

The Truth About
Halloween

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Every year, millions of children throughout the world celebrate the custom of Halloween. During this celebration, they dress up in costumes, parade through neighborhoods knocking on doors, and declare the words "trick or treat," expecting to receive candy or some sort of gift. But is Halloween something Christians should celebrate? Is this the kind of festival Jesus Christ would want us to observe?

First, understand that although Halloween professes to be a Christian holiday, it is anything but Christian. This custom was celebrated by the pagan world centuries before the New Testament Church was ever founded and it was not introduced into the professing Christian world until centuries after the deaths of the apostles. In fact, if you search the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, you will not find a single line advocating the observance of this holiday or anything like it. On the contrary, God condemns such practices throughout the scriptures.

A Strange Superstition

Halloween is one of the strangest holidays mankind celebrates. It is an amazing paradox, an unusual mixture of Christian terms and ancient pagan religious rites. Moreover, despite the technological and intellectual advancements our society has made, it still clings to ignorance of the past. As a result, we celebrate ancient superstitions by partaking in pagan rites, dressing up as witches, goblins, ghosts, skeletons, and demons.

What is this holiday? Where did it come from and why is it celebrated? It certainly did not come from the Bible or the early Christian Church raised up by Jesus Christ and the apostles (Mt. 16:13-17). Consider what authorities say regarding the origin and practice of Halloween.

Ralph Linton, on page four of his book, *Halloween Through Twenty Centuries*, explains the connection between the current practice of Halloween and a pagan rite practiced by the ancient Druids.

The American celebration rests upon Scottish and Irish folk customs which can be traced in direct line from pre-Christian times. Although Halloween has become a night of rollicking fun, superstitious spells, and eerie games that people take only half seriously, its beginnings were quite otherwise. The earliest Halloween celebrations were held by the Druids in honor of Samhain, Lord of the Dead, whose festival fell on November 1.

Furthermore, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition, Volume 12 says:

It was a Druidic belief that on the eve of this festival, Saman, lord of death, called together the wicked souls that within the past 12 months had been condemned to inhabit the bodies of animals... (pp. 847-858)

The Yearbook of English Festivals by Dorothy Gladys Spicer adds the following:

All Hallows' Eve or All Hallow E'en, with its tradition of witches, ghosts, hobgoblins and spirits, its games and incantations, still is a gay time for pranks and parties in many North country homes. Fun-loving Americans have borrowed from their British ancestors many Hallow E'en games such as apple-bobbing, nut roasting and tossing of apple parings. Transplanted to the New World soil, the old practices have become revitalized, and currently are observed with more enthusiasm than in the country of their birth.

To ancient Druids, the end of October commemorated the festival of the waning year, when the sun began his downward course and ripened grain was garnered from the fields." "Samhain, or 'Summer's End,' as this feast to the dying sun was called, was celebrated with human sacrifice, augury and prayers; for at this season spirits walked, and evil had power over souls of men.

Not until the fourth century did the pagan vigil for the god of light give way to All Hallows, the mass for Christian saints; and not until the tenth, did the Druids' death feast become All Souls' the day of prayer for souls that had entered rest. Cakes for the dead were substituted for human sacrifice, fortune-telling for heathen augury, lighted candles for the old Baal fires.

Far from being Christian, Halloween is an old pagan holiday masquerading as though it were one of the customs of the Church. Despite this, professing Christians encourage their children to get into the spirit of this pagan custom! The celebration of Halloween is clearly a relic of pagan times and superstitious tradition. Notice what the authoritative *Encyclopedia Britannica* says about this holiday. It long antedates Christianity. The two chief characteristics of ancient Halloween were the lighting of bonfires and the belief that this is the one night in the year during which ghosts and witches are most likely to wander about. History shows that the main celebrations of Halloween were purely 'Druidical,' and this is further proved by the fact that in parts of Ireland October 31 is still known as Oidhch Shamhna, 'Vigil of Saman.'

Saman or Samhain was the pagan lord of the dead among the Druids. However, this pagan holiday was not celebrated among the Druids alone. It has been and is currently celebrated around the world in different forms, but always with the same general pattern and meaning.

