



Should Christians Celebrate Halloween?

Each October, pumpkins appear on doorsteps, children dress as witches, superheroes and ghosts, sweets disappear at a remarkable rate, and doorbells ring as neighbours who may barely speak during the rest of the year find themselves standing on their doorsteps handing out chocolate. But every year, some Christians ask the same question: **should we really be encouraging this?**

For some believers, Halloween is best avoided. It seems to celebrate things Christians are called to reject - witchcraft, the occult, demons, death and darkness. So they opt out and some churches provide alternative activities for children such as events called "Light Parties."

These concerns deserve to be taken seriously. Christians should never trivialise evil or encourage children to experiment with the occult. The Bible is clear about that. But perhaps there is another question worth asking: could our response to darkness be more than simply walking away from it? Could it be an opportunity to bring light?

A Christian Name?

Let's start with the name itself. 'Halloween' comes from **All Hallows' Eve** - the evening before All Hallows' Day, or All Saints' Day, on 1 November.

A 'hallow' simply means a holy person or saint - as in the Lord's Prayer: *'Hallowed be thy name.'*

Traditionally, three days sit together:

31 October — All Hallows' Eve
1 November — All Saints' Day
2 November — All Souls' Day

All Saints' Day gives thanks for those who have gone before us in the faith. All Souls' Day remembers the faithful departed and points us towards the Christian hope of resurrection.

So the Christian story surrounding Halloween is rather different from the one we often see in popular culture. At its heart is an ancient Christian instinct: **to face the reality of death while proclaiming that death does not have the final word.**

Was Halloween Pagan?

This is where things become interesting and nuanced.

Halloween is often described as a Christianised version of **Samhain**, an ancient Celtic festival marking the beginning of winter. Certainly, pre-Christian customs existed at this time of year, including beliefs about the dead and the supernatural.

But it's too simple to say that the Church simply took Samhain and renamed it Halloween. The feasts of All Saints and All Souls have their own Christian history and theological development.

As Christianity spread through different cultures, Christian festivals inevitably encountered existing customs. Some were rejected, some disappeared, and others were given new names and meanings, such as the pagan feast of Saturnalia on 25th December.

Christianity has often engaged with culture in precisely this way - challenging what is incompatible with Christ while transforming what can be

turned towards him. Perhaps, then, the more useful question is not simply **‘Where did Halloween come from?’** but **‘How should Christians respond to it?’**

Christian Objections

There are good reasons for caution. The Bible forbids witchcraft, consulting mediums, attempting to communicate with the dead and involvement with occult practices. Christians should never treat spiritual evil as harmless entertainment. Nor should we be comfortable with anything that deliberately glorifies Satan, demons or violence.

So when Christians express reservations about Halloween, we should listen rather than dismiss them as people who simply don’t want children to have fun. Their instinct is right: **evil is not something Christians should celebrate.**

But we should also be careful not to turn a sound principle into an overgeneralised conclusion. The fact that some things associated with Halloween are problematic does not mean that everything about the evening is.

A child dressed as a pumpkin isn’t practising witchcraft. A family handing out sweets isn’t participating in the occult. And a church welcoming families isn’t endorsing Satanism. We need to distinguish between genuine

spiritual dangers and harmless cultural customs.

And that points to something much bigger: when something in our culture has become distorted, the answer isn’t always to abandon it. Sometimes the answer is to reclaim it. If an evening has become associated with darkness, Christians can bring light. If it is associated with fear, we can offer welcome. If it is dominated by commercialism, we can practise generosity. If it creates isolation, we can build community. If children are already walking around our neighbourhoods, why not open our doors and meet them? If people who rarely come near the church are already out and about, why not welcome them? That isn’t retreat. That’s mission.

Open the Doors

Halloween offers a surprisingly good opportunity for community. For one evening, children and parents walk around their neighbourhoods. Doorbells ring. People who might otherwise remain strangers meet one another. Streets come alive and families spend time together. Why should Christians see that simply as something to avoid?

Imagine churches offering hot chocolate, games, crafts, food and laughter. Imagine families being welcomed even though they have never been to church before.

Imagine children discovering the church building isn’t just for weddings, funerals and Sunday services, but a place where ordinary people are welcomed.

Imagine Christians being known **not** primarily for what they oppose, but for **hospitality, generosity and joy**. Doesn’t that sound more like Jesus?

Jesus didn’t withdraw from ordinary human life. He went into people’s homes, shared meals, welcomed children and met people where they were. The Christian vocation has never been simply to retreat from the world, but to bring the light of Christ into it.

Celebrating New Life

There is another fascinating connection between Halloween and Christian tradition. Medieval Christians were much more comfortable than we are with reminders of mortality. Churches and churchyards contained tombs, skulls and skeletons. Christian art regularly reminded people that life is short.

The phrase **Memento Mori** — ‘remember you must die’ - can sound rather bleak to modern ears. But it wasn’t intended simply to frighten people. It was meant to make us ask better questions:

If life is short, how should I live it? What really matters? What sort of person am I becoming?

Am I reconciled to God? And what comes after this life?

Christianity doesn't answer these questions by pretending death isn't real. It answers them by pointing to Jesus Christ - who died and rose again.

Faith Beyond the Grave

That is why the traditional movement from All Hallows' Eve to All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day is so significant. We remember those who have died. We give thanks for those who have gone before us in faith. And above all, we proclaim the Christian hope of resurrection. Death is real. But death is not the end of the story.

Reclaiming Not Withdrawing

Perhaps Christians don't have to choose between uncritical acceptance of modern Halloween and complete withdrawal. There is a third way. We can reclaim the evening.

We can reject the occult without becoming fearful of our neighbours. We can refuse to glorify evil without retreating from our culture. We can protect children from genuine harm while giving them something joyful, safe and wholesome to enjoy. We can turn an evening associated with fear into one of

fellowship. We can turn strangers into neighbours and closed doors into open ones. And we can turn something many Christians see as a problem into an opportunity for mission.

Jesus is the light of the world but light doesn't need to shout at darkness. It simply needs to shine.

So this Halloween, perhaps instead of asking only, **'Should Christians celebrate Halloween?'**, we might ask a

darkness become an opportunity to point beyond ourselves to the One who has overcome death itself.

The Christian response to darkness has never been to become part of the darkness - nor simply to run away from it. It is to bring the light.

And few occasions offer a more natural opportunity to practise hospitality, generosity, courage and Christian hope than an evening when the world is already coming to our doorsteps.

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slightly different question: 'How can Christians make Halloween better?'

The answer may be surprisingly simple.

- Open the door.**
- Put the kettle on.**
- Welcome the children.**
- Have bags of sweets ready.**
- Talk to neighbours.**
- Enjoy the evening.**
- Give generously.**

And, where appropriate, let the masks, pumpkins and