

Tricked or Sweet?

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FEATURED ARTICLE

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“And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.”
(Colossians 3:17, NLT)

As Halloween approaches, is it just another excuse for sweet shops and the dental industry to boom? Is it all innocent fun or, behind all the costumes and sweets and trick or treating, is there something more sinister to this festival?

The History of Halloween

Much has been written on the origins of Halloween. A simple search on Google will show that its roots are pagan, not Christian. For thousands of years, people have seen the season around November 1st as special. In pre-Christian Northern Europe, it was New Year. And the night before was the festival of Samhain, their “Lord of the Dead”. Pagan priests taught that during the festival Samhain gathered the souls of the dead, ghosts, goblins and witches to return and mingle with the living. Townsfolk would dress up as ghosts and monsters, wear masks and light bonfires to scare off the dead from coming back and destroying their crops. Pagan priests also conducted diabolical ceremonies where humans and animals were burned for Samhain. Priests collected these sacrifices by going from house to house. Those who gave sacrifices were promised prosperity, and those who refused were threatened and cursed – the origin of ‘trick or treat’.

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In pre-Colombian Mesoamerica, similar festivals existed. It was believed that around the start of November, the border between the spirit world and the real world dissolved. The dead would revisit their families, and the living would provide food and drinks in honour of their ancestors.

In 835 AD, the Catholic Church moved their festival of All Saints Day (“All Hallows”) to November 1st, officially making October 31st “All Hallows Eve”, which became Hallow’e’en¹<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=1230>. Since the 10th Century, the Catholic Church has also celebrated All Souls Day, “The Day of the Dead”, on November 2nd, incorporating a blend of Mesoamerican ritual, European religion and Spanish culture²<https://www.history.com/topics/halloween/day-of-the-dead>. Over the years, all these pagan and church traditions have been amalgamated into the commercial events known as Halloween and el Día de los Muertos.

A Christian Approach to Halloween

As believers, the Bible tells us that God is *“not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive”* (Luke 20:38 NIV). We don’t celebrate the dead or speak to our ancestors because God forbids it, and because we know they cannot return to us (Leviticus 19:28; Deuteronomy 18:11; 2 Samuel 12:23). And we know that when we depart this life, it is not to death, for we will live with Christ forever (1 John 2:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). We do not fear the dead, the devil or evil spirits, and we certainly don’t ward them off with masks and bonfires. The Bible says our struggle is not in this realm; our fight against the demonic takes place in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12). We are instructed to humble ourselves before God, resist the devil, and he will flee from us (James 4:7).

Paul taught the Ephesians, a church that was saved out of and surrounded by paganism, *“Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness”* (Ephesians 5:11a, ESV). He told the Thessalonians, *“Stay away from every kind of evil”* (1 Thessalonians 5:22, NIV).

As followers of Jesus, we need to remember that we have an enemy who has mastered the art of “dress-up”. He parades as an angel of light, while his only intent is to steal, kill and destroy (2 Corinthians 11:14; John 10:10). Dressing our children up in an angel costume or as a teddy bear is no less a celebration of Halloween than painting them to look like a skeleton or zombie.

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Perhaps you have no strong personal conviction about Halloween being evil, but, as Christians, we are told: *“Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister”* (Romans 14:13, NIV). Jesus said, particularly for those who cause children to stumble, it would be better that a millstone was hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2)! Saints saved from the world of the occult, traditional African religions and witchcraft understand all too well the pure evil behind the chiffon tutus and Tigger costumes of Halloween. We demonstrate love towards them, and all our brothers and sisters in Christ, if we ensure that we do nothing that might become a stumbling block to them.

Parents, Halloween is a teaching opportunity. Inspire your children to let their *“light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16, NIV). Teach them to *“have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths”*, but rather train themselves for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7, ESV). And remember Paul’s command to the Ephesian church: *“Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness ... their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them”* (Ephesians 5:11-13, NLT). What business does righteousness have with wickedness and what fellowship can light have with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14)?

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In this season, when the world cloaks itself in darkness, when shops are full of witches, cobwebs and skeletons, and when parents repeat the chorus, “It’s just a bit of fun for the kids”, we have the opportunity to practice being in the world but not of it (John 17:15-16). Let us be those who keep our eyes on Jesus and live as representatives of Him.

Sources: