



Is It a Sin If I...? (Part IV)

1 Corinthians 8:9: (NASB) *But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.*



Is it a sin if I celebrate Halloween? Many countries celebrate Halloween or similar versions, including the United States, Canada, Ireland and several Latin American countries. It is very popular here in the United States with candy, costumes, parties and fun. The Halloween season, with all of its excitement and trappings, is upon us. On top of the fun and the sugar rush, this is a time of year that particularly specializes in seeking horror as another form of entertainment. The party-like atmosphere is generously sprinkled with murder, mayhem, zombies and

apocalyptic events, all in the name of thrills. Because of this anything-goes approach, Halloween has become an absolute favorite holiday. As Christians, should we celebrate this day which has its origin firmly rooted in Paganism and its practices firmly rooted in over-the-top behavior? Is it a sin for Christians to celebrate or have anything to do with Halloween?

In our "Is It a Sin" series, we have been addressing lifestyle questions from our listeners who message us from the Christian Questions app or email us at inspiration@christianquestions.com. We have covered questions involving cross dressing, sexuality, blood transfusions, tattoos and more.



Addressing lifestyle questions using biblical principles



Because Halloween is firmly rooted in Paganism, we want to first do a quick review of what drives Pagan beliefs:

(Source: "Understanding Paganism" www.kheopsinternational.com/blog/understanding-paganism/) As it was in ancient time and so it is today, Paganism is based on the patterns and agricultural cycles of the earth. It is also based on the belief that everything is alive. The earth and all of her inhabitants, animals, plants, oceans, even the air is connected and dependent on one another. This belief extends to the planets, stars and universe; everyone and everything are conjoined. The Divine is recognized in all and manifests itself in the circle of life.

The "when" and "why" of the original celebrations from which Halloween was derived:

(Source: Wikipedia) Samhain... is a Gaelic festival marking the end of the harvest season and beginning of winter or "darker half" of the year. It is held on 1 November but with celebrations beginning on the evening of October 31, since the Celtic day began and ended at sunset. This is about halfway between the autumn equinox and winter solstice. It is one of the four Gaelic seasonal festivals along with Imbolc, Beltaine and Lughnasa. Historically it was widely observed throughout Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man (where it is spelled Sauin). A similar festival was held by the Brittonic Celtic people... in Wales, ...in Cornwall and...in Brittany.



Each of these four festivals are recreated in modern Paganism with its own gods and goddesses that are worshipped specifically at that time of year.

Samhain (pronounced Sow-in) is definitely a season-based ritualistic celebration. Pagan belief was very season centered:

(Source: "Understanding Paganism" www.kheopsinternational.com/blog/understanding-paganism/)
The Pagan calendar, also known as the Wheel of the Year, marks the earth's four seasons, tracks the sun's continual journey through the sky and the waxing and waning cycles of the moon. It is a symbol of the circle of life, representing the continual birth, death and renewal cycle as conveyed by the changing seasons.



We can see Paganism is based on the natural cyclical rhythm of the earth's seasons. There is a lot of sense to this. The ancients based their worship on what they saw in front of them in their daily life. Looking at the cycle of life during the year is a natural focus, even today. What we take great exception to is the addition of spiritualistic aspects. The ancient peoples did this, of course, to explain their world. Today, we can appreciate and give thanks to God for the return of spring, for example, without worshipping a Pagan god or goddess.



A key to this description is the way Samhain is described as a time of transition, going from the lighter half to the darker half of the year. This expands on the sense of the uncertainty that the coming of nightfall (or periods of darker times) can have on people.

Samhain origin, *Top 10 Dark Origins of Halloween, MostAmazingTop10*

- *This was the Celtic festival that was celebrated in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man. It was said that at this time the connection between the other world and our world thinned, so it makes it easier for spirits and the souls of the dead to come into our world. So, they would celebrate the dead and make offerings and sacrifices for them. Another part of this tradition included having the Celtic priest wear dead animal heads and skins and go around making predictions about the future. Most of the stuff they did to celebrate this holiday was done so that the spirits wouldn't get mad at them.*

In some Pagan Wiccan traditions, the god of Samhain is said to be "the horned one," "the stag of great antlers," and "the god of the wild hunt," so we can see the connection to what these Celtic priests would wear. Sometimes he was called the "lord of death." Incidentally, the goddess of Samhain is an image of an old crone called "the old one" or "the earth mother."

This time of year would bring uncertainty because of the early darkness and cold winter coming soon, but it also meant a celebration because it was a time of harvest. Community festivals would combine these feelings of fear and excitement. Some people find a certain thrill in fear.

The fear of uncertainty was considerable in those times. Would they have enough food in the winter? Would they be able to stay warm, especially in Celtic Ireland and Scotland which got quite cold? All these things and others contributed to how they developed their beliefs.

ACCORDING TO PAGAN BELIEFS:

- The connection between our world and the spirit world is thinnest at this time of year.
- Supposedly that makes it an easier passage for spirits and the souls of the dead to come to our world - the mystical veil between the spirit world and the natural world is opened.
- Out of superstition, they celebrate the dead with offerings and sacrifices.
- They try to keep the spirits appeased.
- This is the time to not only communicate with dead ancestors but is also the time to see into the future - both of which are forbidden in Scripture.

Pagans were and are deeply tuned into the earth and its cycle of changing seasons. As we view those same seasons, we see them not as divine - having life in itself - but as CREATED according to God's divine plan. There is a big difference in these two viewpoints.



First, God created an ecosystem in which all of nature works on a cyclical basis:

Psalms 104:19-20: (NASB) ¹⁹He made the moon for the seasons; the sun knows the place of its setting. ²⁰You appoint darkness and it becomes night, in which all the beasts of the forest prowl about.

God set up the seasons as His self-perpetuating design. It did not happen by chance, and the seasons themselves are not divine. He set up the seasons so that the earth would renew itself - this is a brilliant creation! It is nature given by God; nature is not a god.



Second, humanity has been put in place to be an integral part of this system:

Psalm 104:23: (NASB) *Man goes forth to his work and to his labor until evening.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2: (NASB) ¹There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven— ²a time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

Man is to go to work and work hard, and everything happens in its own time. The roots of Paganism which are based in nature are based in God's creation.



Third, we are to clearly differentiate between the Creator and that which is created:

Psalm 104:24: (NASB) *O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; the earth is full of Your possessions.*



Earth and the universe are God-created systems. We are to give glory to God instead of "Mother Earth." Some people give credit and thanks to "the universe" instead of to God. Satan's strategy is to do anything he can to take honor away from God. God created all that is being worshipped. Paganism is idolatry because the created is worshipped and not the Creator.



SATAN'S STRATEGY IS TO DO ANYTHING HE CAN TO TAKE HONOR AWAY FROM GOD.

As Christians, we would never want to join forces with idolatry. Our two-part series on Paganism called, "Can Christianity and Paganism work together?" provides an important base to our topic today. And of course, one of the iconic symbols of Halloween is the witch. No matter how Hollywood depicts them or how they appear in fairy tales, all witchcraft is forbidden in Scripture.



Comparing the core values of Paganism and Wicca with biblical Christian principles



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Paganism is based on the divinity of the earth being the driver of its seasons. On the contrary, Christianity is based on God having created the earth and its seasons. This means there is no common foundation to build upon. Paganism adds all kinds of spirituality to nature. The Samhain origin of Halloween is far from a godly beginning!

So far, we see the roots of Halloween grew out of an earth-based belief system with a heavy dose of spirit-world conjecture!

With a firm basis in nature, how does Samhain integrate the Pagan beliefs about the spirit world?



A key factor here is understanding that every ancient culture had respect and often fear of things beyond earth. So many belief systems saw the sun, moon, stars and beyond as gods, and so many belief systems were focused on appeasing those gods. Sometimes such appeasement went as far as human sacrifices. The celebration of Samhain was built around their misunderstood spirit world.

Today we do not know too much about ancient Samhain. There are some basic concepts that get passed around the internet, but the history can be hard to trace and there is a lot of conflicting information.



Sacrifices origin, Top 10 Dark Origins of Halloween, MostAmazingTop10

- *In sacrifices. So, back in the day the Celts considered November 1st as the day of death. Why? Well, by that time leaves were falling and it was getting darker earlier on and it was getting colder. So, they believe that their sun god was losing strength and that Samhain, the lord of death, was taking over. So, in order to appease Samhain, Druid priests would lead worship ceremonies.*

They would sacrifice things and people to appease the evil spirits from harming them.

(Source: Wikipedia continued) The festival was not recorded in detail until the early modern era. It was when cattle were brought down from the summer pastures and when livestock were slaughtered. As at Beltaine, special bonfires were lit. These were deemed to have protective and cleansing powers and there were rituals involving them. Like Beltaine, Samhain was a liminal or threshold festival, when the boundary between this world and the Otherworld thinned, meaning the Aos Sí (the 'spirits' or 'fairies') could more easily come into our world. Most scholars see the Aos Sí as remnants of Pagan gods. At Samhain, they were appeased with offerings of food and drink, to ensure the people and their livestock survived the winter.

