

Handling Hallowe'en

A telephone poll of 1,005 adults took place in America between October 21 and 24 1999. The following three statistics, among others, were revealed

Around 30% said they believe in ghosts - an increase of 200% from a poll 20 years previous.

20% said they believe in Witches - twice the number.

However, almost 90% said that they have no objections to Hallowe'en on religious grounds.

It appears that, to many, ghosts and Witches - the theme of Hallowe'en - pose no threat to true spirituality. Or, at least, that Hallowe'en was just fun and had no spiritual meaning.

Trivial Pursuit

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'trivial' as, "Of small value or importance", and, "Giving rise to no difficulty or interest".

In the light of this, I wonder if Hallowe'en trivialises the occult.? Does it make the occult of small value or importance and interestingly does Hallowe'en and the occult gives rise to no difficulty or interest?

To answer these questions, first we need a little understanding of what the occult is and then where the celebration of Hallowe'en comes from.

What Is The Occult?

Is it wise to even try and trivialise the occult? Once we discover what power lies behind, even seemingly innocent occult practices, I think we will see how unwise it is. I remember talking with a Wiccan - a "white" witch - who said that the same power that is behind white witchcraft is behind black witchcraft. The difference is simply about the way that this power is manipulated and used. This of course is the storyline of Star Wars - one power, used for good in one character and evil in another.

White witches will tell you that they only use their spells for good - although that is debatable – however, they, and others into occult practices, believe that the same power can be used for very evil black arts. As such, is it really possible to trivialise such beliefs and practices? Is it not possible, for the power that they believe is good today, to manifest itself as evil tomorrow?

By very definition, the power of the occult is supernatural and greater than the person seeking to use and manipulate it; how do I know that I will always be able to control the 'beast'? It might one day turn round and bite me; or to change the metaphor, if I play with fire long enough, in the end I will be burned!

On the files of Reachout Trust we have examples of people who started to explore the occult for fun or because it appeared to give them power. Only to find a number of months down the road, that they were not in control of the power, but now the power was in control of them. Anyone believing they can always control this supernatural power is mistaken and we need to be super cautious about what we do and how we do it.

But What About Hallowe'en?

So far then, we have seen that we trivialise the occult at our peril but is this really the power behind Hallowe'en; surely it's all about hollowed-out pumpkins and scary costumes, not supernatural powers that might be able to do us harm?

Interestingly, there are two faces to Hallowe'en; this isn't surprising when you realise that the word occult means, 'hidden'. There is an outward face that the 'innocent' bystander sees and wonders what all the fuss is about, but underneath the veneered exterior is a different world altogether. It is sometimes hard to separate fact from fiction as far as Hallowe'en is concerned, but there are some facts which are beyond dispute.

The celebration of Hallowe'en goes back to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced 'sow-en' or 'sah-ween'); this is still the pagan name for the festival that falls around the 31st October, depending on the phase of the moon. It is a Pagan celebration of the end of harvest and the beginning of winter; it signifies a season of death and dying. One Wiccan (thought of as White Witches by many) emailed us as follows:

"The correct name for the pagan festival is Samhain (pronounced "Sow'en") and it dates back to the earliest European farmers, perhaps 8-10 thousand years ago... It is the holy day of our religion (Wiccan) remembering the season at which pre-industrial farmers would have to single out any livestock that was too weak, old or infirm to survive the winter, and slaughter them to save wasting valuable fodder on them over the winter period. This is the reason why the festival is associated with death and spirits. It was once thought that a killing, whether human or animal, would attract evil spirits, sometimes like vultures, and when the animals were being culled it was seen as 'bait' to attract blood-spirits. The villagers would defend their settlement by placing human skulls with candles in them on posts, thereby terrifying the evil spirits and frightening them off. When society became more civilised, gourds such as pumpkins were substituted for real skulls."

As you might expect there are different ways for the history to be explained but there does seem to be common threads running through it, for instance the dead and evil spirits. Many thought it was on this night that the barrier between the human and supernatural worlds was broken down. A common pagan belief was that the spirits of those who'd died during the previous year could not go to their 'final resting place,' but wandered until they were properly prepared. To placate the spirits and send them off on a one-way trip to the nether world they 'treated' them to food, drink, etc. If a spirit was not 'treated' well, it could 'trick,' or haunt, those who had neglected this preparing.

