

Halloween - Is It OK for Christians especially, to participate?

In the 5th century BC, the Celts' summer officially ended on October 31. The holiday celebration was called Samhain which meant the Celtic New year. On October 31st after the crops were all harvested and stored for the upcoming winter, the cooking fires in the homes would be extinguished. The Druids, (the Celtic priests), would meet on the hilltop in an oak forest (oak trees were thought to be sacred). The Druids would light new fires and offer sacrifices of crops and animals.

As they danced around the fires, the summer would end and winter (with its darkness and cold) would begin. The following morning the Druids would give an ember from their fires to each family who would then take them home to start new cooking fires. These fires would keep the homes warm and were said to keep them free from evil spirits.

Modern Halloween traditions were brought to the US in the mid-1800s by Irish immigrants.

In today's culture, Halloween is a hotly debated subject among Christians. Some feel like there is nothing wrong with letting their children dress up and go to neighbours to get candy. Others believe that because of the origins of the day and the "pagan connotation", letting children celebrate is inviting evil in, regardless of the family's religious beliefs. Some people have even gone so far as to avoid church "Harvest Festivals" that are held on or around the 31st as an alternative to Halloween because they feel that their attendance is a way of telling their kids that they are missing out on something, thus there is a need for a substitute.

Many people, especially Christians, choose not to observe Halloween. As one of the popular celebrations in our world—for some more celebrated than Christmas—it can present a challenge for Christian families, especially when children are involved.

We might have to do with a Romans 14 issue - a "disputable matter." Some matters lack clear direction from the Bible. At the end of the day all believers must make their own decisions (free will). You have to follow your own convictions regarding the observance of Halloween.

Christian perspectives on the observance of Halloween are strongly divided. Quite understandably, since throughout centuries, religious beliefs and traditions were divided.

Some feel complete freedom to observe the day; others run and hide from it. Others again boycott or ignore it. Some celebrate it through more positive and imaginative observances or Christian alternatives such as spring celebrations or Noah ark parties. And then there are those who choose to take advantage of Halloween's evangelistic opportunities.

Noteworthy?

In the 18th century, Pope Gregory III moved All Saints Day to November 1, officially making October 31 "All Hallows Eve," as a way of claiming the celebration for Christians. However, some of the pagan beliefs and practices associated with the celebration have persisted.

What Does the Bible Say?

Ephesians 5:7-12

Don't participate in the things these people do. For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, rebuke and expose them. It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret.

Many Christians believe that participating in Halloween is a form of involvement in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness. However, many consider the modern-day Halloween activities of most to be harmless fun.

Are some Christians trying to remove themselves from the world? Ignoring Halloween or celebrating it with only believers is not exactly an evangelical approach. Aren't we supposed to "become all things to all men so that by all possible means" we might save some? (1 Cor. 9:22)

Deut. 18:10-12

For example, never sacrifice your son or daughter as a burnt offering. And do not let your people practice fortune-telling or sorcery, or allow them to interpret omens, or engage in witchcraft, or cast spells, or function as mediums or psychics, or call forth the spirits of the dead. Anyone who does these things is an object of horror and disgust to the Lord.

Well, these verses are pretty clear on what a Christian should not do. But how many Christians are sacrificing their sons and daughters as a burnt offering on Halloween? How many are calling forth the spirits of the dead? The verse does not say that "trick or treating" disgusts the Lord.

However, what if you have come to the Christian faith from a background in the occult? What if, before you became a Christian, you did practice some of these deeds associated with witchcraft and sorcery? Perhaps refraining from Halloween and its activities is the safest and most appropriate response for you as an individual.

Rethinking the Issue

There are many other Bible verses similar to these two, but nothing that specifically warns against observing Halloween. Rather than providing an answer, the purpose of this writing is to cause you to ask yourself questions and think about your convictions on this issue.

As Christians, why are we here in this world? Are we here to live in a safe and protected environment, guarded against the evils in the world, or are we called to reach out into a world filled with dangers and be the light of Christ? Halloween brings people of the world to our door step. Halloween brings our neighbours out into the streets. I can think of various creative ways to seize this opportunity for developing new relationships and sharing my faith. Is it possible that our negativity toward Halloween only alienates the people we seek to reach? Can we be *in* the world, but not *of* the world?

Personal believes

I close with a recommendation to give serious thought about the appropriateness of judging others for observing or not observing Halloween. We do not know why another person participates in the holiday or why they do not. We cannot accurately judge the motivations and intentions of another's heart.

I enjoy Halloween myself – not that any child has ever knocked on my door collecting sweets, and neither have I ever decorated Halloween style. (Though I might mention Halloween pumpkins taught me how to cut pumpkins for other purposes such as pumpkin fruit bowls). But I enjoy the different recipes, gadgets, toys, the dress-ups (which I can add to my bag of therapy tools) and especially all the October thrillers on DSTV. The fact that I enjoy it does not necessarily mean I celebrate the underlying meanings or compromise my beliefs.

Therefore I believe the most appropriate response to Halloween is to study the matter for yourself and follow the convictions of your own heart. Let others do the same without condemnation from you.

Perhaps the answer to the Halloween dilemma is - *there is no right or wrong answer!* I believe one's unique convictions about Halloween must be individually sought, independently found and personally followed. Regardless of what anyone else does or says, you have to make a choice that you can live with!

Note – similarly, Christmas celebrations (methods) also derive from pagan traditions. This is another topic for another time...