

Position Statement: **DH010****HALLOWEEN:
OPPRESSION OR OPPORTUNITY?**

A myriad of questions have been raised about Halloween. Should Christians participate in Halloween? What should our attitude be towards Halloween? Should we simply ignore it? Should we vigorously attack it? Or should we, as Christians, find ways in which to accommodate it?

Before offering some suggestions on how we as Christians might best relate to Halloween, I think it would be appropriate to first consider the pagan origin of Halloween.

The celebration of Halloween, also known as the witches' new year, is rooted in the ancient pagan calendar which divided the year into Summer and Winter by two fire festivals. Before the birth of Christ, the day we know as Halloween was part of the Celtic Feast of Samhain (sah-ween). This feast was a celebration of Druid priests from Britain and France and commemorated the beginning of Winter. It was a night on which the veil between the present world and the world beyond was pierced. The festivals were marked by animal sacrifices, offerings to the dead, and bonfires in recognition of departed souls. It was believed that on this night demons, witches, hobgoblins, and elves were released en masse to harass and to oppress the living. For self-preservation many Druids would dress up as witches, devils, and ghouls, and would even involve themselves in demonic activities and thus make themselves immune from attack.

In direct response to this pagan tradition, the early Christian church moved a festive celebration called All Saints' Day from May to November 1 and renamed it All Hallows' Eve, from which we get the word Halloween. This was an overt attempt on the part of believers to infiltrate pagan tradition with the truth of the gospel.

It was a bold evangelistic move designed to demonstrate that only the power of the resurrected Christ could protect men and women from the destructive ploys of Satan and his minions. This was a time in which they boldly proclaimed the marvelous fact of the resurrection and the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Believers in post-Christian America today should do no less. Halloween can be for us, like the early Christian church, an open door for evangelism. The deception of Halloween, with its witches, demons, skeletons, and allusions to death, can become a powerful springboard to demonstrate the dramatic power of Christ to redeem us from death, to fill us with His Spirit, and to give our lives meaning, purpose, and direction.

There are three specific things which I would suggest that you and your family plan for next Halloween: First of all, I would use Halloween as an opportunity to communicate to your children, your family members, and your friends that although death and the grave are very real, we are more than conquerors over the powers of darkness through Jesus Christ.

Second, this is an appropriate time to consider the saints who have gone on before us — those loved ones who make the thought of heaven sweet. Even now my mind goes back to precious moments of days spent with Walter Martin. When I think of heaven, I think not only of what it will be like to meet Jesus Christ, but I think of what it will be like to be reunited with this marvelous saint who has had such a significant impact not only on my life but the lives of countless others as well. This is also a great opportunity to share with my children the life of a saintly grandmother who prayed earnestly for me night after night while I was engulfed in a life of sin. Although she is no longer with us, the answers to her prayers live on.

Christians, this is not a time to look the other way as we do so often when passing by a graveyard. Halloween is not a time for avoidance; this is an opportunity, so seize the moment! Death, demons, pain, and suffering are real in a cursed creation. All of us have to struggle with it, and so will our children. This is not a time for glib and superficial answers — this is a time to build intimate and lasting relationships with those whom God has entrusted to our care. This is the time to reach them and to nurture them in the rich traditions of the Christian faith. Let your children know that Satan is not a character dressed in a red union suit with horns and a pitchfork; instead, he is a very real and powerful adversary whose goal is to steal, kill, and destroy.

Finally, let me suggest that this would be a time to share some of the great classics of the Christian faith with your children. Perhaps you could curl up on the floor with them before a roaring fire and read to them from *Pilgrim's Progress*, or from C. S. Lewis's masterful work *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*.

Yes, this is not a time to curse the darkness, but a time to light a candle. If we are indeed serious about making an impact on a lost and dying world, Halloween represents not just satanic oppression but a strategic opportunity.

— Hank Hanegraaff