

## CANDY, COSTUMES AND THE GOOD NEWS—HOPE FOR HALLOWEEN by Bob Waldrep



As Halloween nears many people are thinking about two things – candy and costumes. What about you? According to the statistical data, you are at minimum, going to buy candy to distribute to trick or treaters (or, at least pretend to do so in order to have it for your own consumption). However, there are some who think Halloween should not be observed in any fashion. Before we address this, let's consider the origin of Halloween and where it fits into our culture today.

The current trends indicate the celebration of Halloween is becoming increasingly popular and is extremely lucrative for retailers. Last month (September 2017) the National Retailers Federation (NRF) reported consumers will spend on average \$86.13 per person (this was \$66.28 in 2010) which translates to Americans spending a record \$9.1 billion in Halloween spending – an 8.3% increase over last year's, then record, \$8.4 billion.

Perhaps, even more incredulous than the money being spent on Halloween is the number of Americans who will be celebrating it in some fashion – 179 million (again, up from 2016's 171 million). This is quite amazing when one considers that the current population of the United States is about 325 million. In fact, the celebration of Halloween is

now among the top three holidays celebrated in America, with only Christmas and Thanksgiving surpassing it. (Interestingly, according to a 2011 Harris Poll, among the baby boomer generation, Independence Day is third).

### Preferred Costume and Candy

Among those celebrating Halloween, 48% will wear costumes. And while one might think those costumed are primarily children, a record number of adults (48%) will also be donning costumes this year including 40% of those who take their children trick or treating (according to a September 2016 poll by ORC International Research). And as if that is not enough costumes, 16% of celebrants will also dress their pets in costumes. In a 2015 article, *Money* put the dollar amount spent on pet costumes at \$350 million (you can draw your own conclusions about what that means). All of this may be quite difficult for baby boomers to grasp since rarely, if ever, did that generation see an adult, let alone a pet, in costume.



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Some may find it surprising that the ORC poll found the preferred costume types were not those that are scary but those classified as funny (these include super heroes), which were favored by 16%. The least favorite were political costumes – preferred by only 2%. Among males, adults favored pirate cos-

tumes or zombies and children favored Ninja Turtles or superheroes. Among females, adults preferred witch costumes by a wide margin, while children preferred being a princess.

It is not only dressing in costumes that makes Halloween popular. Perhaps, the biggest reason is the sale and consumption of everyone's favorite Halloween food – candy. According to NRF, 71% of those celebrating Halloween will give out candy. According to *Money*, most of those trick or treating will prefer chocolate (70%). The favorite Halloween chocolate? Reese's Cups followed by Snickers. A 2015 YouGov poll found that 25% prefer Reese's and 17% prefer Snickers. Of course, there is the old standby, candy corn (introduced in the 1880s), of which an estimated 9 billion pieces will be produced even though it is the preferred choice of only 3% of those polled.

No doubt, this growing interest in Halloween is partly driven by the fond memories many adults carry of their own childhood trick or treating. Everyone knew who was giving out the best treat and often went back to try for seconds. And, who doesn't recall the end of an evening of trick or treating when all the candy was dumped from your bag and sorted for the best of the best (of course, culling out those pieces of fruit given by the health-conscious Moms) and then trading what remained with siblings or friends to get more of that "desired" sugary treat. It is natural to want to pass these memories along to our children or to those children who come to our doors for looking for that special treat.

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## Ghosts, Haunted Houses, Witches



While there may not be any disputing Halloween’s growing popularity, is it simply the candy and costumes that are creating this interest; or, is there more to it? Some would remind that Halloween is also associated with the paranormal or supernatural – ghosts, witches, devils, etc. – which also fits well with Americans’ increasing appetite for such things.

Polling consistently reveals the fascination Americans have with these subjects. For example, a 2005 Gallup Poll found that 37% of Americans believe that houses can be haunted, 21% believe people can communicate with the dead, and 21% believe in witches. A more recent 2016 poll by Harris found these numbers are increasing, reporting that 41% of adults and 44% of teenagers (ages 13-17) believe in ghosts and 28% of adults and 25% of teens believe in witches – common themes associated with Halloween. In fact, 5.8 million adults will dress as witches this year.

This enchantment can be seen in the growth of television programming devoted to supernatural themes and also

carries over into the popularity of horror films, some of which are also related to the celebration of Halloween. One successful horror film franchise even takes its name from the holiday (The “Halloween” films had a worldwide box office revenue of \$366 million as of 2015 and that same year, *Money* reported the first film in the franchise, released in 1978, was the highest-grossing independent movie ever – made for only \$300,000, it took in \$47 million at the box office in the first twenty days of its release).

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Horror films are regularly released during Halloween to capitalize on the heightened interest in the supernatural – offering further evidence of this connection. Television cable stations are also acutely aware of this raised interest during Halloween with many of them having marathons or multiple showings of hor-

ror films leading up to this day.

