

Small Group Guide: October 31st - The Good, Bad, Ugly, and Murky



Opening Prayer

Begin by asking God to guide your discussion and give wisdom as you navigate topics where Christians may have different convictions.

Icebreaker

What was your favorite Halloween memory as a child? What made it special?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. Halloween has Christian origins - All Hallows' Eve (October 31st) was established by the Catholic Church as the evening before All Saints' Day (November 1st), which honored Christian martyrs and saints.
2. The historical claims about pagan origins are murky at best - There are no primary sources linking Halloween to ancient pagan practices. The earliest mention of the Celtic festival Samhain comes from the 9th century—after the Church created Halloween.
3. There are legitimate concerns - Modern occult practices do occur on Halloween, and commercial culture promotes dark themes of witchcraft, death, and horror.
4. October 31st is also Reformation Day - Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in 1517, sparking the Protestant Reformation and the Five Solas.
5. This is a conscience issue - Like meat sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 8, Christians have liberty in areas where Scripture doesn't explicitly command or forbid.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the History

1. Were you surprised by the actual historical origins of Halloween? What had you believed about its origins before?
2. Why do you think myths about Halloween's pagan origins have become so widespread in Christian circles?

3. How does knowing the true history change (or not change) your perspective on October 31st?

The Good, Bad, and Ugly

4. The pastor mentioned "the good" includes community, imagination, and neighbors connecting. Do you agree these are positive aspects? Can you think of other positives?

5. What "bad" or "ugly" elements of modern Halloween culture concern you most? How can Christians navigate these while still engaging with their communities?

6. Is it possible to "redeem" Halloween, or should Christians create alternative celebrations? What are the pros and cons of each approach?

The Conscience Issue (1 Corinthians 8)

7. Read 1 Corinthians 8:4-13 together. How does Paul's teaching about meat sacrificed to idols apply to Halloween?

8. What does it mean to have "liberty in Christ" on matters not explicitly addressed in Scripture?

9. Have you ever felt judged by other Christians for participating (or not participating) in Halloween? How did that feel?

10. How can we honor both those who feel freedom to participate and those who are convicted not to?

The Reformation Connection

11. What are the Five Solas of the Reformation? (Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Solus Christus, Soli Deo Gloria)

12. How should *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone) guide our thinking on issues like Halloween where the Bible doesn't give explicit commands?

13. Martin Luther said, "Here I stand. I can do no other." What areas of your faith require this kind of conviction regardless of cultural pressure?

Practical Applications

Personal Reflection

- **Examine your conscience:** Are you participating (or not participating) in Halloween out of genuine conviction or out of fear of what others think?
- **Check your heart:** If you have liberty, are you flaunting it in front of those who are convicted? If you're convicted, are you judging those who participate?

Family Discussion

- If you have children, talk with them about why your family does or doesn't celebrate Halloween, focusing on biblical principles rather than fear or myths.
- Discuss how to engage the "good" (community, creativity) while avoiding the "bad and ugly" (occult imagery, darkness).

Community Engagement

- **If you participate:** Use Halloween as an opportunity to meet neighbors, show hospitality, and build relationships that could lead to gospel conversations.
- **If you don't participate:** Consider alternative ways to connect with your neighborhood during this time (fall festivals, Reformation Day celebrations, etc.).

Church Unity

- Commit to not dividing over this issue. Practice Romans 14:1-4 by accepting those whose faith differs from yours on this matter.
- If someone asks your opinion, share your conviction humbly without demanding others adopt your view.

Action Steps for This Week

1. **Study:** Read Romans 14:1-23 and 1 Corinthians 8 in their entirety. Journal about what God is teaching you about Christian liberty.
2. **Pray:** Ask God to reveal any areas where you've been judgmental toward others or where you've violated your own conscience to please others.
3. **Reach Out:** Whether you participate in Halloween or not, find one way to connect with your neighbors this week.
4. **Learn:** Research one aspect of Reformation theology (the Five Solas) and discuss how it applies to modern Christian living.

Closing Reflection

"Here I stand. I can do no other." -Martin Luther

What is God calling you to stand firm on in your faith? Where do you need the courage to follow your conviction even when it's unpopular? Where do you need to extend grace to others whose convictions differ from yours?

