

What's so hallowed about Halloween?

Each autumn, after we have arrived safely home from the Feast of Tabernacles, what is the first obstacle that we – or perhaps more important – our children, have to face?

Halloween!

In this article, I would like to answer the question, "What is so hallowed about Halloween?" I would like to show you that the observance of Halloween in the twenty-first century is just as wrong in God's sight as it always was. Also, I would like to encourage parents to give extra help to your children during the Halloween season.

Our Creator understands that we human beings are forgetful creatures. He knows that we need constant reminders as to what is right and what is wrong. This is one reason why He gave us His holy day cycle year after year.

Sometimes it seems that if one of God's teachings or doctrines hasn't been "officially" mentioned for a while (for example, in a sermon, in a Bible Study or in a new item of church literature), we begin thinking that perhaps that teaching is no longer applicable. Our human nature has a "Let's go back to doing that" pull to it.

However, although we may not have heard about it for a while, Halloween has not somehow magically improved. In fact, with the cult-like popularity of the *Harry Potter* stories and movies, it is probably getting worse. In God's opinion, Halloween is still as wrong as it always was and, for God's people, it is still very much to be avoided.

So let us again remind ourselves of its origins:

The name "Halloween," according to Webster's Dictionary, is a shortened form of "All Hallows Even" or "All Hallows Evening." From the Compton's Encyclopedia, here is a brief excerpt from the article on Halloween:

Customs and superstitions gathered through the ages go into the celebration of Halloween, or All Hallows Eve, on October 31, the Christian festival of All Saints. It has its origins, however, in the autumn festivals of earlier times. The ancient Druids had a three-day celebration at the beginning of November. They believed that on the last night of October spirits of the dead roamed abroad, and they lighted bonfires to drive them away. In ancient Rome the festival of Pomona, goddess of fruits and gardens, occurred at about this time of year. It was an occasion of rejoicing associated with the harvest; and nuts and apples, as symbols of the winter store of fruit, were roasted before huge bonfires. But these agricultural and pastoral celebrations also had a sinister aspect, with ghosts and witches thought to be on the prowl. Even after November 1 became a Christian feast day honoring all saints, many people clung to the old pagan beliefs and customs that had grown up about Halloween. Some tried to foretell the future on that night by performing such rites as jumping over lighted candles. In the British Isles great bonfires blazed for the Celtic festival of Samhain. Laughing bands of *guisers* (young people disguised in grotesque masks) carved lanterns from turnips and carried them through the villages. In the United States children carved faces on hollowed-out pumpkins and put lighted candles inside to make jack-o'-lanterns. Halloween celebrations today reflect many of these early customs. Stores and homes display orange and black figures of witches, bats, black cats, and pumpkins. People dressed in fanciful outfits go to costume parties, where old-fashioned games like bobbing for apples in tubs of water may be a part of the festivities. Children put on costumes and masks and go from house to house demanding "trick or treat." The treat, usually candy, is generally given and the trick rarely played. Some parents feel this custom is dangerous. There have been numerous instances in which sharp objects or poisons have been found in candy bars and apples. To provide an alternative to begging for candy from strangers, many communities schedule special, supervised parties and events at Halloween.

This encyclopaedia article says that Halloween precedes the "Christian" festival of Hallowmas (All Saints Day). Still, how truly Christian is this Hallowmas, which we might consider as the daytime portion of Halloween? Here is another short quote, this one from the Encarta Encyclopedia article on All Saints Day:

All Saints' Day, also Allhallows or Hallowmas: Festival celebrated on November 1 in the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, and by the Orthodox churches on the first Sunday after Pentecost, in honor of God and all his saints, known and unknown. It became established as a church festival early in the 7th century when the Pantheon in Rome was consecrated as the Church of the Blessed Virgin and All Martyrs. Pope Gregory IV gave the custom official authorization in 835. November 1 may have been chosen because it was the day of one of the four great festivals of the pagan nations of the north, and it was church policy to supplant pagan with Christian observances.

What does God think of it?

It would appear that Pope Gregory thought that it was quite all right to ignore God's fall feasts as clearly commanded in the Bible, to keep a feast of his own (patterned after pagan festivals) a month later, and to keep his feast (Hallowmas) in a completely opposite and unauthorized manner. Pope Gregory obviously did not learn the lesson from King Jeroboam of Israel who made this same mistake and was severely punished for it. We read about this episode in I Kings 12:27-33:

'If this people go up [at the time of God's fall feasts: verse 32] to offer sacrifices in the house of the Eternal at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.' So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, 'You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. And this thing became a sin, for the people went to the one at Bethel and to the other as far as Dan. He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the Feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices upon the altar, so did he in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. He went up to the altar which he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and he ordained a feast for the people of Israel, and went up to the altar to burn incense.

