

ANGLER CHURCH  
HOPE OF NEW JERSEY

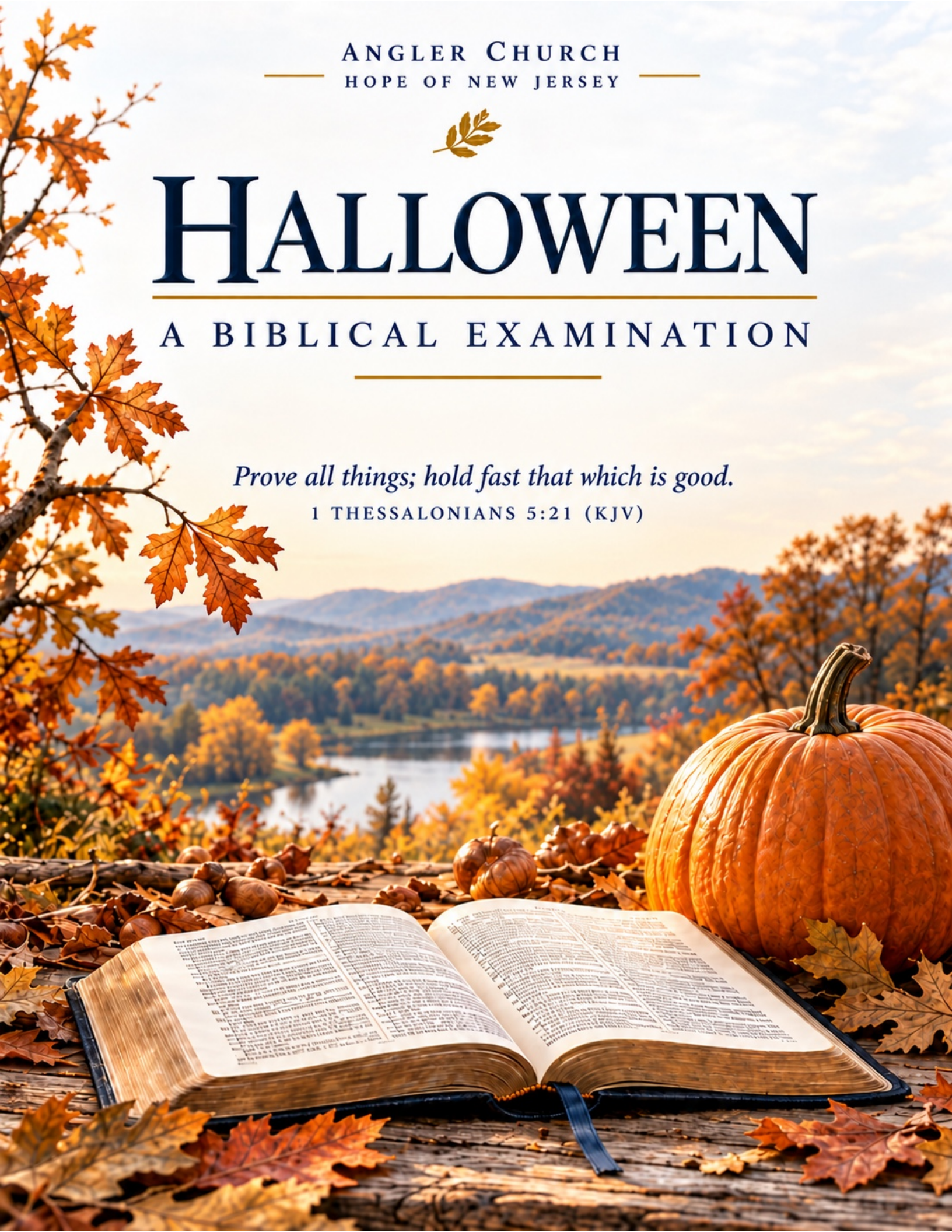


# HALLOWEEN

A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION

*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:21 (KJV)



# SECTION 1 — INTRODUCTION: PROVE ALL THINGS



## THE EXAMINATION

Imagine walking into a doctor's office. Before the doctor recommends treatment, he begins with an examination.

*Why?*

Because you cannot make a sound diagnosis without first examining the facts. Sometimes an examination reveals something a person has lived with for years without realizing it deserves attention. In this study, we will take a familiar tradition—Halloween—and place it on that examination table.

We're going to investigate its history, understand how its customs developed, and examine what Scripture teaches about the things associated with it. We're not here to assume that everyone who participates has the same intentions. We're here because the Bible tells us to **PROVE ALL THINGS**.

**P1 1 THESSALONIANS 5:21–22 (KJV)**

**P1 “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.”**

Now notice what Paul is instructing us to do. He doesn't tell us to accept everything. He doesn't tell us to reject everything without examination. He tells us to prove all things. In the immediate context, Paul is instructing believers to test prophetic claims. But the principle of testing what we encounter against God's truth is certainly relevant to Christian discernment.

We will follow three steps.