"Liminal" means you are in an in-between state - neither fully here nor there. Humans can be very vulnerable in this period of change or indecision. We talked about this in episode #942. We explored how to keep alert during a liminal period.



Halloween's pagan roots in light of biblical reasoning

According to Samhain tradition, these otherworldly fairies/faeries coming through from the other side are not Walt Disney's Tinkerbell! Folklore has them as spirits of the dead, or fallen angels - demons with magical powers out to trick and hurt humans. Pictures of them show little, petite beings. But fairies/faeries are angry, devious and dark! They are not these pretty little things shown in cartoons, but are representations of evil little spirits.



The practice of offering sacrifices to God was common from the very beginning of civilization:

Genesis 4:2-4: (NASB) ²...Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. ⁴Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering.

It was also present at the restarting of human civilization after the flood:

Genesis 8:18,20: (NASB) ¹⁸So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. ²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

Noah and his family were miraculously saved. These sacrifices were not about appeasing an angry god; they were offered to acknowledge God as sovereign, and to show humanity's desire to follow His will and His ways. Sacrifices in Scripture were supposed to be for showing gratitude and thankfulness.



There is a large difference between appeasing a dark, vengeful god and offering thankfulness to a benevolent God who is your Creator.

The basic seeds of what was done in the Pagan Celtic societies can be traced back to the history recorded in the Bible. However, there is a vast difference between those seeds of thankful sacrifice and the path that the majority of humanity took which led them away from God, away from that gratitude and all that was good in God's sight.

God showed His chosen people how to act and what to do when they entered the Promised Land He had given them:

Exodus 34:12-17: (NASB) ¹²Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. ¹³But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim ¹⁴for you shall not worship any other god...

What are Asherim? The Canaanites worshiped the mother goddess Asherah. The Bible describes wooden posts or pillars near the altar of worship called Asherim (plural) used to symbolize her. Despite God's warning in Exodus 34, idolatry was common among the ancient Israelites and these objects were used throughout their history. (For example, see Judges 6:25-26,28,30, 1 Kings 13:15,16:33, 2 Kings 13:6;17:10; 16:23:15 and many more.)



¹⁵otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their god...

God was telling them why they must get rid of these Asherim rather than just putting them aside. If the Israelites let them exist, they would remain a temptation to bring them back into their lives and cause them to *make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land.*

...and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, ¹⁶and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods. ¹⁷You shall make for yourself no molten gods.

This is a situation that can quickly lead from bad to worse. Allowing objects of idolatry around them led to getting friendly, so to speak, with the neighbors. Their guard was down and they became contaminated with idolatry, as it was normalized around them.



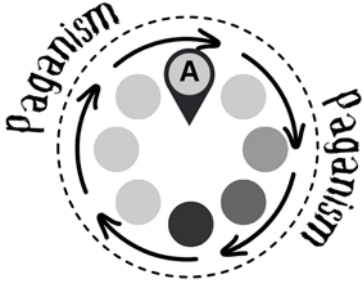
There is a big lesson for us today about allowing outside influences to become "no big deal." We are to maintain sole reverence for the ONE TRUE GOD, JEHOVAH.

The references to Pagan beliefs and practices here are glaring. God's plan is a linear path from past sin to a future righteous life. His plan goes from point A to point B. He consciously is moving humanity down a path that is teaching them to be righteous so by the end they will have life in His kingdom.





Paganism has no such plan. It is ambiguously cyclical, as things, people and all of the universe return to the same point again and again based on the seasons and earth's rotation. Paganism circles from point A back to point A.



God created seasons to be repetitive as time moves forward. Pagans miss this forward improvement in righteousness by always returning to the same point and starting over. They miss seeing the godliness of the true design of the Creator by worshipping the works of His hands, the created.

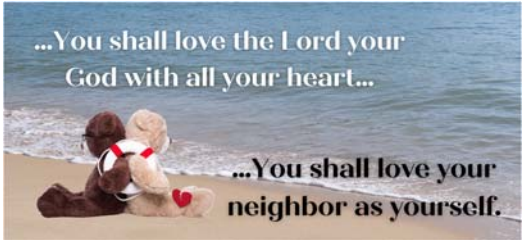
Israel was unequivocally told to not merely avoid such idolatrous practices, but to destroy them from their land and communities. They were to take them out of the land as though they had never been there because these practices were idolatrous. As the First Commandment said, they were to honor God and put no other gods before Him or make graven images.