The evidence seems to point that this evening has always been associated with the 'dark side' and evil supernatural realms, but we should not imagine from this that everyone sacrificed babies and the Devil roamed freely and did whatever he wanted to.

In Celtic and Anglo-Saxon times, this was also the eve of the New Year, and bonfires were lit to ward off evil spirits. At other times it was felt that this was a good evening to invoke the Devil's help concerning marriages, health, etc., by means of divination.

"The ancient Celtic (Irish, Scottish, Welsh) festival called Samhain is considered by many to be a predecessor of our contemporary Hallowe'en. Samhain was the New Year's Day of the Celts, celebrated on 1 November. It was also a day of the dead, a time when it was believed that the souls of those who had died during the year were allowed access to the land of the dead. It was related to the season: by Samhain, the crops

should be harvested and animals brought in from the distant fields. Many traditional beliefs and customs associated with Samhain, most notable that night was the time of the wandering dead, the practice of leaving offerings of food and drink to masked and costumed revellers, and the lighting of bonfires, continued to be practiced on 31 October, known as the Eve of All Saints, the Eve of All Hallows, or Hallow Even. It is the glossing of the name Hallow Even that has given us the name Hallowe'en. The spirits of Samhain, once thought to be wild and powerful, were now said to be something worse: evil. The church maintained that the gods and goddesses and other spiritual beings of traditional religions were diabolical deceptions, that the spiritual forces that people had experienced were real, but they were manifestations of the Devil, the Prince of Liars, who misled people toward the worship of false idols. Thus, the customs associated with Hallowe'en included representations of ghosts and human skeletons -symbols of the dead- and of the devil and other malevolent, evil creatures, such as witches were said to be. - Hallowe'en and other Festivals of Death and Life, Jack Santino, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1994." - Quoted from the Darkside Parlour Web Site.

The history of Hallowe'en is one of Witchcraft and darkness and despite many reputable organisations, such as Cubs and Brownies, schools and church halls hosting Hallowe'en parties, it is still, behind the scenes, a time for Witchcraft. Hallowe'en is one of the main nights of the year for Witchcraft and whether it is "white" or "black" covens meeting, the power is potentially dangerous and certainly, by very definition, does not come from the Christian God of the Bible.

Conclusions For Now

From this short investigation, I believe we can conclude that the public face of Hallowe'en does seek to trivialise the occult but this is a very dangerous stance to take. We are not saying that everyone who goes to a Hallowe'en party is going to be 'demoned-possessed' - although in exceptional cases this might happen - but with such potentially dark supernatural power being celebrated we do not believe it is a trivial matter.

We have looked mainly at common practices but the Bible is also clear on its warnings about the Occult. In Deuteronomy 18:10-12 the Lord tells His people not to follow the ways of the occult that the nations around them were involved in. He knows where involvement in such practices will lead and instructs them not even to start on that road. But what if we have been trivialising the occult, is there a way out? Yes there is, but because involvement has been with a supernatural power there is not just a natural answer.

The New Testament gives several examples of the proper Christian response to the occult and the way out for those who have been involved – see for instance Acts 16:16-18 and 19:13-16; 19. The power of the occult is supernatural with a small 's' but the power of God is Supernatural with a big 'S'. God has the answer but we need to turn our back on the things we have been involved with and seek Him for deliverance.

The Church

In the historical context, the church wanted to divert the thinking and preoccupation away from these pagan ceremonies and so introduced special services for All Hallows Eve and 1 November, All Saints Day. This effort however, largely failed, and to most Hallowe'en is still very pagan.

“Hallowe'en today is part of a trilogy of celebrations: Hallowe'en, or All Hallow's Eve (observed on 31 October), All Saints Day (celebrated on 1 November), and All Souls'

Day (celebrated on 2 November). Of these the second and third (sometimes referred to together as 'Hallowtide' 'Hallowtide') are festivals created by the Christian church. Hallowe'en however, is a festival whose roots are deep in pre-Christian religion and which in modern times retains much of its pagan symbolism." - Hallowe'en Treat or Trick, David Porter, pp.22/23.

This evening is of importance to those who practice Witchcraft and Satanism. Many witches will give testimony to the fact that what happens at Hallowe'en is very special to them and indeed how much they enjoy it. You can also notice that every year around the third week of October informative articles by witches begin to appear in local newspapers.

