

The Halloween Predicament

Ah yes, it's that time of the year again, when spiritual battle lines are drawn, friends open up to other friends in secret, hoping they won't judge them for what they're planning to do, and the kids aren't exactly sure what to think because they just want candy and don't really care where it comes from. I'm talking, of course, about Halloween.

All across America, Christians will be faced with a decision to make at the end of October, and while many won't give what they will choose a second thought, a good many others will have some internal angst about what to do. Which door will you choose? The church "harvest party" or traditional trick-or-treating with your kids? The harvest party, of course, is designed as a safe, spiritually sterile alternative to traditional Halloween that many churches will put on because, let's face it, the kids must have their candy.

Let me be clear right from the outset. What you choose to do with your family on Halloween is entirely between you and God. Romans 14:2-3 makes this clear when it states, "For one has faith to eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Do not let him who eats despise him who does not eat, and do not let him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has welcomed him." Paul is not talking about vegetarians judging meat-eaters here. The example he's giving carried enormous spiritual significance to many people in his culture, similar to the Halloween debate in ours. So his words should be considered very carefully.

We live in a society that has increasingly become obsessed with opinions. Not only does everyone have one on just about everything, but due to the canvassing of social media, we must make sure that the whole world hears our particular opinion on any given subject, and indeed, we consider it our natural right to voice our opinions to everyone within earshot. (And

yes, the irony that I am writing an opinion blog about opinions is not lost on me.) But as I've said before, just because you have an opinion on something doesn't mean you should always share it.

Some Christians make a fun day of trick-or-treating in their neighborhoods, dressing their kids up in silly costumes, watching them gleefully run from a door after having just received candy from their neighbor, enjoying the crisp fall weather and walking around with other friends and family. The whole neighborhood is out together, and everyone is having a great time. Of course there's always that one house that just goes way overboard and is obviously too frightening for your little ones, so you just avoid that one. Plenty of other houses, obviously. And your kids get home, sweaty and tired, and they dump their sugar-laced treasures on the floor and begin the all-important process of sorting, taking inventory and trading. And you stand watch over it all, eyeing one of those mini-Snickers ...

Other Christians dress their kids up, but they head to church, where haystacks are set out, games are prepped and ready to go, prizes are piled high and the candy is given freely. The kids laugh with their friends, you sip coffee with other parents, smiling as your kid stumbles in the three-legged race, and you head home afterwards, sweaty and tired, and the sorting, inventory and trading begins as well ...

Halloween has traditionally been a flashpoint for Christians because many hold very strong opinions about it. An opinion is fine, as long as it is used mostly for your own behavior. When it is used to bully or intimidate or pressure someone else who maybe shares a different opinion than you, it becomes sin. I've had conversations with friends of mine who, for the life of them, can't remotely understand why any Christian would even entertain the thought of celebrating Halloween by trick-or-treating with their kids. To them, it's so obviously Satan's holiday, and so obviously a dark spiritual holiday

(Don't you realize how many sacrifices happen on Halloween?) that to partake would be the same as endorsing occult activity.

At the same time, I have talked to many Christians who don't view the day as spiritual at all, but rather view it as a cultural holiday. Yes, there are goblins and witches and monsters, but there are goblins and witches and monsters in Narnia, too, and we don't stop our kids from reading that. It's enjoyable to get out once a year and meet your neighbors, be a part of the neighborhood and see what everyone is wearing. To them, turning the day into an overtly spiritual, satanic ceremony is laughable and silly.

Regardless of where you fall on this spectrum, always remember that your convictions are *your* convictions. Scripture gives us very clear instructions for times like this, and my prayer is that we can be obedient in what God is asking of us. If you want trick-or-treat, have a blast. If you want to attend a harvest party because you can't stand all the dark imagery, have a blast. Just don't let your personal conviction become an offense, which then leads you down the road of judgment and condemnation of others. Because if you go there, you're just as bad as the very thing you're condemning.