

# Halloween

## An Essay for Nordskog Publishing

Ronald Kirk  
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Judging by the American marketplace and the major media, in popularity Halloween now far outstrips my own favored holy days of Thanksgiving, Christmas and the Fourth of July. Admittedly, for the past many years, I have watched a dwindling trick or treating. The streets have apparently become far too mean for many parents to encourage their children to collect candy from strange neighbors. Yet the stores testify that *many* continue to celebrate. Halloween seems wildly popular among adults. Like another “religious” holiday—Fat Tuesday—Halloween seems a grand excuse to party, really party.

On the serious side, I sense that in the absence of a clear, compelling and satisfying faith, our neighbors seek spiritual connection. In light of rampant interest in the occult and Eastern religions, interest in such a spiritual or pseudo-spiritual holiday as Halloween is not surprising.

Scanning the Internet reveals wildly different viewpoints on Halloween, from severe condemnation on the part of some Christians, to jolly indifference on the part of the irreligious—“it’s just fun,” to loving embrace on the part of neo-pagans and some other Christians.

Everyone seems to agree on the general history of Halloween. It was originally a Celtic and Druid religious observance, but later pre-empted by Christianity.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Eleventh Edition Encyclopedia Britannica claims, “the main celebrations of Halloween were purely Druidical.” The Encyclopedia continues that such emblems as nuts and fruit mark the harvest time, in anticipation of winter.<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising that the Celtic festival appears so similar to the harvest celebrations of other ancient pagan societies. It is also not surprising that God appointed to ancient Israel a similar, but still unique, observance in the Festival of Booths (Lev. 23:39-43). These parallels make sense when one realizes that world history is quite short, and that the sons of Noah shared knowledge of the proper worship of the true and living God. Sadly true, however, is that men quickly corrupted this knowledge in sin unto the various pagan practices known everywhere to this day, with only remnants of godliness remaining here and there. Though perhaps tritely said, men do indeed share a God-shaped vacuum in the heart until the Savior fills it. Except for God’s providential intervention in history, we would all, no doubt have become murderous pagans.

Present day pagans will take exception to the last comment. Wiccans and others claim to be merely gentle nature-worshippers. What is the harm in bobbing for apples, a practice apparently integral to the Druidical rite?<sup>3</sup> (Who wants apples! We want candy! But I digress...) The harm lies in the nature of the Fall. From the beginning, man fell into murderous sin and worse, and cannot live well apart from relationship with Christ. At one point in history, Israel, God’s own chosen and providentially prepared people fell to such depths that they would sacrifice their own children to the idols of Canaan. Their practices exceeded the surrounding nations in evil (2 Chr. 33:1-9). These atrocities are associated with soothsaying (fortune telling), witchcraft (spell casting), sorcery (magic) and medium consultation condemned by God’s Law (Deut. 18). The New Testament uses the Greek word *pharmakeia*, often translated into English as *sorcery* or *witchcraft*. This word clearly implies what modern anthropology knows: occult practices often involve the use of psychotropic drugs. In other words, pagans of every

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Isaac Bonewits, “The Real Origins of Halloween,” <http://www.neopagan.net/Halloween-Origins.html> (October 2008).

<sup>2</sup> “Halloween,” *Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume 12* (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1910), pp. 857-858.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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culture have long used drugs, as well as introspective meditation and spells, to enter the spirit world for the sake of attaining spiritual power. The 1960s gave rise to a new, general interest in the occult. Exemplifying this interest was the popularity of a series of books starting with *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* by anthropologist Carlos Castaneda. These books pursue with grotesque and disturbing detail Castaneda's drug-induced "spiritual" journey into shamanism.<sup>4</sup>

The occult practices are associated with the worst of human atrocity. The human sacrifice by ancient tribal cultures the world over is well known. Present day ritual abuse is more common than most are aware.<sup>5</sup> Placing God's condemnation of the occult religions in context, Jesus declares the authoritative principle: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1 and through v. 11). In other words, those who seek to enter God's heavenly realm apart from Christ, subject themselves to Satan, the great prince and thug of this world. Just before this passage, Jesus had said that He came "for judgment" (John 9:39). That is, Jesus is the watershed, separating those who will truly see and understand from those who make themselves willingly blind and subject to judgment.