It is an evening where those in Witchcraft gather, and through various means, seek to release supernatural power. The particular 'brand' of Witchcraft will determine where the power will be directed. We hear stories that it is directed against churches and families and in a small number of cases this could be true. Nevertheless, whichever way the power appears to be directed, clearly it is not from God and consequently, it is often a night for evil activity in the spiritual realms as well as on earth.

Development

Hallowe'en has developed over the years. In some countries it is used as a commercial enterprise and in other countries hardly celebrated at all. The fact of the matter is, that whatever the 'outward' signs are, witches will be using Hallowe'en as part of their celebrations, because of its pagan and occult roots. However, as we point out in our various publications on the Occult, there is a vast difference between Wicca - 'White' Witchcraft - and Satanism. Consequently Hallowe'en celebrations will mean different things to different covens, but the link with the occult will still be there.

"Yet there are much stronger survivals in modern Hallowtide. Ancient rituals are being recited today much as they were a thousand years ago, and gods and spirits are being worshipped who were worshipped in the West before the birth of Christ. Some groups actively worship the devil; others (the majority, in fact) claim to repudiate satanism and to devote themselves to caring for the planet and for their fellow human beings. Some regard Christianity as a recent religion, of little enduring worth; some regard themselves as in amiable co-existence with Christianity; others hate Christianity and would destroy it if they could. For all these, Hallowe'en is a special occasion in a way that other traditional festivals are not." - Porter, p.31.

Whatever the dangers and questions about Hallowe'en the 1999 poll mentioned earlier shows it to be more popular than ever:

"A third of the people surveyed in a new Gallup poll said they believe in ghosts, three times the number who said that two decades ago. One of five said they believe in witches, twice the rate of the late 1970s. Almost nine of 10 people in the new poll said they have no objections to Hallowe'en on religious grounds... Two-thirds of American parents in the poll said their children will go out trick-or-treating, slightly more than in 1978. More than four out of five parents say their children will wear costumes this Hallowe'en... The telephone poll of 1,005 adults taken Oct. 21-24 had an error margin of plus or minus 3 percentage points." - Associated Press

Involvement – How To Cope

Under the headings below, we give, what we hope, are some practical suggestions, as to how Christians can cope with Hallowe'en and indeed use it as a positive opportunity.

First we need to underline a number of issues that are relevant to a number of areas of Society especially Schools, Offices, etc.

- We live in a multifaith society, whether we like it or not. As such we need to be aware of what we should expect – by all means aim high especially in our intercessions – but we also need to be realistic. Some will want to celebrate Hallowe'en and if we simply try to oppose it without reason then we must expect a backlash. Our apologetics – reasoned defence – needs to be just that, reasoned and based on sound argument.
- One aspect of our reasoned defence is that the motivation for many to celebrate Hallowe'en is religious; as we read in the email earlier, “(it is the) holy day of our religion.” If therefore we allow the Wiccans and others to celebrate their ‘religion’ in this way do we have equal rights at Christmas, and what is called Easter, to celebrate our faith without hindrance? You have to decide what you want the outcome of your argument to be, either you are arguing to ban all celebrations or, more realistically, to ensure equal opportunities.
- The other aspect of the reasoned defence, especially where children and young people are concerned is safety, are we really aware of the potential dangers? In such groups, depending on the age range, there will be a number of warnings given in any one year; these might include, Stranger Danger, Fireworks, Crossing the Road, Drugs. Each one of these will show the potential dangers and warn the listeners to be safe and not to get involved at all.

An illustration that we often use is that on every packet of cigarettes there is a large warning that, “Smoking Kills”. Many ignore the warning, despite medical evidence presented. Ignore it people can, but the issue is not trivial and the warning needs to be there, to make people stop and think. It is the same with Hallowe'en; it is not a trivial matter. It may try to pretend that there is nothing bad about it but unfortunately the evidence shows otherwise and we need to sound the warning - the occult practices demonstrated at Hallowe'en are potentially dangerous. The evidence is there and it is up to the individual to investigate for themselves.

- In all this we must not be superstitious but realise the reality of God's Word. Just because someone dresses as a Witch or there are paper ghosts hanging from the ceiling, these in themselves will bring no spiritual harm. We may not like them and we may find them oppressive but we can still know God's grace, peace and protection. If, in the end, there is nothing we can do to stop it, we should seek to be positive and display the love and wholeness of Christ in a situation that speaks more of fear and darkness.

