

Trick or Treat?

Don't be a Halloweenie

October 29, 2006

HALLOW-HISTORY

Halloween is a timely example of a “disputable matter”. A woman left our church very upset a couple weeks ago. She saw an announcement for Arktoberfest, and let an usher know that she could not worship with us because we celebrate Halloween.

Paul has been telling us (*Romans 14*) not to judge or condemn one another regarding special days, and food sacrificed to idols. But he's also told us not to violate our conscience, and not to cause others to violate theirs. The issue of how believers should handle Halloween doesn't have an easy answer. And my conclusions may be different from yours.



When Paul wrote to the Romans (57 A.D.), the Romans were well on their way to conquering and Romanizing the Celtic regions of Britain, France, and Spain.

The Celts worshiped and celebrated the forces of nature. They held a huge annual feast on October 31 called “Samhain” (pronounced: SOW-en) which is Irish Gaelic for: Summer's end. It coincided with the final harvest and the thinning of herds to match the feed storage for the predicted length of winter. They sacrificed to their gods, honored their dead, celebrated the harvest, and (their Druid Priests) predicted the future.



When the Romans moved in, Samhain got all mixed up with an October Roman holiday (Feralia) to honor the dead; and a Nov. 1st Roman feast to “Pomona”, goddess of fruit trees. Pomona, a *fertility* goddess was represented by an apple.



The Celts believed the pentagram was a *fertility* symbol. If you cut an apple in half, the seeds form a pentagram! Blah, blah, blah – it's where we get bobbing for apples! The first to get an apple would be the next to marry.



200 years later, Constantine becomes the first Christian Emperor (312 A.D.), and Christianity spreads throughout the Roman Empire. 400 years later, the church establishes a feast to replace the Feralia/Pomona/Samhain holiday, *and* to honor the Saints who didn't have a day of their own.

It's called “All Saint's Day”, or “All Hallows”. Celebration begins the night before, on “Hallows Eve” or “Hallow 'Een”.



People who refuse to switch over are labeled as evil and unholy; many accused of being witches or demon worshipers. Witches were thought to possess animals. Cats seemed like the logical choice, being nocturnal *and* stealthy; the black ones being the best camouflaged for night.

1000 A.D., the church declares November 2, “All Souls Day” (to honor the dead). It was celebrated by dressing up as saints, angels, and devils; burning bonfires, and parades.



On Halloween, 1517, the church is split when Martin Luther nails his thesis to the Wittenberg door; rejecting any symbols that stand between worshipers and God. These symbols include Popes, priests, and ... saints.



Protestants continue the bonfire/harvest/apple-bobbing aspects but drop the Catholic elements ... (FYI: bonfires attract bats, associating them with Hallow ‘Een).



In the 1700’s, the Irish create a folktale about a man named Jack who tries to outwit both God and the Devil and ends up wandering for eternity with hollowed out gourd as a lantern. In 1840, the Potato famine hits Ireland, the Irish flock to America, and Jack-o-lanterns are added to Halloween.



By the 1920’s, the Ku Klux Klan was on the rise, and mischief was turning into mean-spirited tricks and hate-crimes. Committees and clubs (such as the Boy Scouts) organized “Beggar’s Night”, as a way to detour vandals. And the American tradition of trick-or-treating was born.

Q: So, what do we do with this mish-mash secular holiday?

The biggest issue seems to be the pagan origins. (This is the same argument some use against the celebration of Christmas and Easter.) But where do you draw *that* line? Birthday cakes with candles go back to Greek pagan worship of Artemis, goddess of the moon.

Q: Can I refer to planets by their Roman-idol-inspired names?

Q: Can I wear my Nikes; she was the Greek goddess of victory?

Logicians call this a “Genetic Fallacy”. It occurs when we reduce the significance of a person, practice, or institution to its original, rather than current status. For example: If something began as a good thing, but was now being used for evil purposes, we wouldn’t say it was still good. That would be a “Genetic Fallacy”.

It’s far more significant to examine the current role and impact of Halloween, and how we deal with it as believers, than how it affected cultures that don’t exist, and people long dead.

THE DEVIL'S TRICKS



Should Christians have special concerns about Halloween? You bet! Second Corinthians (2:11) tells us that Satan schemes, and tries to outwit us. Revelation (12:9) tells us that he's a deceiver. There're four tricks he plays on us at Halloween:

1. Masking our morals

Halloween is becoming like our national Mardi Gras. It's more adult oriented than ever; and the emphasis is on partying. When we put on a disguise it's easy to behave in dishonorable ways that we'd never consider as "ourselves".

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

- Wear a costume, but imitate Christ.

2. Thinking of Satan as silly

The devil would love to use Halloween to make the demonic so ludicrous and laughable that we dismiss it as child's play. The devil has been defeated, but not disempowered. And he would love nothing more than for us to forget that. We walk a fine line between having fun with the things that frighten us, and being flippant and dismissive of real evil. And it's easy to coerce a weaker brother or sister to tag along to a horror movie that violates their conscience.

3. Dabbling in the occult

This goes for Ouija Boards; séances; palm reading; fortune telling; and even a "Magic Eight Ball" if you put stock in it. Scripture is the only source for spiritual insight.

I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists ... -
Leviticus 20:6 NIV

No matter how silly or secular we may think it is, if we call Madam Cleo on the Psychic Hotline, God does not take it lightly when we invite the enemy to act as advisor.

4. Hiding our light

When a little ballerina knocks on your door and says, "Trick or treat!" She's *not* saying: "I'll invoke demonic spirits on you and your household unless you pay me an unholy ransom!" She's saying, "May I have candy, please?" In a culture of isolation, our community takes one night a year to remind themselves that neighbors and strangers do care. Halloween is not a night to retreat, but to relate. Trick-or-treating is about trust; which is why it's so detrimental for a follower of Christ *not* to participate.

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

If we hide our light, out of fear or judgment on Halloween, it must feel an awful lot like worship to the enemy.

THE SAVIOR'S TREATS



So, the Lord of darkness has his four *tricks*, but the Lord of light and life has His own four *treats* to empower us to redeem Halloween.

1. Use thy candy to love thy neighbor

One day each year, our neighbors bring their children to our doorstep. Our goal is to show them love. We know how Jesus feels:

Jesus said, "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*

Q: If Jesus had a house in your neighborhood, what kind of candy would He offer? And how would he speak to the children?

2. Use the supernatural as a segue

Watch for opportunities to talk about the supernatural, the paranormal, death, ghosts, demons, and the devil. The fields are ripe for spiritual conversations!

3. Use an event to serve the community

Not everyone has neighbors. Not everyone feels safe letting their children trick-or-treat. And Arktoberfest is a great way to introduce them to your church. If we're not busy with our own children, we can either stay home and serve our neighbors, or come out and serve our community.

4. Use the goblins to remember who you serve

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

The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. - *1 John 4:4 NIV*

How we celebrate Halloween *must* be a decision of discernment. Some will see it as an opportunity for the Kingdom; others will enjoy it as much needed diversion, and still others may look on in horror at the things that once enslaved them.

- When it comes to Halloween we must be sensible and sensitive.