

A Brief History of "HALLOWEEN"

The Halloween season starts as we enter the month of October each year, but each year begins a bit earlier. Here in North America and in Europe, Oct 31 has been known as Halloween day. The biggest promoter of Halloween are retail businesses, as it is the second highest money making season of the year (Christmas being the first). It has also become the biggest day of celebration in offices and public school systems of the year – surpassing Christmas.

If perusing websites there is a great deal of false information and even fear-mongering, especially among Christians. This article is an attempt to clarify fact from fiction and help you to make an informed, prayerful decision concerning your participation, or lack thereof, in this day or season of the year. It can be a wonderful opportunity to be a witness of the light of the gospel.

I. DEFINITIONS:

1. The Dictionary of the Occult and Paranormal define Halloween as simply as "Originally a pagan festival of darkness, fire, and death, All Hallows' Eve was celebrated by the Celts of Northern Europe ... Halloween was also an important date for the witches calendar."

2. The Encyclopedia, Man, Myth, And Magic, puts it this way, "'All Hallows Eve', or Halloween, was originally a festival of fire, the dead, and the power of darkness'." – **These are mostly incorrect.**

II. HISTORY

Our modern celebration of Halloween is a **VERY** distant descendant of the ancient Celtic fire festival called *Samhain*. (*The word is pronounced "sow-en" or "sow-ane" rhyming with cow, because "mh" in the middle of an Irish word has a "w" sound.*) It was the biggest and most significant holiday of the Celtic year. The Celts (pronounced 'Kelts') lived more than 2,000 years ago around the time of Christ. On Oct. 31st, in what is now Great Britain, Ireland, and France, and their new year began on November 1st. This was important because it was when animal herders would move their animals into barns and pens and prepare to ride out the winter. This was also the time of the crop harvests. This annual change of season and lifestyle was marked by a festival called Samhain -- and means 'end of summer.'

In the Celtic belief system, turning points, such as the time between one day and the next, the meeting of sea and shore, or the turning of one year into the next were seen as magical times. The turning of the year was the most potent of these times. This was the time when the "veil between the worlds" was at its thinnest, and the dead could communicate with the living. Celtic legends tell us that on this night, all the hearth fires in Ireland were extinguished, and then re-lit from the **central fire** of the Druids at Tlachtga, 12 miles from the royal hill of Tara. (*The Druids were the learned class among the Celts. They were religious priests who also acted as judges, lawmakers, poets, scholars, and scientists.*) Upon this sacred bonfire the Druids burned animals and crops. The extinguishing of the hearth fires symbolized the "dark half" of the year. The re-kindling from the Druidic fire was symbolic of the returning life that was hoped for in the spring. (*This is where we get the ideas of Bon Fires as a symbol and practice of Halloween today*)

The feast of *Samhain* is described by MacCane as "order suspended". "During this interval the normal order of the universe is suspended, the barriers between the natural and the supernatural are temporarily removed, the *sidh* lies open and all divine beings and the spirits of the dead move freely among men and interfere sometimes violently, in their affairs" (**Celtic Mythology**, p. 127).

The Celts did not actually have demons and devils in their belief system. Some describe Halloween as a festival in which the Celts sacrificed human beings to the devil or some evil demonic god of death. This is not accurate and **can not be found in any real research**. *Contrary to information published by many Christian organizations, there is no historical or archeological evidence of any Celtic deity of the dead named "Samhain."* (*Even most Encyclopedias wrongly site this*) *We know the names of some 350 Celtic deities and Samhain isn't found among them. The Celtic gods of the dead were Gwynn*

ap Nudd for the British, and Arawn for the Welsh. The Irish did not have a "lord of death" as such. McBain's Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language says that "samhuinn" (the Scots Gaelic spelling) means "summer's end."

The Celts did believe in gods, (polytheists) giants, monsters, witches, spirits, and elves, but these were not considered evil, so much as dangerous. The fairies, for example, were often considered hostile and menacing to humans because they were seen as being resentful of men taking over their lands. On this night of *Samhain*, the fairies would sometimes trick humans into becoming lost in the fairy mounds, where they would be trapped forever.

Keep in mind: Celts were pagans, not Satanists -- both are in error, but to there is a major difference between: (1) pagans (who have not heard the gospel) practicing a holiday containing fairies and elves and (2) Satanists (in rebellion against God) who sacrifice children to the devil.