Perhaps this desire to be frightened is another factor driving up the amount of money spent on, and the increasing popularity of, haunted house attractions. America Haunts, a consortium of haunted house attractions, estimates there are over 1,200 haunted attractions in the U.S. – almost half the number (2,500) of those operating worldwide according to a 2015 NBC News report – charging an admission fee of \$15-\$40. *Money* estimates this is now a \$300 million industry. In addition, America Haunts estimates there are an additional 3,000 plus charity attractions that open for one or two days during the Halloween season. This is definitely a growing industry to watch.

Halloween is big business; however, it is not without its detractors. Despite the interest in these paranormal themes – or, perhaps because of them – some Americans are strongly opposed to any activity that promotes Halloween believing it to be tied to that which is inherently evil. In fact, a 2006 Gallup poll found that 10% of Americans objected to Halloween based on their religious beliefs. While that is a significant number, it clearly indicates this is not the

## Culture Tracks

### American Trends Regarding Paranormal, Supernatural and Religious Beliefs

% THAT BELIEVE IN	2016 Poll Teens (ages 13-17)	2016 Poll Adults	2014 Poll Teens (ages 13-17)	2013 Poll Adults
<b>ANGELS</b>	71%	70%	74%	68%
<b>SOUL SURVIVES DEATH</b>	61%	64%	62%	64%
<b>DEVIL IS REAL</b>	59%	58%	65%	58%
<b>ASTROLOGY</b>	30%	33%	36%	29%
<b>WITCHES</b>	25%	28%	23%	26%
<b>HEAVEN</b>	74%	73%	78%	68%
<b>HELL</b>	65%	59%	64%	58%
<b>THE VIRGIN BIRTH</b>	61%	57%	59%	57%

Source: Polling Conducted by The Harris Poll in 2013, 2014 and 2016

view held by the overwhelming number of people who would identify themselves as Christian.

The fact of the matter is, the majority of those who identify as Christians have no problem being associated with the celebration or recognition of Halloween. One need look no further than their local churches to find the evidence. Many of our churches hold alternative celebrations during Halloween calling them such things as: “Fall Festivals”, “Trunk-Or-Treats”, or the like. While they may not refer to Halloween, these typically involve dispensing candy and children dressed in costumes receiving said candy. Those who oppose Halloween might quote Shakespeare, “A rose by any other name...”



### Origins of Halloween

But what of the roots of Halloween? Are these occult or paranormal influences found in its origins that might justify such religious concerns? Without question. While all do not agree on the origins of Halloween there are some things that are commonly accepted. For one, there is widespread agreement that its roots are found in ancient Britain in the Celtic celebration of the Festival of Samhain (pronounced sah-win or sah-ween). The pagan Celts believed that each year at the time of Samhain the border between this world and the spirit world became thin enough that spirits could pass through and enter this world. (Keep in mind the large percentage of Americans today who believe in communication from the dead and houses being haunted).

The Celts would welcome their relatives who were good spirits into their homes. To keep the evil spirits from also coming in they adopted the custom of wearing masks and costumes to confuse them. As with any good celebration, Samhain also included food.

Through the years the other elements and traditions of Halloween that are practiced today, such as jack-o-lanterns; bobbing for apples, etc. would be added. Undeniably, many of them would also have their roots in Paganism, or the occult. The celebration of Samhain is continued today by modern-day pagans and Wiccans (witches). [Ed Note: While some may argue that Wicca is part of paganism, there are Wiccans who would argue that not all of Wicca falls within the realm of paganism.]

A similar celebration in the Americas has its origins among the ancient religious beliefs of the Aztecs in Mexico. Known as *Dia de Muertos* or *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), this celebration occurs on November 1-2 and, like Samhain, includes the belief that deceased loved ones can/will visit during these days. Altars are built and treats are left on them for the dead to enjoy. Some leave these treats on the graves of their loved ones. And some celebrants believe the dead can/will converse with them. And though, Day of the Dead is not associated with Halloween, skulls are another feature typically associated with it, including skull masks and painted faces. Sound familiar?

Although most widely observed in Mexico, the Day of the Dead is becoming increasingly popular in the U.S. Naturally, there is a correlation between this and the growth of the Hispanic population in the U.S.; however, there is a growing interest among non-Hispanic Americans, as well. For example, in our own city, Birmingham, Alabama – deeply rooted in the Bible-belt – there are a number of Day of the Dead celebrations. Among the longest running (now in its fifteenth year) is one that began as a celebration of the life of a resident who was not Hispanic.

Just as today, in the past the Church has sought to establish alternatives to the celebrations of days like Samhain – trying to find a different focus for such days. Long before “Fall Festivals” the Church tried to give a more Christian emphasis to Halloween/Samhain. In fact, the Church’s influence can be found in the very name we recognize it as today,

a contraction of Hallow (Holy) E’en (Evening) – the day before All Saints Day which is observed on November 1. All Saints Day was celebrated in the Western Church to recognize all the Saints, known and unknown living or dead. It is believed the day of November 1 was chosen in Britain to coincide with the pagan celebration of Samhain and, thus, displace it. Later, the eve of this day would offer an alternative to Halloween.



