

Why do you use the word Halloween – Isn't it a pagan celebration?

Some have wondered why we call our Halloween outreach Halloween and not fall festival, trunk or treat, harvest festival, harvest party, hallelujah party or any of those type of names.

This is often tied to some kind of question regarding Halloween being a pagan holiday celebrating evil. After doing a dig into the history of Halloween and trying to discern what Scripture has to say, we have found there is a lot of misinformation as it relates to the origins of Halloween.

This response hopes to shed some light on why we (currently) choose to use the phrase Halloween to describe our yearly outreach into the community. Please know, our intent is to always honor the Lord, follow Scripture, and shine His light into our community.

We understand that there may be those that come to a different conclusion than we have regarding having anything to do with Halloween. We honor your thinking and decisions and hope you will see the heart, reason, and thought behind using the word Halloween.

The Historical Context of the Word Halloween

The word Halloween is a phrase that originated with the Church that refers to the evening before All Hobbies Day, also known as All Saints Day. This was a religious holiday in the Roman Catholic Church as well as many Christian Protestant denominations to honor Christians who had died (also called saints) and gone to heaven.

The root of the English word Halloween is a combined word formed from both "All Hallows" and "Even," or "E'en," the Scottish word for evening. The word Hallow means "to make holy." Like in the Lord's Prayer – "Hallowed be Your name." The word Halloween can be translated as "make this evening holy."

The Triple day Festival (also called Hallowtide) is observed as follows:

Day 1: All Hallows Eve (Halloween) is celebrated on Oct 31st.

Day 2: All Saints Day (which remembers believers who have passed on) is celebrated on November 1st.

Day 3: All Souls Day (which remembers all people who have passed on) is celebrated on November 2nd.

This triple day celebration is documented as early as the 700s in England and Europe (over 1300 years ago). A chapel built on the original St. Peters Basilica, in the 700's, was consecrated for "all of the saints" and the anniversary of its commencement was set for Nov 1 by Pope Gregory III.

The above dates were officially ratified in 839AD by Pope Gregory IV.

The reason there is a celebration the evening before All Saints day is because, in the Bible, a new day begins in the evening at 6pm, so in the ancient Church calendars, the night before a special day is when the celebration starts. We're familiar with Christmas Eve, but there's also the Vigil of Holy Saturday before Easter. Similarly, All Saints' Eve (Halloween) is the beginning of All Saints' Day.

Going back even further, All Saints Day was part of the festival of Pentecost, a sort of 'Birthday of the Church' when the first followers of Jesus went out first to speak publicly of Jesus's resurrection at Easter. Eastern Orthodox churches still celebrate this at the festival of Pentecost. The Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate this in the spring; the Western Churches changed the date to celebrate this in the fall.

So why did Pope Gregory move the festival in the Western Church? The Church began to set dates for major Christian festivals in the Roman solar calendar, as opposed to the lunar Jewish calendar. Dates were chosen that fit the agricultural seasons and when it was light and dark the same number of hours (end of October/early November).

Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, a historical figure, even chose Halloween to post his 95 complaints about the Church's wrongdoings on the chapel door in Wittenberg. He picked this day on purpose, and that's why Halloween is also called Reformation Day, celebrating "change and improvement."

If Halloween Started as a Christian Holiday – what happened?

If one does a search online, virtually all of the current references to Halloween refer to it originating with a pre-Christian pagan celebration (called Samhain) that ties back to the Celts and Druids of Western Europe (primarily Ireland).

They will refer to festivals on October 31st as pre-dating Christianity and that it actually was a pagan holiday before a Christian holiday with Christianity adopting their original dates. When trying to research the source material, we were surprised to discover *there is no original source material for this claim.*

There is actually no written history of this ever being the case. People who have spent their life studying this part of history find no written history on this subject.

Here is an example: In his book [Stations of the Sun](#), historian Ronald Hutton explains: *"The medieval records furnish no evidence that 1 November was a major pan-Celtic festival, and none of religious ceremonies, even where it was observed."*

Where the evidence primary leads, points to two places:

First was the Protestant Reformation and some people's efforts to taint anything to do with the Catholic church. You can find this around the celebration of Christmas as well. Second is the emergence of a late 19th century group called the neo-pagans. This group made a concerted effort to rewrite history to predate many Christian traditions and as a result, this line of thinking has made its way into modern culture.

The reality is that it doesn't seem likely a church thousands of miles away, in Rome, would orchestrate a major religious festival simply to tie it to a seasonal celebration marked by a handful of people in the Northern Celtic region of the world.

What about the history of dressing up in evil costumes?

Over the centuries - as a part of the festivities - children would dress up and go door to door. Many times they would dress up in scary costumes depicting the spiritual world. This was not a way to endorse or celebrate evil or satanic things as it is often interpreted today. This was actually a way for them to make fun, or belittle, their spiritual enemy. It was a way of saying: Satan, you have no power or authority over us or any who have gone before us.

While this doesn't seem right to many of us today, this type of imagery can also be seen in medieval churches of the day which are surrounded by gargoyles and demonic looking creatures. They did not view this as an endorsement of Satan. Rather, they used them as a way of keeping him away and diminishing his strength as well as a reminder of the evil in the world.

Some Scriptural Context:

Here are some Scriptures that help us as we process this in today's age and in light of Scripture:

In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. **Romans 14:5**

Christ died and rose again for this very purpose—to be Lord both of the living and of the dead. **Romans 14:9** He is Lord over all things.

Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone. **Colossians 4:5**

As a church, we are not celebrating Halloween in the same way the current world is celebrating it. We are making the most of an opportunity to share and show the love of God with those in our community.

Conclusion:

October 31st and the days around it have historically been a day to celebrate God's Hallowed (holy) activity on this earth, and His eternal work in the souls of those who have placed their trust in Him.

We do not believe this is the devil's day. Because we believe Jesus defeats evil, and the devil, every day. Every day *is a day the Lord has made* (**Psalms 118:24**).

In light of all that, we use a word that means "Make this evening Holy," has 1300 year-old Christian roots, and is intended to honor our Holy God.

Our purpose in using the word (and having our event) is to redeem it and bring back some light and holiness into a time when others are misappropriating it and using it for darkness.

Additional Sources: These sources have helped succinctly share and add source to the material above. There are many others. We share these for their approach and simplicity to understand.

<https://www.christianity.org.uk/article/whats-the-history-of-halloween>

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/holidays/is-the-origin-of-halloween-rooted-in-a-pagan-holiday.html>

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/is-halloween-a-pagan-festival>

<https://steadfastlutherans.org/blog/2014/10/redeeming-holy-days-from-pagan-lies-all-saints-dayeve-and-samhain/>

<https://www.medieval-life-and-times.info/medieval-art/gargoyles.htm>