

A Christian Response To Halloween

Selected Scriptures

Sunday School Lesson

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Memory Verse: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

Texts: “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2).

“And what communion has light with darkness? Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you’” (2 Cor. 6:14c, 17).

“When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, *you shall not learn to follow* the abominations of those nations....but as for you, the Lord *your God has not appointed such for you*” (Deut. 18:9-14, emphasis added).

Monday

I want to talk to you this week about a special topic of concern, and that is the holiday of Halloween that is fast approaching. And the primary issue for us is how should a Christian respond to Halloween. What is a Christian response to this holiday and celebration that goes on this time of year? Where did this whole thing of running around trick or treating, carving pumpkins, going to parties dressed up as witches, ghouls, skeletons, ghosts, vampires, werewolves and other monsters all come from; and what should my role in it be? Should I encourage participation by handing out candy, or should I hand out tracts, or should I turn off the light and hide upstairs? What should I allow my children to do? What about Halloween parties at school or haunted houses? What about alternatives to Halloween? Should we be doing those things? What does the Bible have to say, if anything? What is pleasing to the Lord? There are a lot of questions we could ask and a lot of issues to work through with regard to this holiday and that’s what I want to talk to you about today in an effort to sort of help you along the way.

Now let me first of all just come right out and tell you that I am a reformed Halloween celebrator. I used to take part in the holiday with gusto, making the rounds of all the big multistory haunted houses throughout Kansas city, helping with the high school’s haunted house, trick or treating, watching all kinds of horror movies, which I have since learned to regret, and all of the activities associated with this holiday. But then I went to college, and I began to notice that other Christians on campus didn’t want anything to do with it. I began to hear what pastors, campus ministers, and famous Christian speakers such as John McArthur said about it, and they uniformly disliked and often openly denounced the holiday. At first, I was frankly defensive about it. It was just clean fun wasn’t it? Then God began to convict me about participating in this holiday through various scriptures, some of which I will go over with you this week. Then

by His grace God convicted me of my pride and led me to abandon celebrating the holiday altogether - though I am not opposed to Halloween alternatives and I like to hold to the principle that if you are going to take something away from a child, you should make efforts to replace it with something better. God has brought me to the point where I do not like this celebration for many reasons, all of which are based in my Christian faith, and some of which I hope to outline for you this week. We'll begin looking at those reasons tomorrow. But let's just take some time today to ask a few background questions.

What is your history with regard to Halloween? _____

How has God spoken to you about this holiday? _____

What Scriptures support your thoughts and why? _____

Tuesday

Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things (Phil. 4:8).” The Christian is supposed to train himself to set his mind on things above and not on the things of the earth (Col. 3:2). We are to love the Lord with “all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). Let's consider the origins and contemporary practice of Halloween and see if the celebration of this holiday is consistent with these Scriptural principles:

1. The origin and practice of Halloween. When and where did all of this stuff begin? The celebration of Halloween dates back to centuries before the time of Christ and before the time even of the Roman empire. It was a Celtic holiday celebrated principally by the Celtic people of Ireland, Wales, Scotland and Britain, but also further abroad in some parts of Germany and France. The Celts were pagans through and through, worshiping many different gods and objects

within nature such as trees and cats. They believed, in fact that cats were evil people reincarnated. They worshiped nature itself, and we see this history reflected in many elements of our own contemporary culture. They were an animistic people, and the main priests of their religion were men, who called themselves druids.

The Celtic new year's eve was the night of October 31st, and November 1st was the first day of their year. At this time, all of the crops had been harvested and the land was in a general state of decay with the coming onset of winter. Celts believed that on October 31st the Lord of the dead, a god named Sam Hain (pronounced "Sah-Whin"), would release the souls of the dead to roam around on the earth. These were evil spirits and demons bent upon destruction, death and tormenting the living.

In preparation for this night of terror, the druidic priests would travel around from house to house in villages and towns demanding certain foods. If anyone refused to give to them they would call down a curse upon their home so that the people would be tormented by the demons and by spells and magic cast by the druids. This is the origin of trick or treating. And as they went, the druids carried large turnips which they had hollowed out and on which they had carved demonic faces and charms. Each one was said to contain a familiar spirit which the priest had called to inhabit it, and who personally led and guided the druid. Later these things came to be used by others as a way of frightening off and confusing the evil spirits released by Sam Hain. This was the origin of carving pumpkins and making Jack-O-Lanterns.