It is always easy to villanize a whole group of people – especially those who lived along time ago, but to do that – but we must be careful not to do so. The standard God set in, we would have to do so to many animists, spiritists, pantheists, etc that missionaries are endeavoring to give a written language too and reach with the gospel even as we speak.

Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world His invisible [attributes] are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] His eternal power and Godhead..."

Folk tradition tells us of some divination practices associated with *Samhain*. Among the most common were divinations (*a foretelling future events, or discovering things secret or obscure, by the aid of superior beings, or by other than human means.*) dealing with marriage, weather, and the coming fortunes for the year. These were performed via such methods as ducking for apples and apple peeling. Ducking for apples was a marriage divination. The first person to bite an apple would be the first to marry in the coming year -- like the modern toss of the wedding bouquet. Apple peeling was a divination to see how long your life would be. The longer the unbroken apple peel, the longer your life was destined to be. In Scotland, people would place stones or nuts in the ashes of the hearth before retiring for the night. Anyone whose stone had been disturbed during the night was said to be destined to die during the coming year.

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In 601 A.D. Pope Gregory the First issued a now famous edict to his missionaries concerning the native beliefs and customs of the peoples he hoped to convert. Rather than try to obliterate native peoples' customs and beliefs, the pope instructed his missionaries to use them: **For example:** if a group of people worshipped a tree, rather than cut it down, he advised them to consecrate it to Christ and build a church around it.

In terms of quickly adding people to the Christian faith, this was a brilliant concept and it became a basic approach used in Catholic missionary work. In many cases, church holy-days were purposely set to coincide with native holy days. Christmas, for instance, was assigned the arbitrary date of December 25th because it corresponded with the mid-winter celebration of many peoples.

In 835 Pope Gregory IV decided to move the practice of All Saints' Day to November 1, probably done to correspond with the Celtic practice of *Samhain*.

In 1530, a monk named Martin Luther honored the faithful saints of the past by choosing All Saints Day (Nov.1) as the day to publicly charge the Church hierarchy with abandoning biblical faith. This became known as "Reformation Day" or All Hallows Day-Christian is a festival commemorating the saints and martyrs. "All Hallows' Eve" – now known as "Halloween" is the day before. "the evening of all the holy ones". So you see the name "Halloween" is actually Christian, not pagan. It is derived from All Saints Day.

III. SOME HALLOWEEN SYMBOLS:

1. "TRICK OR TREAT": To frighten off all the demons and witches that were so prevalent that night they would put on terrifying grotesque costumes. They believed that if dressed in a frightening enough fashion and roamed around all night with the spirits they would think you were one of them and leave you alone. Trick or treat was the belief that you better have something to treat the demons if they came to your house or they would trick you. [The actual phrase "trick or treat" is not Druidic! The oldest citation in print dates only to 1939! The phrase is not recorded by the Merriam-Webster Company until 1941. And the term is actually American, not European \(*Halloween and Other Festivals of Death and Life*, p. 47, 86-90\)!](#)

2. JACK-O-LANTERN and PUMPKINS: Has several different superstitions attached. **One** was that the people to be sacrificed on Halloween would be randomly selected by the Druids. The Druids would leave a pumpkin on the doorstep of the house of the victim to replace the victim and to assure the other members of the family that no one else would be harmed.

[The pumpkin is a New World plant that never grew in Europe until modern times, so it couldn't have been used to make jack-o-lanterns by the Druids.](#)

Another is the lights on the marshes that looked like lanterns on the water were the souls of the dead wanting to be buried. The carved jack-o-lantern which we are the most familiar with is the legend of a man named Jack who carries a lantern (carved turnip) looking for a place to rest for neither heaven nor hell will take him.

FACT: [People in England and Ireland carved out beets, potatoes, and turnips to use as lanterns \(not just on Halloween\). The hollowing out of a turnip to serve as a makeshift lantern was simply a clever way to solve a technical problem in the absence of available metal.](#) According to an 18th century Irish folklore, jack-o'-lanterns were named for a man named Jack, who could not enter heaven because he was a miser. He could not enter hell either, because he had played jokes on the devil. He tricked the devil into climbing a tree. Once the devil was in the tree, Jack carved a cross on the trunk, preventing the devil from coming down. The devil then made a deal with Jack to not allow Jack into hell after Jack died if only Jack would remove the cross from the tree. After Jack died, he couldn't go to hell, and he couldn't go to heaven. He was forced to wander around the earth with a single candle to light his way. Hence, Jack is a damned soul doomed to wander in darkness until Judgment Day. The candle was placed in a turnip to keep it burning longer. When the Irish and this legend came to America in the 1800's, they adopted the pumpkin instead of the turnip. The purpose of the lantern was to ward off evil.

