order to make the *wisest* choices for ourselves (and our families).

Did you notice that Paul said: "[the] man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables"? He considers the believer who refuses to eat what was used in a pagan ritual as being *weaker* in faith.

Now, we put *that word* on the church not out of weakness but boldness to reach out and relate to the un-churched, so they'll know we want 'em here on "the night of the unspeakable name." A friend asked why we didn't just put up something like *Harvest Carnival*. I said, "Because that would be weirdo." We're *Ambassadors* of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20); it's kind of important to speak their language!

Same friend asked if we were handing out tracks at Arktoberfest. I said, "Heavens no." I'm as likely to blindside people with tracks at Arktoberfest as I am taking a bucket of grain and chasing cows around a pasture! Even if they're hungry, you're gonna spook 'em!

A gentleman came in, having seen our banner, and gave me a Halloween track that he had written himself. Here's a quote:

What pastor ever consulted with the Spirit of the LORD GOD before announcing an October 31 *fun event* from the pulpit for the children of that church body? None; for if he had, no such *alternative celebration* for children of the Holy CHRIST JESUS would have come into his mind. Halloween is a pagan tradition and practice!

We need to talk about the "pagan origin" argument.



Basically it says, if I put a fun-size Twix bar into 3-year-old Tinker Bell's extruded plastic pumpkin, I'm condoning the pagan occult practices of the Celts, 2000 years ago. But, when you point out that "Halloween" *originally* meant "Holy" (Hallow) "Evening" (Een), they say "Yes, but we shouldn't use it because *nobody* knows *that*, and it means something *different* now." I don't think you can have it both ways and still call it logic.

And if you reject solely something because it has pagan origins, where do you draw the line? Cakes with candles come from Artemis, goddess of the moon. The planets are named after Roman gods. Weekdays are named after Norse gods. My Nikes are named after the Greek goddess of victory!

And there are other big problems: The ancient Romans historians, who falsely recorded that early Christians practiced cannibalism, child sacrifice, and ritual incest, also reported untruths about the Celts.

But we do know the Halloween trail leads back to the Celts who celebrated "Samhain" [SOW-in] which means "summer's end" (and wasn't the god of the underworld they made human sacrifices to).

And even though that's well-established historically, it's still reported in most of the anti-Halloween tracks.



The Celts worshiped nature ... and they used a pentagram as a fertility symbol ... and they were conquered by the Romans ... and the Roman feast of Pomona (fertility goddess of fruit trees) got all mixed in with Samhain when someone cut into an apple (Pomona's symbol) and found that the seed pocket looked like a pentagram ... and blah, blah, blah ... that's where we get bobbing for apples! It was similar to the fertility symbol we use at weddings: the Bride's bouquet. Whichever woman catches it (or gets the apple) was going to be the next to marry.



600 years later the Pope established All Saints Day to replace Samhain-Pomona-Feralia (don't ask). And those who refuse to celebrate, beginning on "Hallow 'Een" are labeled as witches.



And witches were thought to possess animals ... and the animal most likely to be chosen was the cat ... because it's nocturnal and it's *sneaky* ... and it prowls at night ... and black cats have the best camouflage ... and blah, blah, blah ... that's where we get bobbing for cats!



The church puts gargoyles on the cathedrals and holds parades with folks dressed as demons and angels to remind people of the evil in the world, and Christ's triumph over it, and the two eternal choices that must be made.



And the Irish bring it to America in the 1800's; and the Civil War ushers in the emphasis on ghosts; and in the 1920's the Boy Scouts counteract the hate crimes perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan on Halloween, by organizing trick-or-treating.

When you sift through the history, the myths, and the urban legends, you find a mixed bag of traditions from many sources.

So, how do we handle this mish-mash American secular holiday? The scripture often quoted to answer this is in 2nd Corinthians where Paul quotes Isaiah and Ezekiel:

"Therefore come out from them and be separate," says the Lord. "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." - 2 Corinthians 6:17 NIV

But, Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for violating both of these! As far as the "coming out and separating", he went to the parties with the worst of the sinners. And as far as the "touch no unclean thing", when the sinful woman wiped his feet with her hair, the Pharisee said if he knew her background, her origins, he would have nothing to do with her.

So what's going on? Two "worlds" are referred to in the NT. One we're called to love and embrace the other we're called to reject and hate.

