

Grace Evangelical Free Church
Issues & Answers: Halloween

Acts 19:18, 19: “And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

Whether or not Christians should celebrate Halloween can be a very controversial topic. Some Christians celebrate Halloween simply by dressing up in a costume and having fun, seeing it as innocent and harmless. Other Christians are equally convinced that Halloween is a satanic holiday established to worship evil spirits and promote darkness and wickedness. So, who is right? Is it possible for Christians to celebrate Halloween without compromising their faith? For the Scriptural answers, we examine:

- **Historical Context:** Written between 61-64 A.D., the Book of Acts does not specifically identify its author. From Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-3, it is clear that the same author wrote both Luke and Acts. The tradition from the earliest days of the church has been that Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, wrote both Luke and Acts (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11). The Book of Acts was written to provide a history of the early church. The emphasis of the book is the importance of the day of Pentecost and being empowered to be effective witnesses for Jesus Christ. Acts records the apostles being Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the rest of the surrounding world. The book sheds light on the gift of the Holy Spirit, who empowers, guides, teaches, and serves as our Counselor. Reading the book of Acts, we are enlightened and encouraged by the many miracles that were being performed during this time by the disciples Peter, John, and Paul. The book of Acts emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's Word and the transformation that occurs as a result of knowing Christ. There are also many references to those that rejected the truth that the disciples preached about the Lord Jesus Christ. The lust for power, greed, and many other vices of the devil are evidenced in the book of Acts.
- **Grammatical Usage:** V18: “Believed” or “Pisteuo” in the Greek means, “to be persuaded...place confidence...trust”; “confessed” or “Exomologeō” means, “acknowledge openly”; V. 19: “curious arts” or “periergos” means, “things that are around”;
- **Literal Application:** Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.
- **Contextual Interpretation:** Paul arrives in Ephesus, site of a spectacular temple and center of the cult of the goddess Artemis in Asia. There Paul meets others who know only John's baptism but who quickly believe (19:1-7). At first, Paul teaches in the synagogue, but when the Jews refuse to believe he continues his mission in a public lecture hall (vv. 8-10). Paul's teaching is supported by miracles of healing and exorcism, and because of them many turn from occult practices to Christianity (vv. 11-12). The revival is so great that it threatens the livelihood of silversmiths, who make and sell religious trinkets to tourists. Their leader, Demetrius, plays on both financial and religious motivations to stir up a riot against Paul (vv. 23-24). But the city officials, fearing they will have to answer to Rome for any rioting, succeed in quieting the crowd and disbursing it (vv. 35-41).

Dealing with our specific text, exorcism in ancient times drew on the belief that names had special powers, for they expressed the essence of the one named. Jewish exorcists were highly regarded in ancient times because pagans believed they had access to unique names of a powerful

entity. The use of “seven sons of Sceva” of Jesus’ name suggests that Paul had succeeded in convincing the population that Christ’s name should be held in awe – but had not penetrated the darkness of many who saw no difference between the Gospel and magic, an interesting point in relation to our own cultural perception.

The victory of the demon over the seven sons increased the pagan population’s awe of Paul and his message. The fact that many did truly believe is shown in the public burning of thousands of dollars worth of books on magic.

At Corinth, many of the Christians came from among those who have been involved in the grossest of sins (1 Corinthians 6:9-11); and so it was here, that among the Christians were many who had been involved in the black arts of magic. Upon beholding the truth, however, they forsook their evil ways.

In relation to our time, All Saints Day is observed on November 1 by the West (primarily by the Roman Catholic Church). In Eastern rite churches, it is observed on the first Sunday after Pentecost. Its purpose is to commemorate the lives of all saints and, based on the belief of the communion of the living and the dead, to ask for their intercession before God.

All Saints Day is also called All Hallows. Halloween is celebrated the day before, or specifically the evening before All Saints Day. The word “Halloween” is a derivative of “Hallows Eve.” The emphasis on spirits, goblins, witches, and other dark images came about from the supposition that the dark forces were especially active just before All Saints Day in order to hinder the prayer for the dead that would be offered the next day. The practice of trick or treating dates back to the Middle Ages when poor people would go door to door begging food in exchange for their prayers for the dead.

While the Bible teaches that the dead in Christ are alive, it nowhere teaches us to ask for their intercession. Rather, it urges Christians to come boldly before the throne of grace (to God) knowing that we have a great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 4:14-16, 7:24-25). We are to depend upon Christ alone for salvation (Acts 4:12) and upon Him alone for grace for Christian living after salvation. The Bible speaks of Christ as being our one mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

- Scriptural Comparison: Halloween, no matter how commercialized, has almost completely pagan origins. As innocent as it may seem to some, it is not something to be taken lightly. Christians tend to have various ways to celebrate or not to celebrate Halloween. For some, it means having an “alternative” Harvest Party. For others, it is staying away from the ghosts, witches, goblins, etc., and wearing innocuous costumes, e.g., little princesses, clowns, cowboys, super-heroes, etc. Some choose not to do anything, electing to lock themselves in the house with the lights off.