Protestants would later try to shift the emphasis from celebrating Halloween on October 31 to celebrating Reformation Day which memorialized Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses on the church door at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. As we recognize the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation this year, how successful were they in shifting the attention from Halloween? You be the judge; but consider, which receives the greater emphasis today – even among Christians – Halloween or Reformation Day, or All Saints Day, for that matter?

### Should Christians Participate

The debate as to whether Christians should participate in Halloween, or not – the argument as to whether it is an inherently evil day, or simply a secular celebration – is nothing new. What does seem new is that, though those opposing it are fewer in number, it is often a more embittered battle. Which side one chooses seems to set the tone as to whether or not those on the opposing viewpoint will accept you as a true follower of Christ – something that is, unfortunately, true of many debates within the Church today.

As is often true, when Christians disagree over cultural influences and practices, factions develop over whether or

not one should be involved in those things. As is also true, in many cases, each side has valid points to offer. We tend to forget that where one stands on this issue is not nearly as important as the effectiveness and humility with which we are able to discuss it with those who disagree.

Whether we want it to be or not, there is no denying that Halloween is one of our nation's most popular celebrations. And while some oppose celebrating Halloween, it is clear that most Christians and non-Christians do not have a problem with it; they view it as simply a celebration of the imagination – a time to don a costume, attend a party or church event, and have some candy. That's the reality.

As Christians, whether we celebrate Halloween or not, our goal should not be to convince the non-believer of our viewpoint about Halloween but to creatively engage them with the gospel. No matter how you and I feel about Halloween, the culture is telling us they want candy. I can certainly give it to them and take care of their sweet tooth. However, more importantly, I can offer them something much more satisfying and substantial, as well – the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ.

Whether you should do this by giving candy at your door, inviting a friend to a Church fall festival, or trying to convince someone Halloween is pagan, is not my call. That's between you and the Lord. What is sad is that, all too often, the ones who get lost in Christians debating methodologies are "the lost" – those who need to hear the gospel. Now, when that happens, it is a sad trick indeed.

This Halloween give someone a real treat – share with them the "Good News" of Jesus love for them. In fact, this would be a wonderful gift to share every day of the year.



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Recently one of our supporters experienced the unexpected passing of a family member and learned that such a loss can include more than emotional pain if certain matters have not been provided for in advance. He sent me the following note and requested I share with our readers the need to be prepared in case their loved ones experience a similar situation.

### BE PREPARED—FRIENDLY ADVICE FROM EXPERIENCE

First and foremost thanks for all you and Crosswinds are doing with your current projects. I wanted to reach out to you and mention the difficulty my sons encountered when their Mom died unexpectedly. As you know, I have two sons from my first marriage. Their mom and I were married for almost 15 years when the marriage ended. She remarried, had a daughter and unfortunately her new husband passed away after only two short years of marriage. I remarried, and have been with my current wife for over 27 years. My former wife and I worked out how to be the best for our sons over the years, and had a great relationship, post divorce over the years.

Just to offer a brief update of what happened with their Mom, she passed away during surgery to replace valves on her heart last week. After several attempts to revive her, her sons and daughter had to make the decision to DNR, thus their Mom passed away in a few short hours. As this was not expected, so much had to take place to prepare for the funeral.... The short of the long story, her estate was not ready for her death. Her sons had to search for documents, trying to find out what was there to help with the funeral, as well as so many other things. A few documents were found, one which helped a small bit with the funeral, but both the funeral home and the cemetery needed required payment prior to the services. Since there was no money in the estate, my sons reached out to me and asked for help. Of course my wife and I helped out with the financial needs for her funeral. As we researched more into the estate, there was a lot of debt, with a small amount of assets not able to even begin to help with many of the bills. Add in a visit to the attorney's office, and a few other expenses, the three of them have a real mess on their hands.

My wife and I will be helping out through this maze over the next very few months, but I thought it might be good to share my experience, and ask that maybe you discuss this with your readers at some point. Encourage everyone to have things in order should something happen to them unexpectedly so as to not burden the family upon your death. I feel it would be good to remind folks to update their information, etc regarding this and make certain a key family member or friend is in the loop should something happen. Thanks again for all you.

**[Ed Note:** We appreciate our friend sharing this message with us. It is an important word for us to consider. Of course, in addition to being prepared to leave your family in good shape should something happen to you, be sure and also have yourself in good shape for meeting with your Creator. Be sure you have responded to Jesus' free offer of salvation to all who come to Him. If you haven't, do this right now - don't delay. It would be a shame to have your earthly affairs in order but not have taken care of your heavenly ones. If you need to talk with someone about this, email us at [info@crosswindsfoundation.org](mailto:info@crosswindsfoundation.org) or call us at 205-327-8317.]

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