

# Tricky Treat

## How to Handle Halloween

October 31, 2021

Today we're talking how to handle the disputable matter of Halloween.



So, **how should Christians handle Halloween?** I'm just gonna cut to the chase and give you the answer: **according to their conscience.** Because, as we've been learning, the *right* and *wrong* of a disputable matter is decided by the conscience, when it testifies for or against us. (Rom 2:15) And God's judgment of sin is *based* in part on these violations of conscience. (Rom 2:16)

Did you notice the big "Halloween at His Place" banner on the front of the church? Just using *that word* is a disputable matter among believers. **Where some see an opportunity to be a light in the darkness, others see an obvious compromise of faith.** But, in Romans 14, Paul tells us to:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ... Who are you to judge someone else's servant? – Romans 14:1-4 NIV

So we need to be sensitive to the large spectrum of approaches that believers take in regard to Halloween. For instance, **would you consider an evil looking Jack O' Lantern as unacceptable?** What if it was friendly? What if it was a puppy? **What if it was Jesus?** I'm just sayin' there's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to how Christians handle Halloween.

We talked about COVID masks; what about *Halloween* masks? Here's one of my favorites. That's me. In 2010 I came to Arktoberfest as an old bellhop. I convinced Shar to let me spend \$750 on that mask, assuring her I could make a *profit* the following year by listing it just before Halloween, after they typically sell out. And to my *shock*, they *did*, I *did*, and it *worked!* I set the starting bid at \$800, and the "Buy it now" at \$2,800 (to make the \$800 seem more reasonable). And three days later, somebody "bought it now" for \$2,800! Now where were we?

We put *that word* on the church, **not out of a compromise of conviction, but a fervent conviction to reach out and relate to the lost.** They don't know what an "Arktoberfest" is. A friend asked why we didn't put up something like *Harvest Festival*. I said, "Because it sounds *weird*. And we're *Ambassadors*, (2 Cor. 5:20) so we should speak the language. And that's what it's called." "But, Halloween is a *pagan* tradition." Is it? Are you *sure* it's that simple?

The pagan-origin argument basically says, if I put a fun-size Snickers into a 3-year-old Peter Pan's plastic pumpkin, I'm condoning Celtic pagan practices, 2000 years ago.

And yet, if it's pointed out that Halloween *originally* meant Holy Evening in honor of All Saints Day, the argument is that it has lost its original significance, and means something *different* now. Can you have it both ways? Not with integrity. **If a principle isn't consistent, it isn't a principle.** It's bad judgment to selectively apply rules and call it good judgment.



Where do you draw the line on the pagan-origin argument? Lit candles on round cakes originated when Ancient Greek worshippers brought moon-shaped offerings to the temple of Artemis/Diana, goddess of the moon, in Ephesus, mentioned in Acts (19:35). The candles made 'em glow like the moon. The planets are named after Roman gods. Days of the week are a mix of Roman and Norse gods. And our Nike's are named after a goddess of victory. But **they don't carry that significance anymore** – to quote the pagan-origin argument regarding the word Halloween.

And there's so much misinformation on the memes making the rounds. Has been for centuries. The Celts did have a pagan harvest festival where they celebrated Samhain [SOW-in]. But it means "summer's end"; it wasn't the god of the underworld to whom they made human sacrifices. That was falsely reported by their Roman enemies, who also, by the way, reported that Christian communion consisted of cannibalism, child sacrifice, and ritual incest.

And even though we know the historical *origins* of those false "memes", the one about the Celts is still being spread by *Christians* in anti-Halloween pamphlets. So am I defending Halloween? Nope. Truth. Logic. Faith. Growth. Our witness. Our unity. Avoiding quarreling over disputable matters. And following our conscience, in whatever we do, to the glory of God. **What matters in disputable matters is what our conscience believes to be right or wrong, and how we act accordingly.** This is Paul's point in Romans 14, when he says:

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that *nothing* is unclean *in itself*, but it *is* unclean for *anyone* who **[without this awareness]** *thinks it unclean.* - Romans 14:14 ESV



Which *doesn't* mean we just get to do whatever we naturally think is right, and it's all *good*. That's called following the *dictates* of our heart. And it's not good. (Jer 18:12) **If we don't want our conscience "seared",** (1 Tim 4:2) **it must be steered in the right direction.** So our goal is to feed our conscience food for thought, and to grow what we already know, and to strengthen our conscience with truth. But the history of Halloween is such a mixed bag of long-forgotten pagan origins, myths, fears, urban legends, and morality tales. And sorting out historical truth from human agenda is always tricky. However, we do *know* that the Celts worshiped *nature* ... and they used a pentagram as a fertility symbol ... and they were conquered by the Romans ... who had the feast of Pomona (a fertility goddess of fruit trees), and the two got all mixed together when someone cut into an apple (Pomona's symbol) and found that the seed pocket looked like a pentagram ... so blah, blah, blah ... that's where we get bobbing for apples!