Prayer

This is essential for every believer all the year and as we approach Hallowe'en please ensure that specific prayer is made. Some suggested topics would be:

- Be aware that our struggle is against principalities and powers and not the people. Seek the Lord to rebuke these powers in your area.

- That there maybe a positive witness of the Lord to teachers, scout troop leaders etc.
- That there will be a lack of involvement of schools, etc., in Hallowe'en.
- Protection of local children and wisdom for parents.
- That no one is drawn into the occult as a result of these celebrations.
- There will be many positive expressions of salt and light in your area.

Praise Party

One aspect of this salt and light might be a 'Praise Party'. We do not recommend that Christians just hold a party on the 31st, as this could confuse children into thinking it is a Hallowe'en party. There is scope, however, to hold a party, which exalts the Lord Jesus and gives a positive message, as well as allowing kids to have fun. Such a time is not just an opportunity to get Christians 'otherwise occupied' but also it can be an outreach evening and may bring non-Christians off the streets that night.

Schools

There appears to have been some turning against the intense celebration of Hallowe'en in schools. Some Local Education Authorities recommend that the subject be kept low-key, while others have agreed, that if it is mentioned, the dangers must also be mentioned. However, there are still many who take the opportunity to highlight, sometimes unintentionally, the occultic realms.

Some schools are finding Hallowe'en too scary as the following 1999 newspaper report shows:

"Hallowe'en is being shunned by schools who say it is too frightening for children. Staff at schools such as Gavinburn Nursery in Glasgow have decided not to celebrate the event on October 31 for fears that it will give youngsters nightmares... The nursery is not the only one to take a hard line. The adjoining primary school and some church schools will also give the occasion a miss. St John and St Francis School in Bridgwater Somerset, says the festival is not part of the Christian calendar and therefore not something it marks."

What To Do?

To have a positive impact at this time of year it is important that we have a regular participation in school life. If we just go once a year to complain, then we will often be dismissed as cranks. However, if we have been involved with the life of the school over the year, our feelings are noted more readily. We should not go in as 'raving evangelical loonies' but, as mentioned above, we should present a careful argument that shows the possible dangers of Hallowe'en.

Underline the fact that we seek to provide a safe environment for our kids at school and so it is not appropriate to teach our children that experimentation with the occult world is okay. If, however, they still feel they must talk about Hallowe'en, ask them to also to warn of the potential dangers.

You of course also have the right to remove your children from any Hallowe'en celebrations if that is what you feel. However, please do ensure that you take time to talk to your children or at least provide literature suitable for the age so that they understand the potential dangers. They

will have a certain amount of peer pressure at this time and it is important that they understand the issues and are not just doing something because their parents told them to.

Youth Groups, Cubs, Scouts Etc

Much of what we said about schools is relevant here.

1. Prepare your reasoned defence along the lines of the potential supernatural danger – don't be a Bible basher but do not be afraid to let them know you are a Christian and believe the warnings contained in both the Old and New Testaments.
2. Obtain relevant and helpful literature – read it yourself first and so you are happy with what you are giving to the leaders.
3. Prepare your children to cope with the events beforehand – do not let them be taken by surprise by what they hear or by what you do.

Offices

One Christian emailed as follows:

“Even now on October 16th areas of the department are decked with Halloween stuff and it is not good. Because of the ‘pc’ correct atmosphere of the company one has to go with the flow – I don't like it and have to stay quiet.”

The ‘adult’ world of the office is not always as easy to deal with but the basic preparation beforehand of what you say and how you say it is just as important.

What is important to remember is that ‘PC’ works the same for all. If you have to put up with the Hallowe'en decorations, ask for the opportunity to have some Christian celebration.

Even if there appears to be no way that the management will stop what is happening, it does no harm to use the opportunity to witness as to what you don't like. Again prepare it beforehand; sometimes we have to stop and think what exactly is it that I don't like, and why I react that way.. Be courteous and clear and explain your situation carefully always ensuring that wherever possible you are positive – what is good about Christianity etc – and not negative – what is wrong with Hallowe'en

Ensure that you are spiritually prepared, knowing your safety in Christ and that just as Paul witnessed in the depths of the Roman prison so you can witness to the light and salt amongst the dark witches hats and pumpkins..

