

Why I'm Against Evangelical 'Hell Houses'

Some churches are trying to scare the hell out of sinners (and saints alike) this Halloween season. And they aren't doing it with classic fire-and-brimstone, sinners-in-the-hands-of-an-angry-God sermons. They are doing it with so-called **hell houses**. And it's scarier than you think.

About 10 years ago, I went to one of these haunted churches in my city. In fact, a whole group of us decided to skip our **Bible study** to attend this haunted church. It was all the rage. There were long lines to get in and large groups of people buzzing about what they just experienced at the exit.

When I entered, the church was dark and gloomy. Bloodied people dressed as zombies, witches and demons jumped from behind walls, eerie sounds filled the halls, and voices "from the dead" issued calls from beyond the grave.

Christians portrayed lost souls in spiritual prison after dying in sins like alcoholism to wife beating to pure unbelief and beyond. (I understand newer versions of these hell houses show rave scenes, **post-abortive** women bleeding and even **gay weddings** to reflect societal trends.) It was supposed to be creepy, and it was. The atmosphere of this darkened **megachurch** was absolutely **demonic**. In fact, I could sense the wicked **supernatural** activity all around me.

"It may be that some young people will find their way to genuine faith through such ghoulish shenanigans, but their overall import is a distortion of the gospel," Timothy George, chairman of the Charles Colson Center for Christian Worldview, once said. "Those who indulge in such displays are taking something serious, eternal, and consequential and treating it with a finesse of a butcher doing brain surgery."

In the process, they trivialize evil and domesticate grace.”

Well said, Brother George.

Listen, I’m all for creative evangelism—and churches report that up to a third of the people who go through **hell houses** get saved. But I remain more than a little skeptical. I’m not sure if it’s a true conversion or if they just agreed to pray because they were scared witless in the heat of the moment. Only God knows. Yes, I’m all for creative evangelism, and I appreciate that churches hosting these **hell houses** truly are trying to reach the lost. But decorating a church to look like a demon-filled dwelling place seems to be an invitation for demons to dwell there.

“Will members of the church of God, the body of Christ, make their goal to stand up and speak out or continue to blend in and hide, fearing the rejection or rebuff of the very ones they were commissioned to help? Too many Christians today in North America represent lifeguards who cannot swim and firemen who are afraid to smell smoke or get wet,” wrote Karl I. Payne, pastor and author of *Spiritual Warfare: Christians, Demonizations and Deliverance*, in a WND commentary. “Halloween as it is celebrated by many today represents a trick, not a treat, and the consequences of this trick can not only be destructive in time, they can haunt a person for eternity.”

Doesn’t Payne make a case for **hell houses**, then? Shouldn’t we be trying to use this secular holiday to rescue souls? No. Absolutely not. God forbid! With **hell houses**, sincere pastors are trying to redeem a cultural event for the glory of God. But most of the people in the hell house I visited a decade ago were church folk looking to have a good time. And, again, we can’t be sure true conversions are taking place in this demonic atmosphere. Why not do an outreach at a local haunted house and share the **gospel** there instead of defiling the church? Why not, as Payne says, make it our goal to stand up and speak out instead of blending in with the crowd?

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