

# **HALLOWEEN**

is a tricky holiday for many Christians.

A wide range of opinions and observances exist.

This booklet is provided as a resource for you and your family. It is an attempt to explain some complicated doctrines as succinctly as possible.

The intention is to help parents navigate a confusing holiday with increased understanding, confidence, and grace.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a way to help us understand and live out our faith. When we are not sure what to think about a controversial subject, such as Halloween, the WQ is a tool that helps us process. This booklet will look at Halloween through the four lenses:



We always begin with Scripture, and "What does the Bible say?"

# **SCRIPTURE** is primary.

The second filter is 2,000 years of Church tradition so the follow up question is, "What does the Church teach about it?" These are our external authorities. The observances of Halloween and All Saints' Day are part of Church tradition, born from how the Church understood scriptural teachings on prayer, the afterlife, and the communion of all the saints.

Reason and experience are also important to understanding and living out our faith because that is what makes our faith come alive. Reason and faith are internal authorities which are always viewed through the lenses of Scripture and tradition.

## A Quick History Lesson

To understand church tradition, it helps to know church history. The early church began as a sect of Judaism; the first Christians were Jewish followers of Jesus. As the gospel spread, more Gentiles (non-Jews) joined the movement. As the early church began to separate from Judaism, it formalized into the Catholic Church. We might call the Catholic Church 'the mother ship.'

The first big church split occurred in 1054 in "The Great Schism." From there we got the Eastern Orthodox Church. The next big split came in the 16th century with "The Reformation" when Martin Luther attempted to reform certain practices within the (Western or Roman) Catholic Church. The Reformation marked the beginning of the "Protestant" movement because adherents were "protesting" certain aspects of the Catholic tradition.

An additional offshoot quickly followed. King Henry the VIII separated from the Catholic Church in the 1530s for more personal reasons, forming the Church of England or the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church upholds many Catholic traditions but also embraces some fundamental ideas born out of the Protestant Reformation (it is what Queen Elizabeth I called "the middle way").

'Methodism emerged as a movement within the Anglican Church. Founder John Wesley was an Anglican priest who sought minor reforms within the Church of England. He began preaching outdoors to those who would not feel welcomed or comfortable in the high-brow Anglican church of his day. John Wesley was committed to the Church of England but shortly after his death in 1791, the Methodist movement separated and formed its own lively denomination which was popular in both England and the newly formed United States.

As we look at Halloween through the lens of church tradition, you will see that Methodists have roots in both the Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformation via the Church of England. It should be noted that traditions and observations vary between Western (Roman) and Eastern (Greek) Christian traditions, and among Catholic and Protestant traditions.

### A Halloween Catechism

#### From where did Halloween originate?

- a. From a church holy day
- b. From the Legend of Sleepy Hollow
- c. From Party City
- a. From a church holy day. All Saints' Day which is always November 1, was also called **All Hallows' Day** or **Hallowmas** in the Catholic Church. "Hallows" referred to the saints, who were regarded as "holy" or "set apart." Originally the day was preceded by a vigil—meaning prayers began the night before the holy day. Therefore, October 31st was referred to as **All Hallows' Even** (evening). Over time the phrase was shortened to Halloween.

#### What is All Saints' Day?

- a. The day we honor the New Orleans Saints football team
- b. The day we all dress up like Bible characters and have a parade
- c. A holy day to honor the Church's saints
- **c.** During the early Middle Ages, our Catholic brothers and sisters set apart a solemn holy day to commemorate the canonized Saints. **All Saints' Day** began as a day to honor the church's martyrs (those who were killed for the faith) but was expanded to a general commemoration of all the canonized Saints, whether martyrs or not.

#### What is All Souls' Day?

- a. The day after All Saints' Day
- b. A day to give thanks for our shoes
- c. A Catholic tradition
- a. and c. Western Christians celebrate All Saints' Day on November 1st which is followed by All Souls' Day on November 2nd. All Souls' Day commemorates all the faithful departed who are still being perfected. In this Catholic tradition (associated with purgatory), the living are reminded to pray for the departed to hasten their preparation for heaven. Since Protestants do not hold to an extended intermediary stage between death and heaven, they remember their faithful departed on All Saints' Day, not All Souls' Day.

#### What is a saint?

- a. A departed Christian who has been recognized by the Church
- b. All faithful followers of Jesus, living and dead
- c. Anyone who gets a hospital or church named after them

**a.,b.** (and sometimes c). When the Catholic Church officially declares a deceased Christian a "Saint" it means they are added to the canon, or authorized list, of Saints. It is the Catholic Church's way of recognizing departed Christians who meet certain criteria. Canonized Saints are considered to already be perfected and in heaven. They are called by that prefix, such as St. Peter or St. Patrick.