As the evening approached, the druids had everyone extinguish all of the lights in their homes so that they were totally dark and hidden and bring one burning torch per household to a hill outside of the towns. There the people would kindle a huge bonfire and hold what was called the "festival of death." They would come dressed up in costumes, as animals or other frightening creatures, wearing horrible masks, also meant to be a means of confusing and misdirecting evil spirits. They would dance around and perform incantations and worship Sam Hain in an effort to appease him.

This was not a game to them, but a deadly serious business, and they would perform sacrifices also, throwing food and animals into the fire, and yes, they even sacrificed people by throwing them into the fire as well. You didn't want to be on the outs with your community or a criminal awaiting punishment when the night of the festival of death came around. At this festival the druids also practiced divination using terrible rituals. For instance, they would predict the future based on how the human sacrifices died, what position their bodies were in, how badly they were burned in various places, whether any flesh remained on the bones. People would even pay money for this kind of divination and sometimes supply the sacrifice.

At the end of the festival, each member of the community would cast a white stone into the fire with their mark etched on it. The next morning they would return to claim it among the ashes. If a person's stone was missing, it was thought that the person was sentenced to die by the spirits within the next year. These customs varied from place to place, but everywhere within the Celtic

world the evening was associated with pagan idolatry and rituals, worship of demons and spirits, divination, magic and witchcraft, the occult, death related symbolism and the activity of evil demonic spirits. There was absolutely nothing redeeming about it whatsoever.

The holiday became very popular and was growing in Europe, and in the year 834, Pope Boniface IV, in an effort to put a stop to this foul time of year moved the church feast of All Saints' Day, which was also known as All Hallow's Day from May to November 1st. This was the day that the Roman church celebrated all of the saints that were martyred during the Roman persecutions. The pope hoped that people would choose to celebrate this day as a replacement holiday rather than continuing with their festivals of death. He also hoped that it would effectively stamp out the worship of Sam Hain. His goal was not to somehow "Christianize" Halloween. That's completely unfair. His goal was to kill it altogether. The strategy unfortunately didn't work. What it did do was eventually change the name of the day to Hallow's Eve, just like Christmas Eve, the night before, which was shortened in the process of time to Halloween.

Halloween was not practiced in this country for about two hundred years. From the time that the Mayflower landed to the early 1800s it was in fact banned by local governments, and you could even be prosecuted criminally for disorderly conduct, if you were caught celebrating Halloween. The settlers at Jamestown, the pilgrims, the colonies, the puritans that came over, the first presidents and the founding fathers of this nation never observed Halloween. Why? Because they were for the most part either Christians or informed by Christian sensibilities; they understood that the holiday was grounded in the pagan worship of Sam Hain and demons, and they didn't want anything to do with it. What happened? In the early 1800s there was an event known as the great potato famine of Ireland, and with it came a huge wave of Irish immigrants. They brought the celebration of Halloween with them; and since that time it has grown and grown in popularity, being a holiday that appeals very much to the dark side of people, fascination with the occult and horror, and having great economic potential. In fact, Halloween is typically second only to Christmas in terms of commercial retail sales.

So we see that the origins of Halloween are pagan, springing from a false demonic religious system. In fact, it is the most important day in the satanic religious year. On October 31st of this year, all over this nation there will be black sabbaths, black masses and occultic worship. We used to have a friend back in New Mexico, an older man, named Bob Liechti, a high school teacher, who before he was saved lived in St. Joseph, Missouri. When he was there, Bob served as a Satanic priest in a witches coven. A couple of times, when we were there, Bob gave his testimony and told us about the things that would go on during this time of year. The coven, which included people from all walks of life, that others never suspected, doctors, lawyers and the like, would have sacrifices, illicit sex, drinking of blood. They would have all manner of demonic rituals, channeling of spirits, displays of power. They would gather the names of Churches, pastors, Christians and they would pray demons against them, that Christians would be tempted and fall into sexual immorality, reputations and marriages be destroyed, their message hindered, children lost to the faith, and they cast curses on the churches. They loved Halloween

and it was the high point of their religious year and the time of their most intense activity, and oh how they loved when people and children would celebrate it.