Scripture does not speak at all about Halloween, but it does give us some principles on which we can make a decision. In Old Testament Israel, witchcraft was a crime punishable by death (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27). The New Testament teaching about the occult is clear. Acts 8:9-24, the story of Simon, shows that occultism and Christianity don’t mix. The account of Elymas the sorcerer in Acts 13:6-11 reveals that sorcery is violently opposed to Christianity. Paul called Elymas a child of the devil, an enemy of righteousness and a perverter of the ways of God. In Acts 16, at Philippi, a fortune-telling girl lost her demon powers when the evil spirit was cast out by Paul. The interesting matter here is that Paul refused to allow even good statements to come from a demon-influenced person. Acts 19 shows new converts who have abruptly broken

with their former occultism by confessing, showing their evil deeds, bringing their magic paraphernalia, and burning it before everyone (Acts 19:19).

Is there such a thing as ghosts? The answer to this question depends on what precisely is meant by the term “ghosts.” If the term means “spirit beings,” the answer is a qualified “yes.” If the term means “spirits of people who have died,” the answer is “no.” The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there are spirit beings, both good and evil. But the Bible negates the idea that the spirits of deceased human beings can remain on earth and “haunt” the living.

Hebrews 9:27 declares, “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” That is what happens to a person’s soul-spirit after death—judgment. The result of this judgment is heaven for the believer (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23) and hell for the unbeliever (Matthew 25:46; Luke 16:22-24). There is no in-between. There is no possibility of remaining on earth in spirit form as a “ghost.” If there are such things as ghosts, according to the Bible, they absolutely cannot be the disembodied spirits of deceased human beings.

The Bible teaches very clearly that there are indeed spirit beings who can connect with and appear in our physical world. The Bible identifies these beings as angels and demons. Angels are spirit beings who are faithful in serving God. Angels are righteous, good, and holy. Demons are fallen angels, angels who rebelled against God. Demons are evil, deceptive, and destructive. According to 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, demons masquerade as “angels of light” and as “servants of righteousness.” Appearing as a “ghost” and impersonating a deceased human being definitely seem to be within the power and abilities that demons possess.

The closest biblical example of a “haunting” is found in Mark 5:1-20. A legion of demons possessed a man and used the man to haunt a graveyard. There were no ghosts involved. It was a case of a normal person being controlled by demons to terrorize the people of that area. Demons only seek to “kill, steal, and destroy” (John 10:10). They will do anything within their power to deceive people, to lead people away from God. This is very likely the explanation of “ghostly” activity today. Whether it is called a ghost, a ghoul, or a poltergeist, if there is genuine evil spiritual activity occurring, it is the work of demons.

What about instances in which “ghosts” act in “positive” ways? What about psychics who claim to summon the deceased and gain true and useful information from them? Again, it is crucial to remember that the goal of demons is to deceive. If the result is that people trust in a psychic instead of God, a demon will be more than willing to reveal true information. Even good and true information, if from a source with evil motives, can be used to mislead, corrupt, and destroy.

Interest in the paranormal is becoming increasingly common. There are individuals and businesses that claim to be “ghost-hunters,” who for a price will rid your home of ghosts. Psychics, séances, tarot cards, and mediums are increasingly considered normal. Human beings are innately aware of the spiritual world. Sadly, instead of seeking the truth about the spirit world by communing with God and studying His Word, many people allow themselves to be led astray by the spirit world. The demons surely laugh at the spiritual mass-deception that exists in the world today.

Let’s take a look at what the Bible has to say about such things.

1. The Bible never speaks of hauntings. Rather, when a person dies, the spirit of that person is goes to one of two places. If the person is a true believer (not one who merely knows about Jesus, but one who has established a living relationship with Christ through faith), his spirit is ushered

into the presence of Christ in heaven (Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:8) and he will be reunited with his body (after it has been transformed into an immortal body at the time Christ “snatches” away his own from the coming judgment upon the earth at the time of the rapture [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18]). If one is not a believer in Christ and does not have his name written in the Lamb’s book of life, his spirit is put in a place of torment (Luke 16:23-24) called hell, to await his sentencing for his works in what is called the “great white throne judgment.”

At that time he is also reunited with his body and is cast into eternal torment in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-15). But whether a person is a believer or an unbeliever, there is no returning to our present world to communicate and interact with people, even for the purpose of warning people to flee from the judgment to come (Luke 16:27-31). There are only two recorded incidents in which a dead person interacts with the living. The first is when King Saul of Israel tried contacting the deceased prophet Samuel through a medium (or witch), contrary to God’s command. God allowed Samuel to be disturbed long enough to pronounce judgment upon Saul for his repeated disobedience (1 Samuel 28:6-19). The second incident is when Moses and Elijah interacted with Jesus when he was transfigured in Matthew 17:1-8.