Closing Prayer

Pray for wisdom, unity in the body of Christ despite different convictions, and courage to stand firm on gospel essentials while extending grace on secondary matters.

Additional Resources

- Scripture: Romans 14:1-23; 1 Corinthians 8; 1 Corinthians 10:23-33
- The Five Solas: Research and discuss these foundational Reformation principles

5-Day Devotional: Standing Firm in Christian Liberty



Day 1: The Foundation of Our Faith

Reading: 1 Corinthians 8:4-6

Devotional:

In a world filled with competing voices and conflicting ideologies, Paul reminds us of the singular truth that anchors our faith: there is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ. This foundational reality liberates us from fear of false powers and cultural pressures. When we encounter practices or traditions that seem spiritually questionable, we can return to this bedrock truth. The idols of our age—whether ancient pagan rituals or modern secular philosophies—hold no power over those who belong to Christ. Today, reflect on what competes for God's place in your life. Stand confidently in the knowledge that you serve the one true God, and let that truth guide every decision you make.

Day 2: Conscience and Christian Freedom

Reading: Romans 14:1-12

Devotional:

Christian liberty is a beautiful gift, but it comes with responsibility. Paul teaches that matters of conscience vary among believers, and we must honor both our own convictions and those of our brothers and sisters. Some feel freedom in areas where others feel conviction, and both positions can honor God when rooted in faith. The key is not uniformity but unity—respecting differences while maintaining fellowship. As you navigate decisions today, ask yourself: Am I acting in faith? Am I considering how my choices affect others? Am I judging those who differ from me? True maturity isn't found in flaunting our freedom or imposing our convictions, but in loving others well while standing firm in what God has shown us.

Day 3: Avoiding Stumbling Blocks

Reading: 1 Corinthians 8:7-13

Devotional:

Love limits liberty. This challenging truth confronts our natural desire to exercise our freedom without restraint. Paul warns that knowledge can make us arrogant if not tempered by love. When our actions, though permissible, cause weaker believers to stumble, we sin against Christ himself. This doesn't mean we live in perpetual fear of offending someone, but it does mean we thoughtfully consider the impact of our choices on others' faith journeys. Perhaps someone in your life struggles with something you find easy to navigate. Your compassionate restraint might be exactly what protects their conscience and strengthens their walk with God. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to show you where love should limit your liberty.

Day 4: Here I Stand - The Courage of Conviction

Reading: Acts 4:13-20

Devotional:

"Here I stand. I can do no other." Martin Luther's words echo the apostles' declaration: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." True faith produces unshakeable conviction—not stubbornness, but Spirit-led courage to stand for truth regardless of consequence. This courage applies whether you're taking a stand for biblical doctrine, choosing to participate in or abstain from cultural practices, or simply living out your faith in daily decisions. The question isn't whether others approve, but whether Christ is honored. When you know God has called you to something—a conviction, a ministry, a sacrifice—you can stand firm with confidence. Today, identify one area where God is calling you to courageous obedience, and commit to standing firm regardless of opposition or misunderstanding.

Day 5: Sola Scriptura - Scripture as Our Guide

Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Devotional:

In a world of competing authorities—tradition, culture, personal experience, popular opinion—Scripture alone stands as our infallible guide. The Reformation principle of Sola Scriptura doesn't dismiss wisdom from other sources, but it establishes God's Word as the ultimate authority by which all other voices are tested. When facing questions about practices, holidays, or cultural participation, we must return to Scripture. Does God's Word explicitly forbid this? Does it violate clear biblical principles? Or is this a matter of conscience and Christian liberty? The Bible equips us for every good work, providing the wisdom we need to navigate complex questions. Today, commit to filtering every decision, conviction, and practice through the lens of Scripture. Let God's Word, not human tradition or modern trends, shape your understanding of truth.

Closing Reflection:

As you complete this devotional journey, remember that Christian maturity involves holding firm convictions while extending grace to those who differ. Stand confidently in what God has revealed to you through Scripture, respect the consciences of fellow believers, and always let love guide your exercise of freedom. Whether you choose to participate in cultural practices or abstain from them, do everything for the glory of God and the good of His church.