[This legend is recent and does NOT go back to ancient times. If it was ancient, we would find it in the Christian art of Western Europe, or the pagan carvings, or somewhere in graphic representations. It is notable by its absence.](#)

3. BLACK CATS and WITCHES: Along with the above traditions, they brought the idea that the black cat was considered by some to be reincarnated spirits who had prophetic abilities.

[How did witches become connected to Halloween? Once the Druids were branded as evil by the Roman Catholic Church, their practices were looked at as "witchcraft." Followers of the Druid religion were persecuted, went into hiding, and were branded as witches who worshipped Satan. This is why European witchcraft became connected with Satan, whereas witchcraft in other areas of the world is animistic in nature. October 31 became known as a witch holiday. It was called "The Witches' Sabbath" by witch hunters and eventually European witches began celebrating October 31 as one of their four great Sabbaths held during the year. Witches today have 8 major festivals throughout the year: 4 are the solar festivals \(one at both equinoxes, one at both solstices\). The other four are in between the solar festival with SAMHAIN or HALLOWEEN as known to us being the most famous one.](#)

Once the practice of *Samhain* was viewed as Satanic, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Practitioners of the old religion began associating medieval Satanic elements with Halloween. You can see this association in many symbols and traditions of Halloween. Want to hold a Halloween party? Be sure to use black and red crepe - the devil's colors according to Medieval superstition... Decorate with a large spider - one of the devil's followers... And don't forget the black cat. Christians during the Middle Ages believed that every witch had a personal demon sent by Satan who gave them their powers. This personal demon was called a *familiar*. The familiars, which lived with their witches, usually existed in the form of some animal -- often a black cat. This is a superstitious practice of medieval Christians, however, and should not be attributed to the ancient Celts. (Domestic cats were apparently not introduced to Northern Europe until post-Julius Caesar, and didn't really "catch on" until after AD 1050.)

IV. PRACTICES TODAY: While much of what has been propagated by well-meaning people is NOT accurate historically, this IS a night where a great deal of evil occurs just the same – **BECAUSE PEOPLE EXPECT IT TO!**

1. Halloween was not an accepted holiday in Canada until the late 1800's. The people who followed the religion, philosophy and practices of the Druids and those who practiced witchcraft were instrumental in helping this event get established in our country.

It came to us sometime in the 16-1700's, but didn't become a commonly celebrated American holiday until the immigration of the working classed from the British Isles in the late nineteenth century, (some "innocently" passing on traditions they new little of and saw no harm in).

2. Does anyone today celebrate the Celtic holiday of Samhain as a religious observance? Yes. During the mid-1900's, a new interest in pagan religion occurred in Europe and the United States. As a result, paganism as an organized religion has attracted large numbers of people. Many followers of various pagan religions, such as Druids and Wiccans observe Samhain as a religious festival. They view it as a memorial day for their dead friends, similar to the United States' national holiday of Memorial Day in May.

Contrary to popular belief Halloween is *not* the most important celebration for Satanists. Most Satanists celebrate their own birthdays as their most important "unholi"-day, which is to be expected from adherents of a religion that believes that the highest form of religion is "worship of self" (The Satanic Bible, Anton LaVey).

(Interview: "Do you know what a Witch can do?", State Times, May 13, 1983), Witches, Satanists and Occultists worldwide are joined together, all practicing spells, curses, sacrifices, séances, etc. on Halloween night."Samhain, or Halloween, is the beginning of our New Year, and is the time when we can most effectively communicate with the dead."

3. Halloween is celebrated in many countries today, but this is actually a result of secular American influence.

V. What Should Our Response Be? *The first question we should ask our selves, that if we are trying to justify why it is okay to participate the way the world does, then perhaps the Lord is dealing with us!*

1. If we call ourselves Christians, a disciple of Christ that believes, follows, trusts, lives as Christ like (Acts 11:26), and not to live in our old lives (Ephesians 2:2, 3);
2. If we are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17);
3. If we are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26, Romans 8:29);
4. If we are not to conform to our passions and the world (1 Peter 1:14-16, Romans 12:2);
5. If our body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6: 19-20);
6. If God chose us and wants us to be Holy and blameless (Ephesians 1:4);
7. If we are to please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1);
8. If God has set us free from being slaves of sin to become slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18);

Deuteronomy 32:16-17 tells us that God is provoked when demons are honored and not Him ... Although some may not see it this way – that we are honoring Satan, the question should be, are we (or how can we) honor the LORD on this day?

