

Quick Guide - Halloween

The Christian celebration of All Saints or All Hallows, is much better known as Halloween. Each year there are plenty of Halloween celebrations going on, with customs which may date back to the pre-Christian Pagan festivals at the same time of year that Pagan worshippers still celebrate. But for some the fun of Halloween is tarnished.

You may want to question some of the things that happen at Halloween:

- The 'harmless' fun in dressing a child in a mask of the fictional murderer and cannibal Hannibal Lecter
- Elderly people sitting in fear in the dark rather than risk opening their doors
- A 20% increase in anti-social behaviour
- Commercialised opportunity with supermarkets trying to grow the event
- An attack on faith and Christian beliefs

Churches should share these worries, so what should we do?

Discuss the issue - Have an open meeting or short discussion at the end of church to consider this issues, and find out what the church community feels about Halloween. Then consider how the church can respond, and also how individuals and families can make a difference to Halloween.

Don't be spiritually paranoid – Don't respond to Halloween like superstitious pagans. Pagans are superstitious; Christians are enlightened by the truth of God's Word. Evil spirits are no more active and sinister on Halloween than they are on any other day of the year! God is in charge, and Jesus defeated evil!

Show wisdom - Some people fear the activity of Satanists or pagan witches, but the actual incidents of satanic-associated crime are very low. The real threat on Halloween is from the social problems that attend sinful behaviour such as pranksters, vandals, and unsupervised children. Parents may want

Christian young people should stay away from secular Halloween parties since those are breeding grounds for trouble.

Tell the Gospel story – Many in the unbelieving, Christ-rejecting world lives in perpetual fear of death. Christians should use Halloween and all that it brings to the imagination such as death imagery and superstition, to engage others with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus brought light to the world – many people have lives that are dark enough, and the Light of the world want to change that.

Challenge the shops – Write to the manager of your local supermarket or other store that is taking advantage of the more commercialised and negative aspects of Halloween. Explain that you have concerns about the items they put on sale, which may encourage fear, anti-social behaviour, and glorifies horror. Don't expect a reply, but do encourage others to write also as only by a groundswell of local opinion will these stores think again.

Don't play along with Halloween – many parents choose to avoid any participation in Halloween, and will explain gently and clearly why. These parents don't want their children participating in spiritually compromising activities such as listening to ghost stories and colouring pictures of witches, dressing up, trick-or-treating or attending Halloween events. That response naturally raises eyebrows and provides a good opportunity to share the gospel to those who ask. It's also important that parents explain their stand to their children and prepare them to face the teasing or ridicule of their peers and the disapproval or scorn of their teachers.

Do something different – Put on a 'Light Party' or other event. Throughout our county churches and groups will be providing parties and other celebrations for young people that focus on the positive message of All Hallows – celebrating the good people and the light of Christ in our lives both in the past and now. These parties will give children a bright, positive experience.

Meet Halloween half-way - Non-compromising participation in Halloween may be possible. There's nothing inherently evil about giving out sweets, dressing up in costumes, or trick-or-treating in the neighbourhood. All of that

can provide a unique gospel opportunity with the community. Even handing out sweets to neighbourhood children can improve your reputation among the children and their families. As long as the costumes are innocent and the behaviour does not compromise our faith, trick-or-treating can be used to further gospel interests.

Go with your conscience - Ultimately, Christian participation in Halloween is a matter of conscience before God. Whatever level of Halloween participation you choose, you must honour God by keeping separate from the world and by showing mercy to those who don't understand. Halloween provides the Christian with the opportunity to accomplish both of those things in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Resources:

Better than Halloween. Nick Harding's book 'Better than Halloween' ISBN-13: 9780715141014, published by Church House Publishing, looks at the original of many traditional Halloween activities and looks at what the Bible says. It is also packed full of ideas and suggestions to make the season fun, bright and positive. It comes with a CD Rom of ideas, images, posters and decorations.

Light Party Pack. Does your church wonder what to do for children at Halloween each year? Do you want help in answering the questions they ask about it. Do you need some inspired ideas for Light Parties that don't involve lots of preparation? Then Scripture Union's FREE Light Party Pack could be just what you need! <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/3534033.id>