Jeroboam's new feast was man-made. It was *not* one of God's commanded festivals. It was a counterfeit! Although Jeroboam's feast was set at approximately the same time and also included idolatrous content, this does not necessarily suggest that he copied it from the pagan predecessors of Halloween. This is, of course, very possible, but the important question is: What did God think of Jeroboam's feast? Verse 30 of this same chapter tells us that *"this thing became a sin."*

Most of us know by now that we are to worship God where, when and how He commands us to. For example, with regards to His autumn festivals:

**Say to the people of Israel, in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation.... On the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement; it shall be for you a day of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present an offering by fire to the Eternal... Say to the people of Israel, on the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the Eternal.
(Leviticus 23:24 & 27 & 34)**

We should know better than to imitate the methods of worship used by the ancient pagan Druids and Romans. In scriptures that are very familiar to us, God repeatedly warns us against such copying:

When the Eternal your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, take heed that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods that I also may do likewise? You shall not do so to the Eternal your God; for every abominable thing which the Eternal hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. (Deuteronomy 12:29-31)

When you come into the land which the Eternal your God gives you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Eternal; and because of these abominable practices the Eternal your God is driving them out before you. (Deuteronomy 18:9-12)

Hear the word which the Eternal speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the Eternal: 'Learn not the way of the nations [*KJV: heathen*], nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations [*heathen*] are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are false... (Jeremiah 10:1-3)

Halloween in the modern world

Of course, to the above, most people in our society would say, "Who cares where Halloween came from? Who cares about its pagan origins? We just want to have a bit of fun!"

But is Halloween really "just a bit of fun"?

My family and I are blessed to live in the beautiful city of Victoria which is situated at the south end of Vancouver Island on Canada's west coast. So many of God's people who have visited Victoria have commented on what an idyllic place it is, and in many ways this is true. Nevertheless, our fair city has been given the dubious reputation of being one of the worst cities in the world for the practice of witchcraft and Satan worship. It is so bad that, according to one young lady who escaped from a local cult and its practices, even some in the highest levels in the ministry of one of Victoria's mainstream churches have been involved in it!

Satan would have the general public believe that "serious" witchcraft is only practiced in scary books and movies, that it is not really an everyday practice. Yet it is. It really is!

We know that those people who are involved in such things are very active in their works of darkness on the night of Halloween. Historically and traditionally this is the night of their most important "witches' sabbaths."

God's Word warns:

For once you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; (Ephesians 5:8-12)

We are commanded to avoid even the mention of the terrible things these people get up to on the likes of Halloween. But suffice it to say that it is definitely not "just a bit of fun."

Even in the more "normal" walks of life, Halloween holds many physical dangers which God's people should avoid. As mentioned in the Compton's Encyclopedia article excerpt above, occasionally we hear of Halloween "treats" being booby-trapped with glass, needles and razor blades. Fireworks are becoming more and more popular in North American Halloween celebrations as they have been for many years on Guy Fawkes Night, a British celebration which has associations with Halloween.

Hundreds of British children are burnt, some very severely, every year through the misuse of fireworks. We can expect to see an increase in burn accidents here in Canada and the United States corresponding to the increase in popularity of Halloween fireworks.

What about moral harm? What are the children who participate in the "Trick or Treat" tradition learning? They are learning that begging, extortion and getting something for nothing are all quite acceptable. They are learning that even some "light" vandalism is permissible on the night of October 31 if they just change its name from "an act of vandalism" to "a trick."

On Halloween night, the people of Canada and the United States, either knowingly or ignorantly, will be celebrating "the way of get" (as Herbert Armstrong used to describe it so aptly). They will also be celebrating death, darkness and the devil.

These are the very opposites of the things God's people were celebrating one month previously. Satan's holidays are very cheap and inferior counterfeits of God's true Holy Days.

Again, in God's sight, Halloween observance is just as wrong today as it always was.

Give children extra help

Let's face it. Satan has done his job well. He has put a great deal of effort into making Halloween attractive, colourful and cute, especially to impressionable little children. Parents in God's church really do need to give a lot of extra help to their children at this time of year.

It is true that, if we have taught them properly so far, our children will by now know, academically, where Halloween came from. Still, school parties are fun! School friends are fun! Dressing up is fun! Candies and other treats are fun! Let us remember that being different is not easy for our children. It is not easy for them to turn their backs on, and walk away from, the things that their peers are enjoying and discussing. It is *very* hard for them. So let us give them as much help as we can.

Here are some practical points:

If there is going to be a Halloween party or dress-up day at school (which is very likely), take the time to have a word with the teacher and keep them home for the day. Don't make them "tough it out." They will not miss any worthwhile learning.

If you and your children find it uncomfortable and difficult to enjoy the evening of October 31 at home because of the constant stream of trick-or-treaters knocking on your door, don't (as some have done) sit in your basement with the lights off, quaking in fear. Simply hang a sign on your front door announcing "Sorry, no trick-or-treat," leave some lights on to deter vandalism, and go out somewhere for the evening. Go to a place where you can avoid it all, or at least as much of it as possible.

Spend the evening with some other church people, perhaps. If you can find a good movie playing, you might like to go to see that. When our children were younger, our family "Halloween avoidance tradition" was to get together with at least one other church family and to go swimming at one of our local pools. We usually had almost the whole place to ourselves.

Again, let's give our children that extra help and encouragement they need to get them through this season, and others like it.

In summary, we have seen that, as we approach the twenty-first century, Halloween is just as wrong in God's sight as it always was, we have refreshed our memories as to its origins, and we have had a reminder to give our children the extra help they really do need at this time of year.

Yes, after returning home from the Feast, before we can again rejoice in one of God's true festivals the following spring, we must run the gamut of Satan's counterfeit holidays. So let us stay as far away from them as we possibly can, and let us keep our children as far from them as we can.

Let us spend as much of our wintertime as we can together with other members of God's family.

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