When asked which commandment was greatest, Jesus took this concept of sacrifices offered to God and elevated it to show the importance of dedication and loyalty.

Jesus answered the question and then verified a scribe's response to his answer:

Mark 12:28-34: (NASB) ²⁸One of the scribes... asked him, *What commandment is the foremost of all?* ²⁹Jesus answered, *The foremost is, Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord;* ³⁰*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.* ³¹*The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.*

In answer to the scribe's question about which commandment is greatest, Jesus teaches in few words the major lesson in what following Christ is all about: God first, then treating your neighbor as you treat yourself.



Now comes the response from the scribe:

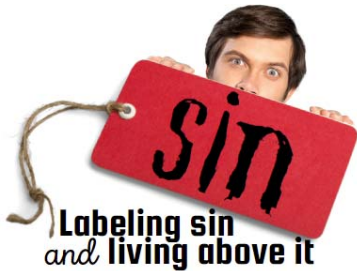
³²*The scribe said to him, Right, teacher; You have truly stated that He is one, and there is no one else besides Him;* ³³*And to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.* ³⁴*When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, he said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God...*

We know the Law was a bridge to worship and honor God. It was not to appease God but it was because we love Him. The burnt offerings and sacrifices pictured Jesus himself. Sacrifices were the way to God for the Israelites until Jesus came.

The scribe repeated Jesus' answer and then made the observation that this was *much more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices*. **The condition of our heart is much more meaningful than the actual sacrifices.** Jesus was impressed that the scribe *answered intelligently*. Jesus would be the final sacrifice; then it all came down to the heart condition.



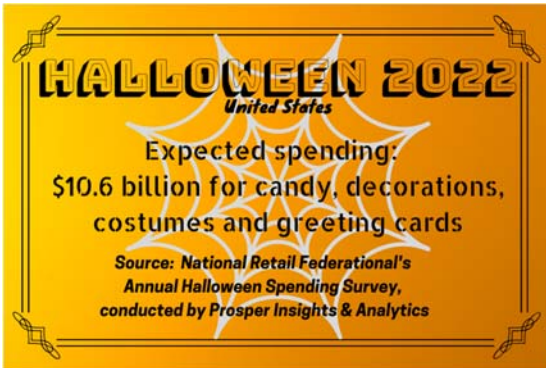
This shows us that sacrifices are not the ultimate way to God. They were temporary until Jesus came to lay down the final sacrifice. Now it comes down to sacrificing our hearts and our will for the sake of the will of God. It is not about appeasing an angry god. It is about gratitude to the Creator of all things who is above all things. It is about wanting to serve Him and Him alone - not the things He created.



The deeper we go into understanding Samhain, the less we see any similarities with Christian faith. From multiple gods to multiple sacrifices to appeasing what we know to be non-existent spirits of departed ones; this whole celebration is diametrically opposite to our faith. Unfolding this history helps us to know where to draw needed lines in our decisions.

We need to understand what happened in ancient history in order to have an informed godly perspective. Samhain was about darkness, insecurity, and celebration all at once. Halloween, while lighter, fits some of that same description.

We see origins of darkness, fear and harvest time, but what about Halloween and "trick-or-treat"?



In our present time, trick-or-treating has played one of the leading roles when it comes to Halloween celebrations. Between parties at home and being on the streets in full costume, the idea of trick-or-treating and collecting candy rules our day. As we uncover this tradition from ancient days, we will begin to get to the core question of what we are supposed to do now as Christians.

For our listeners in other countries, trick-or-treating means kids dress up and go door-to-door, collecting candy from each house.

Trick-or-treat and costumes origin, *Top 10 Dark Origins of Halloween, MostAmazingTop10*

- The praying for the dead. This is an old school tradition that may have inspired trick-or-treating. So back in the day, people would go around door-to-door asking for money or food. In return, they said that they would pray for the dead. But here's the thing - if you denied them, then they would get upset and they would trash your front lawn or your garden, etc. So, you kind of were obligated to give them treats...or else you'd get the trick!*
- In our four spot, we have the Halloween costumes. Now, how did the whole dressing up for Halloween thing even start? Well, during Samhain when people thought that spirits were crossing over into their world, there were a lot of people that weren't okay with this, so they thought if they dressed up as one that they would be left alone. That's just one theory as to why costumes became associated with Halloween.*





This year in the United States, costume spending alone is projected to hit a record \$3.6 billion, including \$700 million on pet costumes, with one in five people dressing up their pets.



