

Can Christians Redeem Pagan Holidays Such as Halloween?

Author's Note: There is always an attempt to de-emphasize the true, spiritual significance of Christian holidays and place emphasis on Santa, toys, bunnies, baskets and candy. That is a sincere cause for concern. This article assumes that is understood. This article is also not a hill to die on for me. I respect those who may disagree, and they may have a valid pause for concern.

During the 2011 Christmas season, I received the following email from an online viewer, "I'm sorry, but every time I tried to watch the sermon the decorated Christmas trees in the background were disturbing to my spirit. I turned it off. I am discouraged and disappointed because of the trees."

Her statement begs the question, "Can we redeem holidays?" Redeem means to recover the ownership of something. Can we, in good faith, redeem Halloween, Christmas and Easter with their roots saturated in paganism, superstitions, and the occult?

Redeem and celebrate are not unfamiliar to Christians. God "redeems" man from a state of darkness and we "celebrate" this transformation of heart. Simply stated, it's about why, whom and how we celebrate.

For example, Halloween, a mixture of Celtic pagan superstition and early traditions is associated with witchcraft and satanic activity. This is not something to be celebrated, nor can it be redeemed, as it stands with themes such as horror, death and fear. We have children and we can't always avoid the gory and grotesque decorations, so we change the theme in order to redeem. We use the opportunity to redefine Halloween to "good overcame evil day."

We don't celebrate Halloween per se; we remember Jesus'

victory on the cross and how He overcame evil. Many churches offer Fall Festivals and celebrations for this very reason—to redeem the theme of Halloween.

What about Christmas? Rooted in pagan practices, it is abused and commercialized, but can it be redeemed?

Christmas, unlike Halloween's message of horror and death, celebrates eternal life through the birth of Christ. We don't falsely worship the tree and the decorations referred to in Jeremiah 10:1-10; we worship the Creator of heaven and earth.

Conversely, rich in symbolism, the Christmas tree can point to the cross: Once a dead and barren tree, supporting a lifeless Savior, it now stands evergreen as the symbol of eternal life that darkness cannot overcome (cf. 1 John 1:5).

Gift-giving can also represent peace and goodwill among men (Matt. 2): "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). It can, however, lead to extravagant spending and debt; this should be avoided.

What about Easter, with roots in neo-paganism and ancient Celtic and pagan rituals? Can it be redeemed? Many Christians who celebrate Easter are not swayed or influenced by pagan roots, Celtic rituals or cult-like experiences. They are not worshipping the false goddess Eastre.

Like Christmas, the historical roots and the secularization does not undermine the message in a sincere heart. Easter celebrates the reality of an empty tomb and the power of the cross to cleanse and redeem, to release us from sin and death. It offers hope and peace to a dying world. This is cause for great celebration. Holidays, in many cases, are redeemed when the focus is on Christ.

Let's look at this another way: It is my guess that there are a number of Christians who do not acknowledge holidays because

of how they originated, and I respect that. But let's follow that line of thinking in other areas: Should we not acknowledge days of the week whose names originate from false gods: Sunday from the sun god, Monday the moon god and so on?

Again, these issues are heart issues. God does not desire superficial sacrifice and "religiosity"; He desires a broken and contrite heart. Pleasing God is the most important issue of the heart. We can avoid celebrating holidays, yet still be rigid, arrogant and judgmental. The "heart" is the main focus of this article.

Considering that liberty has its limits. If all that we do honors God, He is pleased. Again, the key is to avoid arrogance and judgmentalism, and to avoid worshipping the wrong things. Strive to follow Paul's advice and not "dispute over doubtful things" and "live peaceably with all men" (cf. Rom. 14:1 and 12:18). For example, what the online viewer whom I previously mentioned failed to realize was that I did not place the trees on the stage; the building was not ours. She neglected to err on the side of grace.

Whatever your position, the question to ask is: "Is my stance leading to love, joy, peace, contentment, gentleness and kindness? Or is it leading to rigidity, arrogance, legalism, divisiveness, criticism and anger over non-essentials?" The former is the filling of the Spirit; the later is the slippery slope of judgmentalism.

There are those who derail Christmas and its commercialism, yet purchase a \$2,500 Plasma on credit, book expensive vacations each summer and never serve the community or help those in need. Time is spent posting videos exposing the root of holidays, but no time is spent in the prayer closet truly seeking God. Others ridicule the secularization of Christmas and Easter but allow their family to watch ungodly entertainment. Celebrating holidays is often not the issue; the issue is what, or whom, we choose to worship; the attitude

of the heart.

This Halloween, don't celebrate it like the world does. Remember that good overcame evil. Don't forget about the power of the cross. "There is no peace until we see the finished work of Jesus Christ—until we can look back and see the cross of Christ between our sins" (D.L. Moody). This offers peace and hope to a dying world—truly a cause for celebration!