1. The world's system ("Do not love the world" 1 John 2:15a)
2. The world's people ("For God so loved the world" John 3:16a)

We're called to reach out and relate to the world's people as Ambassadors of Christ, even as we reject the world's system. Jesus described this as being "in" but not "of" the world:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. – *John 17:15-16 NIV*

The Pharisees saw Jesus *in* the party and assumed this meant he was *of* the party. And instead of following his example, they arrogantly concluded that he was a boozier and a glutton. They weren't upset that Jesus *went* to the party; they were there too. But he *enjoyed* it! And they went to *spoil* it.

Don't shrink back. Don't wrinkle your nose. Don't fear. And don't imitate the world's system of dark values. But embrace those who do! Join the party and be a light in a dark place!



We can be in Halloween without being of Halloween.

This will play out differently for each of us, again depending on our backgrounds, convictions, and taste (or lack thereof). However, the enemy has some basic Halloween tricks that we should *all* beware of.

1. Masking our morals



Halloween is more sexualized, raunchy, and gory than ever. So use caution and Christian common sense. So ... Disguise your face but not your faith. When we're camouflaged it's easier to let down our guard, loosen our morals, and behave in ways we wouldn't consider as *ourselves*.

Be imitators of God ... Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness ...  
– *Ephesians 5:1;11*

What do your "deeds" communicate on Halloween? Be sensitive not to coerce someone into doing or watching something that violates *their* conscience: "C'mon, it's Halloween!"

2. Underestimating the enemy

We can walk a fine line between having fun with the things that frighten us, and being flippant and dismissive of real evil. The devil has been defeated (so we don't need to fear him), but not disempowered (so we shouldn't underestimate his desire and ability to exert his influence on us however he can). The Bible is clear on God's stance against dabbling in the occult. Ouija Boards; séances; palm reading; fortune telling may seem silly, but you're inviting something in that isn't of God.

### 3. Overreacting to our culture

When Tinker Bell says, “Trick or treat!” she’s not threatening to invoke demonic spirits unless you pay an unholy ransom. She’s just saying, “Look at me, I’m Tinker Bell ... now *gimme* some candy!”



Let your [porch] light shine before men, that they may see your good [and plenty] deeds and praise your Father in heaven. - *Matthew 5:16 NIV*

People in our culture often don’t know their neighbor’s name; so one night a year they remind themselves that neighbors and strangers can be loving and kind and generous.

And this is why Halloween is a night to relate, not retreat! If Jesus had a house in your neighborhood, would his light be off or on, on Halloween? Would he fear, judge, or engage the children who came to his door? And what would he say to the ones who came dressed as witches and goblins?

The prince of darkness and death may have his *tricks*, but the King of life and light has his *treats*.



#### 1. Use thy candy to love thy neighbor

What an incredible opportunity for Kingdom Ambassadors! Try to Overwhelm your neighbors with love and joy and kindness!

Jesus said, [to his disciples] “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” - *Matthew 19:14 NIV*

When they come knocking, they’re going to find out if you’re friendly or unfriendly, kind or unkind, and “*Jesusy*” or “*un-Jesusy*”. If the King of Kings had a house in your neighborhood, what *size* candy bars do you think he’d give out? I’m guessing King size. The big question is: *Will* Jesus have a house in your neighborhood this Halloween?

#### 2. Use the supernatural as a segue

Talk about ghosts, demons, hell, death, fear, and the afterlife! The fields are ripe for spiritual conversations on Halloween! I’m not saying to push it on people and ruin their party; just watch for it and follow God’s lead, *naturally* as his Ambassador.

#### 3. Use an event to serve the others

Did someone say Artoberfest? If you’re not serving your own children, you can stay home and serve your neighbors (if you’ve got some), or come out and serve our community. Or introduce your neighbors to the loving people in this church. If you can

afford it, and it's appropriate, buy a \$5 punch card for a neighbor with small children and say "Happy Halloween!"

4. Use the ghosts to remember who defeated death

When you see the gory demon, ghost, and vampire decorations, don't condemn the culture for being lost (that was the Pharisees mistake), remind yourself and celebrate the One you trust.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, Jesus made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. - *Colossians 2:15 NIV*

Act like it. Believe it. Walk it. And get ready to share it!