We would be wise to heed Paul's admonition in I Corinthians where he says he does not want us to fellowship with demons or pagan practices in any way. The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

Christians can carefully evaluate Halloween and determine for themselves and their own families what their appropriate response should be. A good general principle should be to refrain from any participation that would either compromise one's faith or bring dishonor to the Lord Jesus Christ. Another good principle is to look for ways to become a positive, Christ honoring voice in the midst of secularism and paganism. Each Christian must be persuaded in his own conscience about how he approaches Halloween.

Some Christians decide to have absolutely no contact with Halloween. They have the legally protected right to keep their children from participating in any potentially spiritually compromising activity, such as listening to ghost stories, or coloring pictures of witches. They may decide to completely ignore the holiday, not answer their door to trick-or-treaters, and instead have a family evening watching Bible story videos or playing family games. Parents who choose this course need to explain to their children why they have taken this stand, and give them strong encouragement, since their children will undoubtedly experience some teasing or ridicule from their friends and schoolmates.

Some Christians decide to have a limited, non-compromising participation in Halloween. Sometimes their activities can be creative and help to promote the gospel. One mother was planning to keep her son home from his public school's Halloween parade but he convinced her to let him go dressed as his favorite Bible character, David. He stood on the stage before his entire public school and told the story of how David trusted God and saved God's people from Goliath. Other families respond to trick-or-treaters by including a salvation tract with each treat. Many families restrict their children's trick or treating (this seems consistent with our continuing parental admonition "Don't take candy from a stranger!") and instead let them attend an alternative celebration at church or in the home of friends. Most Christian families restrict their children's costumes to exclude evil, pagan, or demonic costumes. Some insist on biblical characters.

Some Christians decide to "overcome" the pagan and secular trappings of Halloween in a manner similar to the way the Church "overcame" Samhain with All Saints Day. Many churches have "Harvest Festivals," where children may dress as farm animals or farmers. Others host "Reformation Festivals," where children may dress as their favorite Bible character or as a figure from church history. Some churches sponsor "Hell Houses" for older children and teenagers where the gospel is preached as the way to avoid the horrors of eternal punishment. Others have a costume party (no evil characters allowed) where participants play games and have contests as part of preparing food baskets for the needy. Then they ring the doorbells of needy people in their community and "treat" them with the anonymous food baskets (each of which includes a personal message with the plan of salvation and an invitation to church).

What do Christians do with a holiday when pagans refuse to stop practicing it? This was the dilemma that faced Christians in the Middle Ages. (It is also the dilemma facing Christians today with 40 million children going door-to-door each Halloween.) It is not going to go away. It is more popular than ever. It is the SECOND most celebrated event on our calendar each year!!!!

Although some devil worshippers have adopted Halloween as their "holiday," the day itself did not grow out of Satanic practices. However, because of what it symbolizes to the world, what will our participation in it mean to those whom we are trying to witness to? 1 Tim 1:7 -- If people like to be "scared", they are already giving in to a Satanic spirit – what should our witness be? Is it "harmful" to participate? Each person and family must decide:

1 Corinthians 10:23-33, Paul speaks about meat sacrificed to idols. This meat was often sold in the meat market and the question arose, "Should a Christian eat such meat?"

Paul said in verse 25, *"Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience's sake."* This is most interesting. He says it is okay to eat the meat bought in the market place even though that meat may have been sacrificed to idols.

Then in verses 28-29 he says, *"But if anyone should say to you, 'This is meat sacrificed to idols,' do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience's sake; ²⁹ I mean not your own conscience, but the*

other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?" (NASB). Paul is saying that if you find out the meat was sacrificed to idols, don't eat it -- not because of you, but because of the other person. In other words, eating that meat won't affect you. But, it may affect the attitude of another who does not understand the freedom the Christian has in Christ.

Romans 14:5-9 *One person esteems [one] day above another; another esteems every day [alike]. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes [it] to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe [it]. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*

One of the best thing we can to that day and night and leading up to it is to PRAY!!!

Give out candy – tell people Jesus loves them – and be sure to give them a tract too!

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