Halloween was also a Roman festival. Consider the words of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* regarding this celebration.

On the Druidic ceremonies were grafted some of the characteristics of the Roman festival in honor of Pomona held about November 1, in which nuts and apples, representing the winter store of fruits, played an important part.

Halloween can be identified in various forms all around the world. It is found in both Christian and non-Christian countries. This is because its origins predate Christianity. Marie Trevelyan, in her book *Folk Stories of Wales*, writes the following.

In Wales it was firmly believed that on All Hallows' Eve the spirit of a departed person was to be seen at midnight on every crossroad and every stile. (p. 254)

The practices involved in Halloween are also found in Mexico. In the book *Adonis* by Frazer, the practice of Halloween is clearly identified, not only by its date, but also by its symbolism and rituals.

The Miztecs of Mexico believed that the dead came back in the twelfth month of the year, which corresponded to our November. On this day of All Souls the houses were decked out to welcome the spirits. Jars of food and drink were set on a table in the principal room, and the family went out with the torches to meet the ghosts and invite them to enter. Then, returning to the house they knelt around the table, and with their eyes bent on the ground, prayed the souls to accept the offerings. (p. 244)

The elements of this holiday are also found in Cambodia. According to E. Aymonier in the work *Notice sur le Cambodge*, people would chant,

O all your ancestors, who are departed, deign to come and eat what we have prepared for you, and to bless your posterity and to make it happy. (p. 59)

It is clear that the trappings of Halloween have covered nations around the world. It is equally clear that the practices embraced by this holiday are not Christian at all.

Symbols and Superstitions

Understand the shocking truth from history as to why this holiday was celebrated! Ruth Kelly, a recognized authority on Halloween, wrote that because the Druids believed in the immortality of the soul,

they concluded that a person's spirit would pass from them at death and seek out another body in which to reside.

[The pagan Druid priests] . . . taught the immortality of the soul, that it passed from one body to another at death . . . They believed that on the last night of the old year the lord of death gathered together the souls of all those who had died in the passing year and had been condemned to live in the bodies of animals, to decree what forms they should inhabit for the next twelve months. He could be coaxed to give the lighter sentence by gifts and prayers. (The Book of Halloween, p. 10)

Many Druids believed that black cats were in fact reincarnated human beings, and that the Priest had the ability to divine the future through them. If any crossed your path, however, it would mean they might possess you, a very bad omen. Halloween was celebrated to preserve in the minds of the people the false doctrine that the soul is immortal and that the dead are not really dead. The Celtic peoples believed that the souls of good men went to paradise while the souls of those who did evil were reincarnated in the form of animals for a year. The only chance these disembodied souls had for a decent afterlife was to return on this day of Samhain, and find a human body to possess. It is important to understand that November was regarded by the Celtic people as the beginning of the New Year. Therefore, it was a perfect time for their priests to remember and celebrate the dead.

All Saints Day

Today, Halloween is celebrated on the evening of All Hallows or All Saints Day. Because days were customarily reckoned as beginning at sunset, Halloween was celebrated in anticipation of November 1, which was dedicated to the Lord of the Dead. Halloween is founded on a fear of the spirits of the dead possessing those who are alive. This fear is driven by a belief that man has an immortal soul. It is important to understand that the Bible clearly declares that only God has immortality at this time. The apostle Paul, when writing to Timothy about Jesus Christ, said,

Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; Whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to Whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:16)

The clear teaching in the Bible is that the soul is mortal and that it is appointed unto all men once to die (see Hebrews 9:27). The book of Ecclesiastes actually states that the same fate befalls both man and beast.

For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them; as the one dies, so dies the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. (Eccl. 3:19-20)

God's Word repeatedly explains that the dead are in their graves awaiting a resurrection. The dead have no contact with the living. However, because almost all heathen nations have no knowledge of the true God, they have created times and superstitions that honor their dead.

Who is the Lord of the Dead?

Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus was questioned by the Sadducees about the concept of a resurrection. In order to demonstrate that there will be a future resurrection from the dead, Jesus told them:

But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. (Mt. 22:31-32)

It is important to understand what Jesus meant by these profound words "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." The Sadducees to whom Jesus was speaking did not believe in a resurrection. They also accepted only the Torah as Holy Scripture. With this in mind, Jesus quoted the Torah (Ex. 3:6) to prove that a resurrection would one day occur. He did this by illustrating that long after the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God continued to refer to Himself as their God: "I **am** the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," not "I **was** the God..."

The point Jesus was making was that although these patriarchs were dead (Heb. 11:13), they will live again in the resurrection, as will all of God's people (Dan. 12:2; Lk. 14:14; Jn. 5:28; Rev. 20:4-6). Although these men were dead, they were as good as alive at that moment because God's promise of a resurrection is immutable (Rom. 4:17). With this understanding, Jesus' words take on greater meaning. The God of the Bible is the GOD OF THE LIVING, not the God of the dead! To worship the true God, we should not celebrate rites dedicated to the dead. However, among the heathen Druids, Samhain or Saman, is the lord of the dead and that lord is none other than Satan himself! Therefore, when people celebrate the dead, they unknowingly honor the devil!

Is Ignorance an Excuse?

What if people don't know who it is they serve when they celebrate Halloween? Is it alright to keep this holiday if you do not know what it represents? The resounding answer to this question is NO! When writing to the Church at Galatia, the apostle Paul indicated it was possible to worship something that didn't even exist.

Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. (Galatians 4:8).

The heathen who thought they were worshiping the true God were actually serving demons. Young people today who dress up in weird costumes and demand "trick or treat" are not serving the true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Rather, they are unwittingly serving the god of this world who has blinded them (2 Cor. 4:4). Do you want to serve the lord of the dead? Halloween is a holiday dedicated to worshiping the lord of the dead. The true God is the God of the living

"Trick or Treat"

Do you know where the practice of children knocking on doors and shouting "trick or treat" originated? At this special time of the year, it was believed that there was a very thin line between the living and the dead. During the time of Samhain, people believed ghosts of the dead were able to mingle with the living. It was feared that the dead would come back in search of bodies to possess the next year. This was the only means for these spirits to have an after-life. Fearing possession, the townsfolk did many things to trick the spirits or scare them away.

At this time, Druid priests wore masks so they would not be recognized and attacked by evil spirits. Some believed that the spirits would leave you alone if you tricked them by dressing up to look like them. Others thought the wearing of frightening costumes would scare the evil spirits away. Many people even carved demonic faces in turnips or potatoes and put candles inside them, an early Jack-o-lantern, to frighten the spirits.

The "treat" part of this holiday came from attempts by some to "buy off" these evil spirits by giving them gifts. Some believed these spirits imprisoned the bodies of animals and could be released by giving gifts or tribute to the lord of the dead. James Napier, in his book Folklore, wrote about this practice.

There was a prevailing belief among all nations that at death the souls of good men were taken possession of by good spirits and carried to paradise, but the souls of the wicked men were left to wander in the space between the earth and moon, or consigned to the

unseen world. These wandering spirits were in the habit of haunting the living... But there were means by which these ghosts might be exorcized. (p. 11)

The idea that spirits possessed animals was just one belief. Others believed that the souls of the dead returned to their original homes and were to be entertained there with food and drink. If they were not given the things they desired, these spirits would cast spells and cause absolute havoc to the inhabitants of the home. Alexander MacGregor, in his book *Highland Superstitions*, writes,

It was the night for the universal walking about of all sorts of spirits, fairies, and ghosts, all of whom had liberty on that night. (p. 44)

In an effort to exorcize these ghosts, people were encouraged to set out food as a form of treat. If the demons were satisfied, they would leave the individual in peace. If not, they would leave an evil spell.