2. Scripture speaks repeatedly of good and bad angels moving about unseen (Daniel 10:1-21), but also as interacting with living people at different times, even to the point of evil spirits actually possessing people (dwelling within them and controlling them (see Mark 5:1-20, for example). Good angels, on occasion, appear to people as well (Acts 5:17-20; 12:3-11). The four Gospels and the Book of Acts are filled with many incidents of demon possession and of good angels appearing and aiding believers. Angels, both good and bad, can cause unusual natural and supernatural phenomenon to occur (Job 1-2, Revelation 7:1; 8:5; 15:1; 16).

3. Scripture repeatedly shows that demons know things of which the people around them are apparently unaware (Acts 16:16-18; Luke 4:41). Because these evil angels have been around a long time, they would know facts that those living limited life spans would not. Because Satan has access to God’s throne at the present (Job 1-2), the demons may also be allowed to know some specific events that pertain to the future, but this is speculation.

4. Scripture speaks repeatedly of Satan being the father of lies and a deceiver (John 8:44; 2 Thessalonians 2:9) and that he also can disguise himself as an angel of light. Likewise, those who follow him, whether human or otherwise, do the same (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

5. Satan and demons have great power (compared to humans) (again see Mark 5:1-20; Acts 19:13-16), even to the point where Michael the archangel trusts only in God’s power when dealing with Satan (Jude 1:9). But Satan’s power is nothing compared to God’s (Acts 19:11-12; Mark 5:1-20, etc.) and God is actually able to use Satan’s evil intent to bring about His good purposes (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 12:7).

6. God commands us to have nothing to do with anything that smacks of the occult, devil worship, or involvement with the spirit world through the use of mediums, séances, Ouija boards, horoscopes, tarot cards, channeling, etc. He considers all of these an abomination (Deuteronomy 18:9-12; Isaiah 8:19-20; Galatians 5:20; Revelation 21:8), and those who involve themselves in such things invite disaster (Acts 19:13-16).

7. The example set by Scripture in dealing with items that pertain to the occult (books, music, jewelry, games dealing with the occult, and other occult objects) is to confess the involvement with such as sin and burn the items (Acts 19:18-19).

8. The main source of release from the power of Satan is through salvation through the believing of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 19:18; 26:16-18). And if one will not believe the Word of God, there is no other source of the truth they will believe, even if it came from one who rose from the dead (Luke 16:31). If one attempts to get rid of Satan and his evil angels' involvement in his life without this, it is futile, as one merely leaves an empty dwelling place for even worse demons to return to in the future (Luke 11:24-26). But when a person comes to Christ for the forgiveness of their sin through His shed blood, the Holy Spirit comes to abide and remain until the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). The other main weapon would be simple prayer in total dependence upon God, even as Michael the archangel exemplified in Jude 1:9.

In view of the multitude of passages dealing with involvement of the unseen demonic world with the present world—in contrast with the two recorded incidents involving interaction between the living and those who have died—and considering that the dead cannot visit the living without permission and that permission is not lightly given (Luke 16:27-31), it would seem best to understand ghosts, hauntings, spirit helpers, voices at séances, etc. (besides those which are the mere illusions created by charlatans) as the work of demons. Sometimes these demons may have no intent to conceal their nature, and at other times they may seek to deceive by appearing as human spirits in order to generate credibility for the lies they seek to spread and the confusion they seek to create.

Again, God states it is foolish to try to consult the dead on behalf of the living or to consult with those who say they have an inside track on the future when instead one can actually consult with the wisdom of the living God (Isaiah 8:19-20). And if God considered the occult practices of contacting the spirit world for wisdom or guidance for the future an abomination worthy of judgment in Moses' time (Deuteronomy 18:9-12), then God who does not change considers it so today (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 1:12) and those who ignore this do so to their own hurt. Lastly, again, the largest weapon in God's arsenal for freeing people from Satan's kingdom is the good news of Jesus Christ.

- Conclusion: God can do amazing things through ordinary people when He empowers them through His Spirit. God essentially took a group of fisherman and used them to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). God took a Christian-hating murderer and changed him into the greatest Christian evangelist, the author of almost half the books of the New Testament. God used persecution to cause the quickest expansion of a "new faith" in the history of the world. God can and does do the same through us—changing our hearts, empowering us by the Holy Spirit, and giving us a passion to spread the good news of salvation through Christ. If we try to accomplish these things in our own power, we will fail. Like the disciples in Acts 1:8, we are to wait for the empowering of the Spirit, then go in His power to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). There is no other name by which we may be saved...and empowered...than that of Jesus Christ. To participate in a 'holiday' so opposed to the things of Christ...much less influence others, including children in such a contrary manner, is unthinkable for the truly committed.