Now someone will say to me, “Pastor Chris, what if I just dress my child up as a bunny and we go around and get some candy from our neighbors and friends. That’s not harmful. It’s just totally innocent, clean fun. We’re not involved in any satanic rituals or other evil things. It’s just a fun dress up day.” Well, I would say tread very carefully. First of all, if that’s your goal, a fun dress up time, maybe with friends, candy and a happy memory, then you can do all of that in a totally different context. You can do it with a safe gathering of friends and family. You can pick a theme for dressing up that doesn’t include vicious or evil characters, something like animals from Noah’s Ark, that’s something that is commonly used by churches and Christian schools. You can do it on their birthday; you can do it at a fall festival on a different date. Churches all over America have gone to having fall festivals as a way of encouraging their members and friends not to participate in Halloween, but rather drawing them into more wholesome activities. There are all kinds of things that you can do to keep your children from feeling left out. You can schedule a special family outing, a trip to the beach or grandma’s house; you can play games at home for candy. If your goal is just to have a special fun time for your children, then you can handle that in a different way, rather than following this tradition.

My second response is this, where do you think it begins, this interest in the occult? Where do you think it starts? It starts right here, a small child growing up has a fun time pretending to be a scary character or creature, gets lots of candy, a very positive influence. The child is allowed to watch cartoons, movies and shows with fun occult influences, television shows like Sabrina or Charmed, things that glorify witchcraft and power. It’s all so neat, this cool fantasy world. The child gets in Jr. High and starts going to Halloween parties with friends. Someone breaks out the ouiji board. They do some rituals, play with spells, have a seance for fun. The child gets into high school and college. He or she meets people that are seriously into witchcraft, new age paganism, crystal power or even outright satanism. The whole experience from start to finish has been nothing but fun and enjoyable, a real rush. And it all started because parents failed to ground their child in solid spiritual principles, rejecting things associated with the occult, demonic lies and false promises of fun, fulfillment and power.

As Pastor Tom says, “What parents excuse in moderation, children will tend to do in excess.” Has there not been a great revival of satanic practices, witchcraft and magic, and paganism clothed in the new age movement in our own day? We could ask those of you who are older about your high school days, and most likely not a single one of you could remember a satanist in your class. But you go to school today, and these kind of things are everywhere. It was making great inroads with people back when I was in high school, and it was all over the place when I went to college. We’ve even started having wicca chaplains in the military now. Parents are the front line in protecting and training their children.

Third, celebrating Halloween is inconsistent with training your children and yourself to set their minds on things above. It is not spiritually edifying and uplifting any more than sitting down and

watching some gory horror movie.

Fourth, if we as Christians simply disregard the unchristian aspects of such practices as merely fantasy or superstition, and then encourage our children to participate in them. We are sending two inconsistent messages to our children. Therefore, we run the real risk of communicating the idea that the spiritual battle waged by the rulers of darkness described in Ephesians 6, which the Bible says is real, isn't real. We run the risk of communicating to our children that this warfare is simply not to be taken seriously, and not only that, it's ok to dabble with the other side.

Wednesday

Having considered the origins and practices associate with Halloween, beloved, let's ask the question honestly: by participating in this holiday, are we fulfilling the admonitions of Philippians 4:8 and Colossians 3:2? Why or why not? _____

My freshman year in college, I was in a dorm room next to two homosexual men, Keith and Kent. Keith was a tall guy with bright red hair and a bushy red beard. He wore a necklace with a pentagram on it, lots of crystals, and gave free tarot readings to his fellow students in his room or in the basement at night.

I developed a friendship with these guys and shared the gospel with them several times. They were more lost than you can possibly imagine, but willing to talk. We had a lot of good discussions over an open Bible, sometimes lasting until three or four in the morning. One day Keith asked me if he could give me a tarot reading. I didn't see any harm in it at the time. As I said before, my personal background included a lot of dabbling with occult things. It was, to be completely honest, the besetting sin of my pre-teen and teenage years. I saw it as basically harmless, so I agreed and he gave me a reading.