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IS HALLOWEEN A CHRISTIAN HOLIDAY?
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Celebrations that were a basis for today's holiday activities:

(Source: Wikipedia continued) The souls of dead kin were also thought to revisit their homes seeking hospitality, and a place was set at the table for them during a meal. Mumming and guising (amateur actors) were part of the festival from at least the early modern era, whereby people went door-to-door in costume reciting verses in exchange for food. The costumes may have been a way of imitating, and disguising oneself from, the Aos Sí (faeries). Divination (a ritual used in fortune telling) was also a big part of the festival and often involved nuts and apples.



THE PAGAN ORIGINS OF HALLOWEEN WERE FOUNDED IN VERY REAL CONCERNS ABOUT LIFE:

The early Pagans had real concerns about the uncertainties of their lives, especially as a harsh winter approached. For most of us, this history does not have a basis on our present-day Halloween celebrations. Let's compare the past practice with the present-day parallel.

➤ Back then, this was the end of the harvest and thanksgiving for it.

For many of us today, harvest time is all the time. We can experience harvest every day at the grocery store because of modern logistics growing and moving food all over the world.

➤ Back then, the coming cold winter loomed ahead. This was a big problem.

Today, cold winters mean heating bills but also mean winter activities. Just having a heated house can be the difference between life and death.

➤ Back then, there was apprehension over the coming dark days. Not only would food not be growing, but this would mean spirits came sooner in the day and were closer than other times of the year. The god of the day was being overwhelmed by the god of the night. Darkness breeds fear.

Today, days being darker simply means lights go on sooner.

➤ Back then, the uncertainty of life, death and the hereafter was strong. The season of fall is all about the transition from life to death with leaves falling, plants dying and animals hibernating. For those who live in areas with four seasons, fall feels very different than spring.



Today, many do have questions about life and death, but Halloween is not a focal point for those questions. Mediums and fortune tellers do business year-round. Our advice: No matter what time of year - do NOT visit mediums and fortune tellers!

- Back then, the communication with departed ones and the avoidance and appeasement of evil spirits was of foremost importance.

Today, for those who foolishly seek to communicate with the dead, they can do so at their convenience - and we believe to their absolute detriment.

- Back then, these real concerns were expressed through ritual and celebration of multiple gods.

Today it is not about ritual celebrations. It is about fun, sweets, friends and the thrill of being spooked! They had life-and-death concerns; we have luxury and entertainment - usually the scarier the better. There are similarities, but also dramatic differences in how our society has translated these similarities into modern practice.

In other words, Samhain does not directly translate into Halloween. Rather, some community traditions of today have their ancient roots in something with an entirely different meaning.

Fast-forward many centuries. What are WE supposed to do with all of this here in our society? For most of us, the history we just discussed has no bearing on the actual basis of our present-day Halloween celebrations.



I do not have children so this question is not as personal for me now, but I did some limited trick-or-treating in my day. I was not allowed to be anything sexy or scary. I went as a frog in a costume my mom made me for several years. As an adult, I do not like Halloween. I can eat candy any day! I don't know what we are celebrating - it is death, skeletons, witches and mischief! For every innocent frog costume, there is a ton of satanic movies of torture and gore. If Halloween itself is not evil, to me it seems "evil adjacent" and, in my opinion, unnecessary.



When our son was little, we did allow him to dress up. My mom was an artist and she would make him beautiful costumes. His favorite one was an eagle that she hand painted feathers on. We would take him to just a few houses of relatives and friends. Then we would head up to good friends of ours from Bible study who had a harvest campfire every year. They would serve chili and baked potatoes and everyone contributed to the big candy bowl. The kids had fun being together, and the adults enjoyed fellowship. They are nice memories.

In this case, Halloween meant family fun and not a celebration of fear and death.



No, no fear and death with us either. Our kids did not go trick-or-treating, but we went to my mom's house for a pumpkin party. We dressed up, played games and just had fun! There was no darkness allowed. We would pick a theme as a family and dress as The Wizard of Oz, or a Peter Pan theme and it was just fun. The idea was to take the time and be together. Yes, we did eat candy.

There are segments of society who see the darkness and thrive on it. Other segments see the fun, kids and happiness, and they thrive on that. We have these two things going on, and some people try to mix the two. It can be confusing.