However, both the Old and New Testaments also refer to God's faithful ones who are still living as saints (with a lower case "s") because they are "holy" or "set apart" as followers of the One true God. Therefore, Catholics and Protestants both recognize All Saints' Day but it has slightly different meanings for each.

# How are All Hallow's Eve, All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day related?

- a. By the word "all"
- b. By their proximity in the Christian calendar
- c. By their association with the dead

**d.** all of the above. The three days together are known as **Allhallowtide** and form a triduum. A triduum is a religious observance lasting three days. A more familiar triduum is

Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. Historically, Allhollowtide was a time to remember the departed, to pray, and to reflect on one's own mortality.

#### Why is prayer associated with Allhallowtide?

- a. Because we pray when we get scared
- b. Because the early church would pray for those who had died
- c. Because we pray for Pastor Tom on his birthday

**b.** All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day are based on the Catholic's fundamental belief of a prayerful spiritual communion among all Christians, living and dead. The idea that the living can intercede for the dead to help hasten their purification and speed them toward heaven, began in the late first century. The Apostle Paul made a curious statement in 1 Corinthians 15:29 about those who are being baptized for the dead, without offering any explanation, which would lead us to believe it was something commonly practiced and understood in his day. In fact, he used it as an argument for the resurrection of the dead.

#### **How is Allhallowtide observed?**

- a. By watching scary movies
- b. By remembering the faithful departed
- c. By avoiding black cats

**b.** All Saints' Day and/or All Souls' Day are celebrated around the world in different ways. Generally, people will visit the graves of their deceased loved ones. They may tidy the gravesite, light candles, or bring flowers. Depending on the religious tradition, people may attend church services and say prayers.

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther, in an attempt to reform the Church, nailed his 95 Theses to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany—marking the beginning of the Reformation. October 31 is celebrated as "Reformation Day" among **Lutherans** and **Anglicans**. They combine it with their All Saints' observations. Typically, Martin Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" is sung in services.

John Wesley celebrated All Saints' Day, describing it in his journal on November 1, 1767, "as a festival I truly love."

Methodists commonly regard All Saints' Day as a time to remember those among their local congregation who have preceded them in death, usually by reading their names during Sunday services. At Asbury, we follow the practice of the Oklahoma Annual Conference by honoring our departed loved ones in the spring, near Memorial Day.

**Eastern Orthodox** churches observe All Saints' Day right after Pentecost.

#### What else happens on All Saints' Day?

- a. We remember to pray for the Persecuted Church
- b. We eat candy for breakfast
- c. We start Christmas shopping
- **a.** Since All Saints' Day was originally associated with **martyrs** and those who have suffered for their faith, it is now recognized as the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

#### Is Halloween really just a pagan festival?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Possibly, but probably not
- **c.** A common urban legend claims Allhallowtide traces its roots to a prehistoric pagan festival from ancient Ireland, called Samhain, about which little is known. Citing a lack of historical documentation, some modern historians flatly reject the popular notion that the Church was attempting to Christianize a pagan Celtic observance by making November 1st a holy day.

The earliest documented customs attributed to Halloween grew out of the Medieval observances of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day and included such things as the lighting of bonfires (symbolic of the plight of lost souls) and the practice of "souling" in which beggars would go door-to-door offering prayers for the household's deceased in exchange for "soulcakes" (which appear to be a soft, spiced cookie).

That being said, throughout human history people have puzzled over what happens after we die and have found ways to honor their dead and commend their departed to the afterlife. Within the church, we have established our own ways of dealing with the universal human experience of death, dying and the afterlife.

#### How did Halloween get to be Halloween as we know it?

- a. The entertainment industry
- b. Because it is fun for everyone
- c. Because we needed a holiday between Labor Day and Thanksgiving

**b.** It was the English, Scottish and Irish who added merriment to the holiday and celebrated with prayers, communal feasting and playing divination games, such as bobbing for apples. Irish immigrants brought the holiday to North America in the mid-1800s. Today, Halloween is so commercialized it is barely recognizable from what was observed in the U.S. just a few centuries ago.

# Knowing What Is Real and What Is Not:

The secular observance of Halloween often includes decorations, costumes, and forms of entertainment with dark or scary images and content. Christians can participate in the holiday without embracing all its trappings. It requires us to be informed, prayerful and discerning. The following is a descriptive list of characters/creatures often associated with Halloween for your general knowledge.

# GOOD RULE



With entertainment choices, a good rule of thumb is to reject that which celebrates or glamorizes evil and tread very carefully with anything that blurs the lines between good and evil. When it comes to books and movies, for example, you may ask questions such as, "Is something evil being portrayed as good?" or "If the evil character is portrayed as a hero, is he redeemed at the end of the story?" In this way we are applying a Christian worldview to our daily choices.