Afterwards, I was completely fascinated. The facts and knowledge he was able to pull out of the cards were amazing. He asked me if I wanted to have a deck. Thanksgiving break was coming up and I thought I could examine it and read about it over the break, so I accepted his offer. About two days after I was home, I woke up completely sick. It felt like there was rot inside of me. God was speaking in my heart so powerfully, "Why do you consult the dead and not the living Chris! Should you not seek me! Are you not mine! (Is. 8:19). Come out from them and be separate!" (2 Cor. 6:17). I wouldn't find the verse references until later, but the Spirit brought the words to my memory with all the subtlety of a freight train.

I was so ashamed and knew immediately what I had to do. I rolled out of bed. It was about five in the morning, cold and dark. I walked down to the screen porch and threw the tarot cards in the

barbecue pit. I doused them in lighter fluid and set them on fire. The pouch burned, but I couldn't for the life of me get the cards to burn. I was so angry I went and got scissors and sliced them up into little pieces, praying and confessing to God, doused them again and lit the fire. This time they went up in smoke. I scraped up the ashes and remnants and tossed them in the trash.

After I got back to college, Keith asked me about the cards. "I had to burn them," I said. He looked at me and laughed. "Yeah," he said, "I was wondering how long it would take. It was totally wrong for you to have a reading or take them." I looked at him astonished. He had seen the compromise so easily. He'd known it the instant I agreed. Why had I been so dumb and blind to it? What must he have thought?

Read 2 Cor. 6:14-18. We often think of these verses in connection with marriage, and that's right, but the applications are much, much broader. How do these verses relate to Halloween and other things with occultic associations, games, movies, books etc. How do they apply? _____

How does our compromise in this area impact the lost of the world around us? _____

Thursday

The second major reason I do not celebrate Halloween, which I alluded to yesterday, is not only its origin, but, **2. Halloween's association with things condemned in Scripture.**

We've already pointed out that the origin of Halloween is steeped in false religious practices. What does God think of false religion, religion that has its source in something other than Himself and his word? What does he think of this kind of idolatry? According to Deuteronomy 7:25 and 1 Peter 4:3 such things are "an abomination" to Him. In Deuteronomy 16:12 and Jeremiah 44:4, He says that they are "hateful." In 1 Corinthians 10:19-20 we are warned not to have anything to do with anything connected to false religion; and Deuteronomy 7:26 says not to let such things into your home. Did you get that last thought? Some of us, probably need to take out the trash.

Here's an interesting question, do you think that Halloween is something that's going to be done once a year in heaven? Do you think that they will have the holiday in the millennial kingdom? I'm sure that we will remember the Lord's birth. I'm sure that we will celebrate His death and

resurrection. But will we memorialize the legacy of those who worshiped Sam Hain in their festival of death? The question is utterly absurd. It doesn't honor God. Halloween will not even be named among us.

Turn today to Deuteronomy 18:9-14, and let's consider some of these associations. The text reads, "When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you."

Now this is obviously an important passage of Scripture as it relates to things in the occult world. There are many things that God refers to quite plainly as "abominations." The Hebrew word is *toebah* (תועבה or תעבה), which means that which is loathsome, detestable, abominable or a thing of horror. Does that word tell you plainly enough how God feels about these things? What are they:

1. The first thing mentioned is "anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire." This has to do with the sacrifice of children in false religious rituals, obviously a terrible murderous action, which is always condemned in Scripture. Incidentally, that would also include sacrificing the life of your child in abortion to the god of convenience, a great idol in our own society, and **an abomination** to the one true God.
2. "Witchcraft" or some of your versions will say, "divination," that is a better translation of this word, though witchcraft appears later in the list. The word has to do with fortune tellers. Those who put themselves in the role of psychics and try to predict the future. That's not innocent fun to God, it's **an abomination**. If you are concerned about the future, you need to take your concern to the living God, the one who can actually do something about it.
3. "Soothsayer" or "observer of times" in some translations. This is an astrologer, a person who studies the skies in an attempt to understand the future and get guidance for life. These are your horoscope people, **an abomination** to God.
4. "One who interprets omens," this is the person that tries to tell the future based upon certain signs. The word also means an Enchanter or magician who casts spells. They are **an abomination** to God.
5. "Sorcerer" or as some versions say, "someone that engages in witchcraft," male or female. This refers to those who try to use spells and supernatural powers. It's **an abomination** to the