Yes, the occult is deadly serious. Satan and demons rule the occult realm. Their aim is death and destruction (John 10:10). But does this demonic world really have anything to do with America's family Halloween tradition? Christian families are certainly not involving themselves with the occult or demonism! James Jordan goes so far as to claim that Christianity has completely co-opted Halloween, and it is now a Christian holiday! Red devil costumes simply mock Satan, as a silly relic.<sup>6</sup> What does it hurt to beg for candy? Are demons anything? What good does cranky negativism do? On the other hand, what does the Christian commemorate in his contemporary Halloween celebration? Does it glorify God in light of Halloween as a quasi-religious holiday? Should Christians join in with the secular or pagan Halloween's celebration often glorifying death, mayhem and Satan even if only as mocking? How does that distinguish God's people for His glory?

The issue is not always simple. For example, accomplished Hollywood screenwriter and devout Christian Brian Godawa has produced a short film—working toward a feature—called *Cruel Logic*. *Cruel Logic* depicts a serial murderer who uses his victims' own idiotic post-modern beliefs to justify their killing and therefore to relieve him of legal culpability. While many may recoil at the use of the horror genre, and I confess I am not a big fan, the point is well taken.<sup>7</sup>

Paul the Apostle provides an answer for such matters of conscience when he deals with a parallel issue—the eating of meat sacrificed to an idol (1 Cor. 8). Eating meat sacrificed to idols is no big deal, because idols are nothing, though demons be associated with them. However, if someone's conscience is

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<sup>4</sup> "Carlos Castaneda," Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos\\_Castaneda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos_Castaneda).

<sup>5</sup> "Ritualistic Abuse: Fruit of Neo-Paganism and Target of Christian Reconstruction," <http://www.chalcedon.edu/articles/article.php?ArticleID=685>.

<sup>6</sup> James Jordan, "Halloween: A Distinctly Christian Holiday, A Discernment Exercise," <http://www.redeemertulsa.org/News/NewsStory.aspx?guid=aafc0b9e-6ee2-43ef-bee1-3a943ae7974e>. In answer, I would cite Jude 9. Furthermore, it is not wise to underestimate the power of one's adversary.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.godawa.com>.

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harmful because of my liberty, I will restrain my liberty for his sake. I will not cause a brother to stumble, Paul says. All things are lawful, but not all things contribute to the good (1 Cor. 6:12).

God has always meant for men to learn wisdom from a close walk with Him. And he has always required faith of His children. God intends for us to be thoughtful, taking every thought captive to Christ. Here we may ask, to what risk do we put our unbelieving or weak neighbors, our children, and ourselves? Do we send compromising mixed signals to our neighbors? Do we test the limits of our character for the sake of fitting in? How close can we go without getting burned? Do we send a diluted evangelical message? Solomon urges the wise man to *hide* when he sees evil coming (Prov. 22:3). What do we teach our children about holiness in the world? Are there better alternatives? Would we do better to celebrate the day rather than the night?

Alternatives exist, including ignoring the Halloween observance altogether. Some Christians observe a Christ-centered harvest day, All-Saints Day, or Reformation Day. Frankly, in my home of five children, we shunned Halloween. We simply did not wish to encourage the quasi-pagan associations. Our children sometimes enjoyed alternative celebrations. Sometimes, we merely enjoyed a family dessert at a local restaurant.

Whatever one decides, Let His people resolve to live well. Let us enjoy the good Jesus has provided. Let us be thankful for the harvest and life, liberty and salvation. Let us indeed take every thought captive to Christ. Whether therefore, we eat or drink, or whatever we do, let us do all to the glory of God.