Trick Or Treat

This common practice, associated with Hallowe'en, was introduced by the Irish immigrants in America and at first was quite malicious. As it developed down the years it very often turned into harmless pranks. Much today is still harmless, but there is also an element of the destructive and malicious that has come back in.

Trick or Treat boils down to 'blackmail to prevent vandalism' and we would suggest is not healthy for Christian children to be involved in it. We should also, where possible, encourage our friends and neighbours not to allow their children to do it either. Not only do we have the preoccupation

with the occult but also the danger of talking to and taking sweets from strangers. We should also consider how we might frighten some young or old people with gruesome costumes.

What To Do?

Another Christian emailed:

“What would be a good response to Trick and Treaters? Some of my Christian friends hand out tracts, but I think that this is a bit cheesy.”

First, you need to realise that in most cases you have very little time to do or say whatever you want, as the children are simply wanting to get round as many doors as they can.

Second, whether you give them sweets or not is up to you, on the whole it makes you more welcoming if you do and I do not see that in anyway compromising with the occult. However, you should also look for a way to give a positive message and probably a tract is about the best way of doing that. Is that cheesy? Probably depends on the tract; but a well presented and well written tract could leave a message in that child’s mind and maybe even the parents too.

Finally, you can also look for other ways that the evening might give to building a bridge to your neighbours and sharing the gospel. One such way is taking care of the elderly who live alone in your neighbourhood. Maybe you could contact them beforehand and tell them if they are frightened or have needs they can ring you.

The other way of course is to put on an event that can be used as a ‘neighbourhood’ celebration.

Parties

Many Hallowe’en parties are harmless on the surface and we must not think that demons are waiting to strike at every fancy dress party. However, we do have to realise that again the themes of most of the parties are a preoccupation with the evil supernatural realm.

Understand that it can sometimes be difficult for your children with peer pressure and activities at school, etc. Do take time to explain the dangers to them and not just say 'NO!' It will of course help if there is a Praise Party or similar event being run in your locality.

Further Conclusions

There are other areas to be taken into consideration too. For instance we might have freedom to do things but they are not always the best for us or indeed for other people. The following seems to me to sum up this subject for Christians:

“Three Reasons To Examine How You Celebrate Halloween

1. What may not hurt you may hurt others.

Paul said that it wouldn't harm a Christian to eat meat sacrificed to an idol. After all, the pagan gods that the meat had been sacrificed to weren't real gods. In the same light, he probably would say that Christians are not prohibited from dressing in costumes and going trick-or-treating or attending Halloween parties. After all, ‘We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one’ (1 Corinthians 8:4).

But Paul went on to say that by doing what the believer was free in the Lord to do, the believer may be distressing another believer who doesn't realise he has this freedom. 'Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak' (1 Corinthians 8:9). The weak ones would be those who still had problems with the idea of eating the food sacrificed to idols.

During Halloween, little children in particular are the weak ones. On TV, in movies, in school, and with their playmates, many children today are exposed to occult influences. We may be opening our children to these influences if we approve of these things in Hallowe'en fun. We adults may be fully aware that we are only spoofing witches and ghosts, but the young many not be so sure.

If we have given our lives to Jesus Christ, then our eternal destiny is safe in the hands of Almighty God. But that's not true of most of the people around us. There is a valid reason for most people to fear a 'lord of death' even if they don't take him seriously on Halloween. We who have found life in Jesus should be careful that our freedom doesn't keep others from finding that same eternal life.

2. Some permissible things may hinder your Christian growth.

The Bible encourages us to 'throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus' (Hebrews 12:1-2). This one night of the year, most eyes are not fixed on Jesus but on a darker image. The Christian's 'race of faith' leads him to eternal life, to a joy that has no shadow. Should we really be focussing on the devil, witches and other dark beings, even for one night?

3. God says, "Don't imitate evil!"

'When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who...practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium, or spiritist or who consults the dead' (Deuteronomy 18:9-11).

If our children dress as witches and sorcerers, if we hang cardboard ghosts in our windows, if we entertain with tales of ghouls and haunted houses what are we doing but imitating that which is evil? We need to make it clear as Christians that witches and evil spirits are not funny and are not harmless, even if the people in witch costumes are only play-acting." Taken from website - http://www.nisbett.com/holidays/halloween_christian_perspective.htm

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