

Do Halloween's Pagan Roots Matter?

The debate rises again every year at this time among sincere believers. What do we do with Halloween? Some say that regardless of its past, in the 21st century it is a harmless time of fun for children. Others point to the fact that Wiccans and Satanists, still consider it to be their high holy day of worship so Christians should avoid it in every way and at all costs. How should Christian parents approach this one day that marketers turned into a \$6 billion holiday?

We Cannot Avoid All Things Pagan

First, it is essential to understand that we cannot go through life avoiding everything of pagan origin. Many of the names of our months and days of the week named after pagan deities. We can't avoid calling out a false god's name each time we say a particular day of the week or month of the year. Perhaps we can start calling days by their numerical value? "Let's meet for coffee on Day Four? Say Seven?" I don't think that is going to work, do you?

Should this worry us? I don't think so. In Babylon, they called Daniel by a name that honored a pagan god. For the vast majority of his long life, he answered to that name. His position demanded that he become an expert in the false religions and beliefs that dominated Babylonian society. He did and managed to prosper in a high governmental capacity, not only in the Babylonian empire but the Assyrian and Persian as well. Did he compromise in learning how to thrive in such a pagan culture? No. At least not if we believe God's record of his life. (See Ezek. 14:14).

In the New Testament. Paul dealt with the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols. He taught that with prayer and a clear

conscience. one could eat it. even though it was previously used in a sacrifice to a false deity.

We Must Not Embrace All Things Pagan

Even though we cannot avoid all things pagan in our society, this doesn't mean that we should embrace anything and everything in the name of freedom. While Paul said that a follower of Christ with a clear conscience could eat the meat offered to idols with no harmful side effects, he does give boundaries. For instance, he forbids partaking from the table at a pagan ceremony (See 1 Cor. 10:14-31).

Freedom isn't life without boundaries. It is life within the right boundaries. Can someone practice witchcraft and still be a born-again Christian? No. Not according to the Scripture. God expressly forbids witchcraft (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:31, 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:10-14; Gal. 5:19-21). So anyone who knows the Bible understands how ridiculous the idea of Christian witches is.

What's Up With Us, Christians?

Yet, many Christians allow their little boys and girls to dress up as witches for Halloween. Why do we let our children dress like monsters or creatures of the night? Why do we watch shows and movies where the main characters are involved in witchcraft, fortune telling and so on? What's up with Christians? Why are so many flocking to see horror movies where the dark side is celebrated and elevated as something greatly feared and respected?

Freedom does not mean everything that once was considered bad is now good. Read, Ephesians 5:7-11, "Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth—proving what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph.

5:7-11a).

If we are told to find what is acceptable to the Lord, it obviously means that some things are not acceptable. How do we know what is and isn't acceptable?

Roots Matter

One key is to look at the root. The root always determines the fruit. Jesus said:

Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way, they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions (Matt. 7:15-20, NLT).

If the root is evil, then the fruit is evil. Things don't magically change from the source to the fruit. Much of what passes for innocent fun in Halloween traditions finds its root in pagan rituals of the Celtic people of Ireland, the United Kingdom, and northern France. The Celts who lived 2000 years ago in these areas celebrated their new year on the first of November. They believed that during the night before the new year began the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead were blurred.

Halloween

On this night of Oct. 31, they celebrated Samhain, when they believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth. In addition to causing trouble and damaging crops, Celts thought that the presence of the otherworldly spirits made it easier

for the druids, or Celtic priests, to predict the future.

To commemorate the event, druids built huge sacred bonfires, where the people gathered to burn crops and animals, and sometimes humans as sacrifices to the Celtic deities. During the celebration, they wore costumes, typically consisting of animal heads and skins, and attempted to tell each other's fortunes.

Many traditions, such as "guising" or dressing in costumes continued to evolve as the Romans conquered and absorbed the Celtic traditions into festivals dedicated to their own gods.

Trick or Treat

The tradition of trick-or-treating began by leaving treats outside in honor of the good spirits and in hope to appease the evil ones and keep them from bringing a curse upon their crops, home and family. Later, the Catholic Church incorporated these ideas and made them their own by baking cakes for departed souls. The church commemorated a festival to hallow (reverence) the dead and eventually set the time during the time of the Celtic feast melting the two together. All of these traditions were rooted in a faulty understanding of the spirit world and a deep fear of the future.

Most everything related to the night of Halloween (or Hallows' Eve) is connected to an attempt to divine the future. Even the bobbing of apples has its roots in divination. As my friend Ben Godwin wrote, "Halloween is a showcase for witchcraft." Ouija boards, tarot cards, Dungeons and Dragons, horoscopes, fortune-telling—all seek to see into the future through illegal authority. The casting of spells, use of potions and charms attempt to manipulate people to perform in a way that violates the laws of God. Don't be confused: Witchcraft and Christianity are incompatible in any century. They draw power from two different sources, and in the end, only one will remain.

Halloween today is much watered down and mostly changed from what it was during the Celtic Samhain celebrations and the Catholic church's adaptation of both Roman practices and Celtic practices. However, roots still matter.

What Are We to Do?

I am not advocating for living in this world like we are out of it. But I am advocating for living in this world like you are no longer of it (John 17:14). If a Christian parent allows their little ones to put on a harmless costume (not related to the dark side) and takes them to a few friends to collect some goodies, I am not going to condemn them or act as if I am a superior Christian because I will not allow my daughter to do the same. But Christians need to investigate the roots and make decisions based on eternity rather than the temporary. Yes, we want our kids to enjoy life, but that doesn't mean they should participate in everything that is fun. Just because it is fun doesn't mean it is right.

Parents, the decision is ultimately yours. I hope you will really pray over this and seek the Lord's wisdom. He'll guide you in the right way. And if you need to make changes to family traditions, He will give you the grace and wisdom you need. Roots matter! {eoa}

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