Ralph Linton (*Halloween Through Twenty Centuries*) concludes that the practice of leaving gifts for spirits is the origin of today's practice of trick or treat when he states "...certainly it comes from pagan times." In Ireland up to the turn of the century, it was customary to have a procession "led by a man in a white robe wearing a horse-head mask... The horse was sacred to the Sun God," says Linton, which indicated that this custom was a survival of a Druid rite. "The procession levied a contribution from the farmers in the perverted name of what probably was an old Druid god. Unless the procession was "treated liberally with gifts," the farmers were "tricked" with the threat of a curse that would ruin next year's crops! The present day practice of "trick or treat" is nothing less than a continuation of these degenerate and absurd customs which came out of paganism.

How Did Halloween Become Christian?

The first of November, celebrated among pagans in honor of Samhain, is celebrated today in thousands of Christian churches around the world. The Catholic Encyclopedia states that the purpose of this day is to "honor all the saints, known and unknown." Additionally, according to Pope Urban IV, this day was designed to address "any deficiencies in the faithful's celebration of saints' feasts during the year."

But how did the veneration of saints, supposedly alive in heaven, come to be celebrated on the same day used by pagans to honor evil spirits? According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, the Church believed that every martyr should be honored and it appointed a common day for all of them.

At this point, it is important to understand that the general practice of the Christianized Roman Empire was to convert pagans as quickly as possible. From the time of Constantine who made Christianity the state religion, the pagan religion and practices were appropriated for use in order to encourage conversion by those who were deeply tied to paganism. To do this, the names of pagan gods were changed to those of Christ, Mary, and the saints.

The book, *The Mysteries of All Nations* by Grant, records the story of how the pagan celebration we call Halloween became a Christian practice. Grant explains that the Emperor Hadrian rebuilt the Pantheon about 100 A.D. and dedicated it to the goddess Cybele and other Roman gods. The Pantheon became the central edifice for worship. However, before the sixth century, Rome was invaded and controlled by barbaric tribes. After the defeat of the Barbarians by Emperor Phocas, the Pantheon was retaken and given to Pope Boniface IV as a gift. As a result, this great temple now became "holy" and was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and all the saints. It became a shrine where Christians could pay homage to Mary and others who had died in the faith. An annual holiday was commemorated to this end. May 13 was first chosen and this day became known as "All Saints Day." Later, the date was changed to November 1 and the name changed to "All Hallows," and ultimately to "Halloween." The book, *Strange Stories, Amazing Facts*, by the Readers Digest Association explains how pagan practices became a part of Christian worship:

Although Christianity has swept the world in a relatively short time, as the histories of great religions go, the early missionaries faced an up-hill task. The pagans were reluctant to give up their false gods and ancient practices. So the missionaries, unable to convert them easily to an entirely new code of worship, did the next best thing. They took the pagan festivals as they were, and gradually grafted the observances of the new faith onto these festivals and rites and customs surrounding them.

Like Christmas and Easter, the festival of Halloween originated in a pagan celebration, even though its name is derived from the Christian festival of All Hallows' or All Saints' Eve.

It was introduced in the seventh century to commemorate all those saints and martyrs who had no special day to themselves and was held on May 13th. But in the eighth century, All Hallows' day was moved to November 1, to counteract the pagan celebrations held on that date. Only since the late 18th and early 19th centuries has Halloween developed into a festive time for children, with costumes, lanterns, and games. Before then it was regarded as a night of fear, and wise men, respectful of hobgoblins and wandering demons, stayed indoors.

On page 6 of his book, Ralph Linton explains how All Saints' Day became a Christian practice.

All Saints Day was introduced into the church calendar because the year was not long enough to make it possible to dedicate a special day for each spirit of the Catholic Church.. The day chosen was one already associated in the popular mind with a thronging of spirits of the dead, which was quite in line with church policy of incorporating harmless pagan folk ideas... Gregory III (731-741) consecrated a chapel in the basilica of St. Peter to all the saints and fixed the anniversary [honoring them] on November 1. (Halloween Through Twenty Centuries)

Notice what once was a memorial for each martyr on different days became a general day in honor of the dead who were believed to be alive in heaven. Protestants have continued the celebration of Halloween in part because "it was on this day in 1517, that Martin Luther posted his epoch-making ninety-five theses on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg" which started the Protestant Reformation. "He chose Halloween night because he knew that the townsfolk would be coming to the church that night." (*Halloween Through Twenty Centuries*, Ralph Linton, pp 9-10).