Let's use the scriptural principles from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8. Here he addressed a very real and current issue of his time - the eating of meat that had previously been offered to idols. This was an issue that rocked the Christian world in the early days! This and circumcision for the Gentiles coming into the early Christian church caused big discussions.

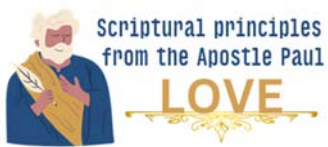
The concern over eating meat first given to idols came up because Gentile cities had large temples devoted to Gentile gods. Each day the priests would offer meat to the idols. (Never once did an idol actually eat the meat offering!) The priests would take the meat the idol did not eat and sell it to the market to be resold. It was older, so it would be sold at a discount. There were places near the temple where one could go to eat discounted meat.

Maybe Rick and Jonathan, early Christian friends, could go to one of these places and have a half-priced hamburger!

- Jonathan: I love half price, but I don't know - this meat was once offered to an idol. I'm a little nervous about this...
- Rick: Oh, come on, it doesn't mean anything.
- Jonathan: It bothers me.

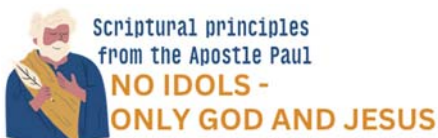


How should we react to this situation? Idols are not real, but...



As Paul begins, he sets the stage for the most important aspect of this issue: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13: (NASB) *¹Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love (Greek: *agape*) edifies. ²If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; ³but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.*

Knowledge makes us arrogant, but love (agape - selfless, benevolent love, like God's love for us, or Jesus' sacrificial love) edifies (builds one another up). Paul is talking about a touchy issue. He states that he is going to teach them knowledge but wants them to have love first and foremost in their minds.

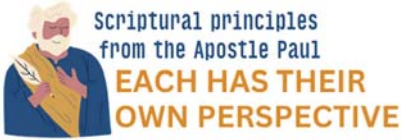


Next Paul establishes the foundational facts. There is only one God and one Lord Jesus - no idols:

⁴Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. ⁵For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, ⁶yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through him.



Love is the basis, and we worship only one God and one Jesus Christ. Our existence is because of God, and our salvation is because of Jesus. These are our foundational beliefs.



As certain as we are that idols do not exist, it is not easily understood on an emotional level as a freeing truth by some of our own:

⁷However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

Sometimes our personal history colors our present-day perceptions.

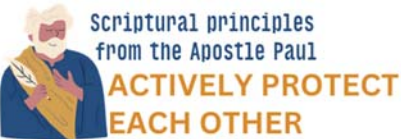
The Apostle Paul knew this and wanted to protect those who did not see things as clearly as he did. In other words, "You are more important to me than a silly piece of meat." We do not want our brethren devastated after eating idol-offered meat, thinking they have dishonored God. We do not want to hurt someone because their conscience is sensitive along a certain line.

For instance, someone might say, "I know the idol is not real so it is okay to eat the meat, but I used to worship that idol. I cannot even get close to that meat now that I honor and worship the only God."

Paul again states an important fact:

⁸But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.

What you eat does not bring you closer - or farther away - from God.



A call to action - we should actively protect each other's conscience:

⁹But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

We could hurt someone who does not have the same background and experience as we do.

Rick: Jonathan, if I know you have this issue about eating idol meat, according to the Apostle Paul, I am going to avoid that restaurant and we will pay full price for our hamburgers. What matters to me is YOU. When we are fellowshiping together, I am going to be extremely careful not to wound your conscience.



Paul warns us of the devastation we can cause by not caring for our brother's conscience:

¹¹For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. ¹²And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Paul is saying: "You have contaminated your brother and he stumbled. You have sinned against him and he may never recover!"

While there are some similarities, Samhain is a different place in a different time and for different reasons. Halloween, especially in America, is mainly about entertainment and corporate profits.



How can we apply Paul's principle to what we as Christians should be doing so that we do not sin?

We want to guard each other's consciences. That is most important. Even though idols are not real, we have to be extremely careful of those around us. This applies to consciences, but be careful to note if it is a difference of opinion, preference or priority. All of these things matter, but they are not as important as conscience.



Rick: Jonathan, if you say, "I can't even watch you go into that restaurant that served meat to idols. I cannot get that image out of my head. It actually hurts me to see that," this is conscience, not opinion, preference or priority.