**Note:** Focus on the Family's Plugged In is an online resource that reviews media from Christian perspective. It is helpful for making entertainment choices.



**Goblins** are mythical creatures from British and Germanic folklore. Goblin is a generic term for troublemakers from the fairy world and can range from mischievous tricksters to dangerous evil doers. Goblins are found in the literary works of Hans Christian Anderson, the Brothers Grimm, J.R.R. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling.



**Vampires** are mythical creatures whose origins date back to Sumerian mythology and Babylonian demonology. Linked to restless souls of the dead, they seek to continue their time on Earth by taking the life force (blood) of living beings. Nearly every ancient culture considered blood to be sacred, and viewed it as a requirement for life. Belief in vampires was spurred by misunderstanding the spiritual realm and the natural world (such as the appearance of bats or the effects of illnesses). Bram Stoker's "Dracula," provided the definitive version of vampires in pop-culture, and more recently, the "Twilight" series has given them a reboot. They are also the subject of the movie/ series, "What We Do in the Shadows."



Werewolves (man-wolves) also from folklore, were believed to be shape-shifting creatures with unusual strength and speed, who were victims of a condition or "curse" which could happen in a number of ways (association with a full moon is the one that stuck in the public's mind). Misunderstanding certain medical conditions probably gave the mythical creatures credibility in a time when people were less knowledgeable and more superstitious. Werewolves play a role in the "Twilight" series, while the stop-motion animation film, "Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit" takes a comical approach to the myth. You may also recall from the 1980s- "An American Werewolf in London" and "Teen Wolf."



Zombies are a fairly recent pop-culture phenomenon thanks to the television series, "The Walking Dead," even making headlines from time to time. They came from the Haitian Voodoo religion which is steeped in the belief of magic and witchcraft. In Haiti, zombies were seen as victims, not villains, believed to be corpses which were re-animated and used for labor. The government and secret police used the fear of zombies to control the general population. George Romero's classic movie, "Night of the Living Dead," redefined zombies, although they are never called "zombies" in the movie.



**Witches** are actual individuals or groups who practice witchcraft (magical skills and abilities that require esoteric secret knowledge).

Witchcraft is a complex concept that varies culturally and societally and is difficult to define precisely. Witchcraft usually occupies a religious, divinatory, or healing role, and is often found in societies and groups whose cultural framework includes a magical worldview. Witchcraft may differentiate between good (white) magic and bad (black) magic, although the existence of magical powers lacks scientific credibility and their effects may be explained by psychology or mentalism. As a modern form of paganism, witchcraft is forbidden in Scripture as it is a practice closely related to idolatry, or the worship of other gods. Fictional witches are found in many popular works such as DC and Marvel comics, the Harry Potter series, "The Chronicles of Narnia" and "The Wizard of Oz" franchise.



Satan and the demons are actual spiritual beings who were created by God, rebelled against Him, and were cast out of heaven. They exist in the spiritual realm and have certain supernatural powers, however, they are not omnipresent or omniscient. Scripture describes Satan as the father of lies, the accuser, the tempter, the evil one, the ancient serpent and the prince of this world. It seems more than anything he seeks to distort God's Word and keep people from correct thinking. "The Screwtape Letters" by C.S. Lewis is a novel

comprising letters written by a senior demon named Screwtape to his nephew, Wormwood, a younger and rather incompetent demon who is charged with guiding a man, called "the patient," away from heaven and into hell.



**Ghosts** are difficult to fit into the Christian worldview, so we saved them for last. Typically, ghosts are believed to be disembodied human spirits who have died but have not proceeded to the next world or realm. The reason ghosts are so challenging for Christians is because Scripture does not tell us what to make of them. The Bible does speak about a transitional state somewhere between death, resurrection. and final judgment although the exact nature and timing remains a mystery. In Jesus' story/ parable of the "Rich Man and Lazarus." the rich man asks to be sent back to warn his brothers. about their impending doom. His request is denied but not because it would be impossible, rather because it would be ineffective. Curiously. Jesus had a friend named Lazarus who died and was raised back to life. That Lazarus probably had particular insight to this question and that story (see Luke 16:19-31 and John 11:38-44).

The Apostle Paul said, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8), which would preclude a manifestation on earth and lead Christians (conservative Protestants mainly) to believe ghosts and paranormal experiences may be related to heavenly spirits, demonic activity, or something that may be debunked with naturalistic explanations.

The only ghosts mentioned in the Bible are that of Samuel, and the two times Jesus "spooked" the disciples: "When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear." (Matthew 14:26)

#### And-

"While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.'" (Luke 24:36-39)

We can see from these passages the disciples' worldview allowed for ghosts. Jesus seemed comfortable with the word and Scripture does not record Him correcting the disciples' understanding. Granted, in both instances more important things were happening.