Lord. Do we entertain ourselves with movies, books, games and T.V. shows, exalting abominations to God? What books or movies have you seen that might fall into this category? _____

6. “One who conjures spells.” This is a very interesting word in the Hebrew. It means a charmer, one that charms others in order to control them, (things like hypnotism) **an abomination** to the Lord.

7. “Medium,” this refers to channeling, a very big thing in the contemporary new age movement. It means trying to talk to and consult with the dead or some other familiar spirit, as in a seance or with a ouji board, or some other spirit guide. This is all demonically driven. In Is. 8:19, God says, “when men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?” In other words, you need to know about spiritual matters, what is true, right or wrong, what direction to take etc., don’t go to some sort of medium or spiritist, don’t go to those things that are dead, go to God, talk to Him. Mediums are a **hateful thing** to God.

8. “Spiritist,” this refers to a person that has a very intimate acquaintance with the demonic spirit world. It is a person that can cast spells or gain knowledge via the power of familiar spirits, **an abomination** to God.

9. “One who calls up the dead,” a “necromancer” who seeks to gain information through the dead. This is also **detestable** to God.

Now listen to me beloved, these things were detestable to God back then, they still are today. He is the God, who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. All nine of these things were a part of the original pagan celebration of Halloween. The last eight of them, if they are not openly a part of Halloween today, are still glorified by the holiday and the industry that surrounds the holiday. So, you’ve got this massive industry and holiday in America that is associated with such things as witchcraft and divination. It’s not something for us to play around with as Christians. Is God our treasure, or is the world. These things are detestable to Him. Do we treasure Him enough to say, “I want no part of it, Lord.”

Does Deuteronomy 18:9-14 point to anything you need to root out of your life? What is it? _____

Friday

Finally, let’s consider some other Scriptural principles that we might apply to this issue of Halloween. We’ve already talked about setting our minds on things above. As Christians we are

also called to:

1. Be separate from the world. “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles - when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (1 Pet. 4:3).
2. Be transformed. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom. 12:2).
3. Be God pleasers, obedient and holy. “...as obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior” (1 Pet. 1:14-15).
4. Be leaders in exposing evil. “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:11).

These thoughts bring us to a final reason that I do not celebrate Halloween: **3. The spiritual opportunity Halloween presents.** You are obviously going to draw some attention if you don't celebrate Halloween. Especially children and students, who refuse to join in the parties at school, will draw attention. This attention can be diverted to Jesus Christ. We can be a witness that His life is the reason we don't celebrate the festival of death.

There is a tremendous need for Christians to be different from the world. Jesus said in John 17 that we are in the world but not of the world, and 1 John 2:15 tells us not to love the world. We live in a world where the water has become very muddied, and lost people desperately need to see that followers of Jesus are different. It may be that God will lead you to stay home and pass out candy in a way that witnesses to Him with tracts that are specifically geared towards children. It may be that He will lead you to be a witness in a different way.

Halloween night is an awesome time to have a prayer meeting. In college we routinely scheduled all night or late night praise and prayer meetings on October 31st, to pray against the enemy, and to pray for revival and awakening. When family members ridicule you or school people say you are weird, just square your shoulders and tell them, “Yes, you're absolutely right, I am weird and this is why.” Share the Gospel with them. Tell them about your love relationship with Jesus and that you love Him too much to play around with things associated with the occult.

The appeal this week is not to legalistically bind you from having fun. No, you can have fun in many other ways. God has given us many good things and wonderful ways to fill our hearts with pleasure in this life. The appeal is to consider and carefully evaluate the kinds of things that you are doing for entertainment and invite you to enter into the Lord's joy and His type of joyful fulfillment in life, which, I can attest from personal experience, is a whole lot more satisfying than the junk the world has to offer.