We must change our behaviors if this is hurting someone in our fellowship. With opinion, preference or priority we need to talk, communicate and fellowship.

Paul's conclusion is that his brother is more important than our freedom, even if that freedom is based in fact:

¹³Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

In other words, just because we prefer not to do something does not mean others should not. However, when it comes to conscience, we need to be careful not to stumble our brother.



As Christians, the question of participating in some events of Halloween can only be answered with broad consideration. How do I truly see the things I am considering? Do they have any attachment to Pagan rituals or are they benign, current-day ways to have fun? How do my brothers and sisters with whom I associate see these same things? Do they agree? Do they simply say it is not something they would do? Do they say it is not a good idea? Are they troubled and do they believe I am violating Scripture?

Not only does an idol not exist, but things attached to the idol are not tainted because the idol is non-existent. There is a strong similarity of principle when we apply it to Halloween. The "idols" of Halloween (the gods of Samhain, the spirits coming over to this side, etc.) do not exist. With our personal examples of trick-or-treating, there were no idols - only a controlled environment of fun. We are staying far away from the darkness. Therefore, celebrating Halloween is not sinful as long as we do not move close to the darkness.

These questions of conscience are where we can prove faithful to that which is most important. We need to stop, consider and act with godliness.





With the matter of our brother's conscience in place, how should we continually regulate our own conscience?

It always seems to come down to looking in the mirror and assessing what we ourselves are, on the most basic level, motivated by. Do we just want to belong, or do we see whatever activities we are considering as clearly harmless? How much of my motivation has a spirit of self-serving in it compared to a spirit of simple goodness or godliness?



One final look at another Halloween tradition, the pumpkin carved to look like a face, also called the weirdly-named Jack-o'-Lantern.

Jack-o'-lantern origin, Top 10 Dark Origins of Halloween, MostAmazingTop10

- *So here is another theory as to how Jack-o'-lanterns and pumpkins became associated with Halloween. First off, turnips were used back then before pumpkins. They would hollow out the turnip and carve them into scary faces. This was done in order to scare off any spirits. Then they would light them with the candle or a piece of smoldering coal. The lanterns were then placed in the windows or doorways of their home, hoping that the face they carved was scary enough to scare off evil spirits and welcome their ancestors inside.*

the bottom line Halloween as Samhain likely began as a way to cope with the dark and unknown. In our day, it has transformed into fun. However, much of this fun translates into seeking recklessness, thrills and dark excitement - a lot of it is even blatantly satanic and evil. So, what do we do?

We suggest several points to consider as we ask what role we should play in this time of year.



Define what we see as what it is - be honest with ourselves:

1 John 2:15-17: (NASB) ¹⁵Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

When we look at Halloween as a Christian parent or individual, are we looking at *the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life*, or are we looking at something different? Be honest with ourselves, as this is how we honor God.



Beware the subtlety of sin! Sin does not have to be blatant to be dangerous:

2 Corinthians 11:14-15: (NASB) ¹⁴No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.





See, Satan dresses up, too! He is disguised *as an angel of light* and his servants *as servants of righteousness*. Here it is for the purpose of deception.

This reminds us of the following:

Isaiah 5:20: (NLT) *What sorrow for those who say that evil is good and good is evil, that dark is light and light is dark, that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter.*

Yes, Satan does disguise himself so he can be deceptive, looking like a good *angel of light*, not of darkness. We need to be aware the subtlety of sin. Sin is so subtle and it is like Velcro. Once it grabs on, it does not let go.



Check out our CQ Kids videos:
WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT SATAN?
christianquestions.com/youtube



Carefully choose the image to which we will conform:

1 Peter 1:14: (NASB) ¹⁴*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance,*

We must not keep the desires we had before we came to Christ unless they are exactly, precisely in line with spirituality, godliness, righteousness, justice and integrity. Be careful of the image to which we conform. If we participate in Halloween activities, be aware of what it looks like we are confirming to, by the way we are participating. Does it involve only the "happy" side of Halloween or something quite different?



Be sure of the source of whatever it is we are willing to conform to:

1 John 1:5-8: (NASB) ⁵*This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

Am I conforming because I am attracted to the darkness lurking here? Or, am I looking to make this a fun and good celebration?



My niece is a fourth-grade teacher in an area where it is not safe for her students to trick-or-treat. On Halloween, she and her fellow teachers do a "trunk-or-treat." They all put candy in their trunks and go the school and open their trunks so the kids can have a safe, happy, uplifting place to celebrate without danger and darkness hanging over their celebration. These children live in neighborhoods where there are gunshots, but here they can go and just be kids!