Since Scripture does not provide a clear teaching on ghosts, we must leave some room for mystery here—especially since they exist (or don't exist), in a realm of which we know very little.

#### What is the most popular ghost story of all time?

- a. A Christmas Carol
- b. Hamlet
- c. Casper, the Friendly Ghost
- a. "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens has become the all time most popular artistic work associated with Christmas. And yet, A Christmas Carol is a ghost story (which could have been inspired by Jesus' parable of the "Rich Man and Lazarus"). It extols the Christian virtues of joy and charity and warns against the dangers of greed and corruption while the ghost characters bring about the redemption of the main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, through their visitations. Redemption, the ultimate Christian theme, is made accessible to religious and non-religious alike because it's rooted in the common human experiences of wealth, poverty, life, death, the effects of our choices, fear of the unknown and the mystery of ghosts.

## A Warning about Occultism:

Scripture strictly forbids us from conjuring up spirits (called necromancy), asking the dead for information or performing séances (see Deuteronomy 18:10-15; Leviticus 19:31). The Lord clearly instructed the Israelites not to be like the pagan nations who practiced these things.

In a strange biblical account, we read that Saul, the first king over Israel, had turned away from God and was therefore going to be replaced by another (David). Saul went into a panic because the Lord had stopped speaking to him. Out of desperation, Saul entreated a witch to bring up the spirit of Samuel, God's prophet and Saul's former advisor, who happened to be dead. It sounds like a bad joke, but Samuel told Saul, "Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me."

(1 Samuel 28) It is unclear if the witch really communicated with Samuel or if this was merely a parlor trick. Either way, this is one of those lessons in Scripture about what not to do.

## Redeeming Halloween

It is popular to accuse the Church of trying to Christianize a pagan holiday by instituting All Saints' Day, but it seems the converse may be true—our culture has successfully secularized a Christian observance. Christians recognize the tension this creates, but instead of allowing this secularization to scare us or cause us to throw up our

hands and walk away—perhaps we should consider it an opportunity. That Halloween would be adopted so heartily by those outside the church speaks to the human experience. To any thoughtful person, it raises the question (and has since the beginning of time): What happens after we die?

Trying to connect modern Halloween traditions to ancient pagan rituals proves that death/dying is a universal truth with which people have always wrestled. God places in each of us the sense of something bigger, something beyond our earthly existence. Ancient mythologies originated from people trying to explain what they could not understand.

The Lord created all days and all days belong to Him. Even a day that stands on the fringe is being made new through Christ Jesus (Revelation 21:5). The question is, what unique opportunities do Halloween and All Saints' Day afford parents that the other 363 days of the calendar do not? How can we use Halloween to help others (our kids included) follow Jesus?

#### Here are some ideas:

- **1.** When characters or images frighten our children, we can talk about what is real and what is not and begin teaching them how to use discernment in their entertainment choices. And assure them Jesus is really real.
- **2.** Kids usually begin to become aware of their own mortality around the 5th grade. We can assure our children they do not have to be afraid of death because Jesus has overcome death—we will live together forever with Jesus in heaven.
- **3.** Watch "Monsters, Inc." and talk about what each of you finds scary and why. (Parents may say what scared you as children.) Naming a thing can make it feel less scary. Remind them Jesus is always with them.
- **4.** We can get out pictures of grandparents or others (even pets) who have died and tell happy memories about them.
- **5.** We can open our homes to family, friends, and neighbors in a spirit of good-natured Christian hospitality. Maybe even carve a pumpkin for a neighbor who doesn't have any children.
- **6.** We can invite school friends or others to Asbury for our Harvest Hayday. Think about those who might not have a church home. Most people are just waiting to be invited.

#### For older kids...

- **7.** It might be interesting to research martyrdom stories of the early church, talk about how people could believe in Jesus so strongly that they would be willing to die for that belief.
- **8.** We can say a prayer for the Persecuted Church and Christians around the world who are suffering for being followers of Jesus. (Ask God to strengthen and comfort them.)
- **9.** If you like to bake, find an easy recipe for soul cakes, and make them together as you talk about the history of Halloween and All Saints' Day.
- **10.** With teenagers, we can dig into some of the scriptural references and stories in this booklet. No one has all the answers, so it could lead to fun and interesting spiritual conversations.

Halloween reminds people of their mortality and their fear of the unknown. Our culture wants to celebrate Halloween. The Church can provide something to really celebrate—hope.

The hope of life eternal through the only name by which a person can be saved, Jesus Christ.

We have life in His Name and therefore, we have nothing to fear.