800 years later the Pope Gregory moved “All Saints Day” to November 1st, to replace the Samhain-Pomona festivals. And the night before, like Christmas Eve, was Hallow Een/Evening. And those who refused to celebrate, were labeled as *witches*. And witches, they believed, possessed *animals* ... and the most *likely* candidate was the cat ... because they’re *sneaky* ... and nocturnal ... and the *black* ones are hard to see in the dark ... so blah, blah, blah ... that’s where we get bobbing for cats! Back then, *not* celebrating was *sin*! See? Halloween’s always been *tricky*. Oh, and the church put hideous gargoyles on cathedrals to serve as a threat of the dangers that Christians need not fear. And they held costume parades of demons and angels as a declaration of Christ’s triumph over very real evil, and the two invisible, eternal choices we’re faced with every day. So if you’re sticking strictly to the origin argument: demon costumes good; apple bobbing bad.

And the Irish brought their traditions to America in the 1800’s; and the Civil War caused an American emphasis on ghosts; and in the 1920’s the Boy Scouts counteracted the hate crimes of the Ku Klux Klan on Halloween, by organizing trick-or-treating. So, how do we handle this secular Americanized mish-mash of a holiday? Here’s the Scripture most often quoted:

“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! Come out? **He went into parties with the “worst” of the sinners.** Touch nothing unclean? When the sinful woman wiped His feet with her hair, the Pharisee saw it as proof of *His* ungodliness. But what they failed to understand is that we’re called to **come out and separate from the world’s system**, even as we **reach out and relate to the world’s people**. Jesus describes it as being “in” but not “of”.

“My prayer is *not* that you take them *out* of the *world* but that you *protect* them from the *evil one*. [Especially on Hallowed Eve!] They are not *of* the *world*, even as *I* am not *of* it.” [So they can stay in it and love on it] – John 17:15-16 NIV

[So] **Do not love the world** or [in other words] the things *in* the *world*. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. – 1 John 2:15 NKJ

For **God so loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes *in Him* should not perish but have everlasting life. – John 3:16 NKJ



Halloween is a great dark-and-gory night to practice being a light “in” it but not “of” it. **The Pharisees saw Jesus in the party and assumed this meant he was of the party.** The same way our Arktoberfest protesters see *us*. The Pharisees weren’t upset that Jesus *went* to the party – *they* were there *too* – but that He *enjoyed it!* Whereas *they* went to *spoil* it.

[So] Let your [porch] light shine before men, that they may see your good [and plenty] deeds and praise your Father in heaven. [That’s my paraphrase] - 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 **it's a night to relate, not retreat**. If Jesus had a house in your neighborhood, would He put a bushel over His porch light on the darkest night of the year?

**The Light of the world has called us to shine.** And what do you supposed He'd say to those who came dressed as witches and goblins? I'll bet it'd be clever, and caring, and funny, and kind, and gracious, and full of life! So, if thy conscience allows, **use thy candy to love thy neighbor**. What an opportunity for Kingdom *Ambassadors*! The people God's put around us come right to our door and into our church to see what we're like! It's so easy. **It's like giving candy to a baby.**

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

So let's overwhelm 'em with a bit-O-sweet peace and joy, in the form of Reece's Pieces and Almond Joys, and a Bit-O-Honey. And if your conscience allows, and you shine your porch light tonight, and they stand at your door and knock, they'll be expecting "fun size". So **what do you think they'd think if you gave 'em a "King size"?** Whatever you do, just remember that you are investing in your own glowing reputation for the other 364 days of the year.

And don't forget to **use the supernatural as a segue**. What a night for Ambassadors of Christ! Everyone's talking about ghosts and demons and hell and death and fear and the afterlife – so get in on the conversation! **Just don't push it on people and spoil the party**. And many of you will be shining the kindness of Christ, by serving and encouraging right here tonight.

And finally, **use the gore as a reminder of glory**. When you see the gory demon, ghost, and vampire decorations, don't condemn the culture for being lost (that was the *Pharisees* mistake).

Instead, commend the One who's overcome the darkness of sin and death itself!



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

**Because the power is in loving, not judging.**

And the light of His life *is* shining through *each* of us; and it's especially visible in the darkest seasons. But at the end of the day, literally, **it's up to you how to handle Halloween**.

So definitely don't *imitate* the *ways* of the world, but also don't shrink back from embracing those who *do*, to whatever degree your conscience will allow.