Recognize that we have already been delivered and need to live a delivered life:

Colossians 1:12-14: (NASB) ¹²*Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³For He rescued (King James Version: delivered) us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*



Rescued from the domain of darkness - do we want to go back to the darkness from which we were delivered? If this celebration is something we see as positive and fun, we must make it to be all about children, light and happiness and not allow the darkness.



To be delivered is to have the privilege of holiness. Seek holiness:

1 Peter 1:15-16: (NASB) ¹⁵*but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;* ¹⁶*because it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.*

Like the Israelites who so easily became idolatrous by adopting the ways of the Canaanites, we can easily get seduced by what the world finds attractive and what it deems as normal.

Julie: In my personal opinion, any holiday where the main mascots are devils, witches and ghosts should put us on high alert.

Rick: I agree, we should be on high alert. I maintain, however, that when we are dealing with children and you put a celebration together that is happy, light and family-oriented, that is good. But make sure your kids know how we honor God by not celebrating the evil. We have to achieve clarity of mind by understanding the history of the event, the scriptural principles that might apply and then how we react to these facts. Where do I stand, and why do I stand there? Am I doing anything that might be a problem with my brother's conscience (maybe not their preference, but their conscience)? If I am, I must be careful.



As a Christian, Halloween is always a cautionary tale. Engaging in some activities of this holiday can, in and of themselves be harmless, yet the effect our engagement may have on others could be a different story. Remember, the fallen human mind will always find ways to go from bad to worse, while the enlightened spiritual mind will always find ways to rise above the fray!

What will I choose?
 What do I know?
 What do I believe?
 What principles will I stand for?

The idea of Halloween is popular in many societies, including ours. What do I do with that popularity when it surrounds me at this time of year?

- Do I seek a way to find a light, happy way to celebrate with fun activities?
- Or, do I fall prey to celebrating the darkness because it is convenient...and maybe a little bit thrilling?
- If so, beware! We are being drawn by something ungodly and inappropriate.

Stand firmly for light and truth!



*So, is it a sin if I... celebrate Halloween?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



Join us next week for our podcast on October 31, 2022

Ep. 1253: How Do I Let Go and Let God?

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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1252: Is it a Sin If I...? (Part IV)

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1252-halloween/>

See:



1. What is the basis of Paganism? Why did the ritualistic celebration of Samhain likely develop? How would ancient peoples have viewed the increasing darkness and coming cold of winter?
2. Explain three differences between Christian beliefs and Paganism? (See Psalms 104:19-24, Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)
3. What was the purpose of animal sacrifices offered to God? Why were sacrifices offered to Pagan gods? (See Genesis 4:2-4, 8:18,20)
4. How were the Israelites supposed to treat Pagan idols, their altars and sacrifices? Why? How did Israel follow God's edict? What was the danger in this for Israel? For us? How is Samhain different from the Christian faith? (See Exodus 34:12-17, Judges 6:25-30, 1 Kings 15:15, 16:33, 2 Kings 13:6, 17:10,16, 23:15)
5. What was Jesus' answer to the scribe's question, "What commandment is the greatest of all?" What was the purpose of the Law? Why did the scribe's response please Jesus? What is the ultimate way to God? With what should we replace animal sacrifices? (See Mark 12:28-34)
6. What was "meat offered to idols?" Why was it a problem for some early Christians? How does Paul approach the problem? (See 1 Corinthians 8:1-13)

Verses 1-3: What must be first in our minds when facing a difficult issue? What might antagonize it?
Verses 4-6: What are our foundational beliefs?
Verses 7-8: What do we need to consider? What must we keep in mind about our own perspective?
Verses 9-12: What could we do to someone through our example? What might be the result?
Verse 13: What should our conclusion be? How does this apply to differences in opinion, preference or priority? How does all this apply to our participation in Halloween?
7. Points to consider if you are participating in Halloween - expand on each thought:

Honestly ask, why am I you doing this? (1 John 2:15-17)
Am I watching for subtle sins? (2 Corinthians 11:14-15, Isaiah 5:20)
What image do I want others to see me conforming to? (1 Peter 1:14)
Do I know the source of what I am conforming to? (1 John 1:5-8)
What must I remember in all that I do? (Colossians 1:12-14)
What is the most important thing for which to seek? (1 Peter 1:15-16)
What will I choose? What do I know? What do I believe? What principles will I stand for?