

Question: Since there are so many ungodly pagan associations attached to Halloween, don't you think Christians should separate themselves from this holiday?

As a Christian, I find it more and more difficult to see any redeeming qualities in Halloween. This holiday is deeply rooted in ancient paganism and satanic worship of false gods that included things like human sacrifices, haunting by dead souls and various occult practices and symbols. In the Middle Ages, an attempt was made to replace the pagan festival of the dead with a celebration of dead saints by proclaiming November 1 as "All-Saints Day" or "Hallowmas" (cf. Christmas). But over the centuries many pagan traditions for the evening preceding November 1 have been retained and have been developed into "All Hallows Eve" or "Halloween."

The continued influence of Halloween's unholy origins is evident in the emphasis on black magic, witches, goblins, haunted houses, skeletons and ghosts. Party entertainment often includes things like séances, fortune-telling, tarot cards, palm-reading, crystal ball gazing and soothsaying. Halloween horror movies emphasize fear, darkness, blood-fests, demons, vampires, death, axe murders, monsters and mayhem (cf. Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:9-13; Galatians 5:20). Unlike Christmas, Thanksgiving and other holidays, this one often results in vandalism, violence and mischief of all kinds.

At the same time, we should not rush to pass judgment on everyone who participates in a Halloween party. Some people have provided alternative parties for young children to dress up as cartoon characters and play fun games. Churches sometimes have parties for dressing up like Bible characters. Others provide "Trunk or Treat" by decorating car trunks with wholesome themes and giving away treats. But even here we sometimes see vestiges of the darkside in the costumes and decorations. (I recall my own past failures to think carefully about how I was involved with Halloween.) Our "Halloween parties" need to help children and young people see a clear distinction in what we are doing as Christians and the standard Halloween fare.

Perhaps we can learn from the apostle Paul's instructions to the Christians in ancient Corinth. Often the meat sold in the marketplace had first been presented as a sacrifice to a pagan idol. Sometimes Christians were invited to eat at dinners where the food had also earlier been used as part of the sacrifices in a pagan temple.

These Christians did not want to endorse sinful idolatry in any way, but they could not always know whether the meat was used for worship of an idol or not. Paul told them to eat without asking questions. However, if someone told them, "This has been offered in sacrifice," they should not eat it (1 Corinthians 10:23-28).

In a similar way, Christians might be able to participate in a Halloween party that does not include nor endorse the unholy aspects of the season. But when the darkside and evil aspects are introduced, Christians should choose not to participate. We can explain as the apostle did, "Everything is permissible" -- but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible" -- but not everything is constructive" (1 Corinthians 10:23). We choose to do only that which can be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881.] 2014/10/31