Because the leaders of the Reformation did not believe in Saints, there could be no "All Saints Day." No "All Saints Day" meant no "Halloween." Therefore, to please those who still wanted to celebrate these festivities, the Halloween revelries were moved to November fifth and renamed "Guy Fawkes Day." Guy Fawkes was one of a group who plotted to blow up the Protestant English Parliament. Guy Fawkes Day celebrated the failure of this plot. Still it was Halloween in spirit; bon fires were lit, lanterns were carved in turnips, and children went begging for money. Halloween survived the Protestant reformation to live on with all its ancient and pagan traditions.

Should Christians Celebrate Halloween?

When the average person thinks of Halloween, there are visions of jack-o-lanterns with candles inside to make the jeering faces look even more eerie. There are thoughts of skeletons and ghosts, goblins and devils. Black is a favorite color of Halloween and rooms are made to be dark and scary.

Consider for a moment the symbolism of Halloween. What has that symbolism to do with the true God or Christianity? The symbols of Halloween are blackness and darkness. These are symbols of Satan. God is light and there is no darkness in Him (I John 1:5). Does the symbolism surrounding this holiday reflect what God would appreciate? Does this holiday, with its dark symbolism, seem like something God would accept from us? Would Jesus Christ celebrate Halloween, considering its symbolism and images?

What about the whole concept of "trick or treat"? In principle, this is no less than simple extortion. Halloween encourages wrong by suggesting that if you don't get what you demand, you are justified in causing harm or damage. Such a belief goes totally contrary to the scriptures.

Halloween is the very antithesis of Christianity. Jesus Christ tells us in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." God further tells us:

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

There is nothing connected to Halloween that is even remotely Christian. Its images are of death, demons, the spirit world, ghosts, goblins and mysticism. All this is totally contrary to God's word. Halloween is pagan in origin and its symbols and practices are not of God. Halloween is about the dead. God is the God of the living.

Furthermore, we need to understand that Halloween is not just an ancient pagan festival of the past. It is still celebrated by the occult in our land today. One practicing witch writes the following in the *Leaves of Wonder Website*.

Samhain... is the most important of the Wiccan Sabbats... The deities are in their darkest, most fearsome aspects... Though fearsome, he [the Lord of Death] is also comforter and teacher of the dead, preparing them for the next lifetime.

Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, God admonished Israel to refrain from learning pagan practices and indicated that there would be severe consequences for failing to obey.

Hear ye the word which the Lord speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the Lord, "Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. (Jer. 10:1-2)

But the Lord is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting king: at His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide His indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens... (Jer. 10:10-11)

God's word is clear. Pagan practices, including Halloween, are to be rejected by His children. He not only forbids inquiring after false gods and practicing their ways, but He outlines the consequences for violating His command.

God's Holy Days

But God does want us to worship Him and that worship must be in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24). In order for us to properly honor God, He has created specific festivals. These festivals outline His plan of salvation and identify who He is and how He will accomplish His purpose for all mankind. These Holy Days, which are commanded assemblies, include the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. These great feasts, which were designed personally by God, were kept by the champions of faith in the Old Testament as well as Jesus Christ and the apostles in the New Testament. The book of Acts indicates that the early Church celebrated these Holy Days (Acts 18:21; 20:6; 27:9). The great prophet Zechariah indicated that the time would come when the entire world, under Christ's millennial rule, will keep His feasts (Zech. 14).

A Final Thought

Understand the truth about Halloween: it is a spiritual counterfeit! It is a pagan holiday. It is based on the worship of the dead. In short, Halloween is the trick, not the treat. It is the trick that has been played on an unsuspecting world. Fortunately, the Bible declares that the time will come when Jesus Christ will rule the entire world and the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). In that day, people will honor God's Sabbaths and His Holy Days. Once people begin to celebrate God's true Holy Days, Halloween will begin to look "hollow" instead of "hallow."

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