**P1 EXAMINATION → DIAGNOSIS → DECISION**

First, we're going to examine the historical facts. Second, we're going to bring what we've discovered before the Word of God. Third, we're going to consider what response is appropriate for a Christian. And throughout the lesson, I want us to keep one question in mind:

**P1 Does this practice help me love what God loves, or make me more comfortable with what He warns against?**

That question is not limited to Halloween. It applies to the entertainment we enjoy, the traditions we practice, and the influences we welcome into our homes.

**TRANSITION:**

Before we can examine what Halloween means in modern culture, we need to understand where its traditions began.

**TEACHER REMINDER:** Pause for questions or clarification.

## SECTION 2 — THE ORIGINS OF HALLOWEEN



### 1. SAMHAIN — THE END OF SUMMER

Halloween didn't begin with candy, costumes, and children going door-to-door. One important part of its historical background is an ancient Gaelic seasonal festival known as Samhain.

**P2 SAMHAIN — A Gaelic seasonal festival marking the beginning of winter, traditionally observed around October 31–November 1.**

Samhain is pronounced approximately SOW-in. For agricultural communities, this was an important transition. The harvest had been gathered. Livestock were being prepared for winter. The days were becoming shorter. Families were preparing for the difficult months ahead. But Samhain also became associated with supernatural beliefs. In medieval Irish literature, Samhain appears in stories involving encounters between the human world and the Otherworld.

Later folklore included beliefs about spirits, supernatural beings, and attempts to discover what the future might hold. However, we need to be historically responsible. We cannot establish that every modern Halloween custom originated in an ancient Celtic religious ritual. And we cannot always determine exactly what ancient people believed or practiced. What we can do is distinguish documented history from later folklore.

### 2. THE HISTORICAL TIMELINE

**P2 Ancient era — Samhain seasonal observance; exact origin unknown.**



**P2 Medieval era — Irish stories associate Samhain with the supernatural.**

Now here's something important. The name Halloween doesn't come directly from the word Samhain. It comes from the Christian calendar.

**P2 HALLOWEEN — From "All Hallows' Eve," the evening before All Saints' Day (November 1).**

All Saints' Day developed as a Christian commemoration of saints and martyrs.

**P2 8th–9th centuries — November 1 becomes more widely established as All Saints' Day.**

Later, All Souls' Day became associated with prayers for the departed.

**P2 Around AD 1000 — All Souls' Day observances gain prominence.**

Some European customs involved people visiting homes and receiving food in connection with prayers for deceased relatives. This is one of the historical backgrounds of a practice known as souling, which we'll discuss shortly. From our Apostolic understanding of Scripture, we do not teach that prayers after death can change someone's eternal condition.

**HEBREWS 9:27 (KJV)**

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"

Hebrews 9:27 speaks of death followed by judgment.

**LUKE 16:26 (KJV)**

"And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

In the account of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus describes a fixed separation that cannot be crossed. Together, these passages support our understanding that people should respond to God in this life; we do not teach that prayers after death can change a person's eternal condition. The purpose of this study is not to conduct an extended study of Catholic doctrine.

We're examining how these beliefs and customs became associated with the season.

**3. HISTORY AND FOLKLORE**

**FOLKLORE** — The traditional stories, legends, beliefs, and customs passed from one generation to another within a community. Folklore tells us what people have believed or repeated; it does not, by itself, prove that the events in a story actually happened.

For example, the story of Stingy Jack is a legend. We can explain how that story became associated with a custom without treating the story itself as historical fact. Here's an important distinction:

**P2 Folklore may not be historical fact, but beliefs inspired by folklore can become real practices.**

A legend may not describe something that actually happened. But if people believe that legend, it can influence what they do. And that's why examining both history and folklore matters.

**TRANSITION:**

We've examined the historical background. Now let's look at the traditions that have survived into modern Halloween.

**TEACHER REMINDER:** Pause for questions or clarification.

**SECTION 3 — THE TRADITIONS OF HALLOWEEN**



**1. COSTUMES AND DISGUISES**

*Why do people wear costumes on Halloween?*

In Ireland and Scotland, Halloween became associated with disguises, masks, and visiting neighboring homes. This practice became known as guising.

**P3 GUISING — Wearing disguises and visiting homes for entertainment, food, or seasonal mischief.**

Some disguised visitors performed songs or other entertainment in exchange for food or gifts. Others participated in seasonal pranks. Some later folklore associated disguises with spirits and supernatural protection. But we cannot establish that this was the



original purpose of ancient Celtic costumes. Now consider modern Halloween. A child dressed as a firefighter or princess probably isn't thinking about spirits or supernatural protection.

*But what about costumes deliberately portraying demons, witchcraft, or evil?*

*Does the absence of an evil intention automatically make every choice spiritually beneficial?*

That's something we need to consider.

## 2. JACK-O'-LANTERNS

*Why do people carve frightening faces into pumpkins?*

Before pumpkins became popular in America, people in Ireland carved faces into turnips. These hollowed-out vegetables could be illuminated with candles and used to frighten people. The tradition became associated with an Irish folktale about a man known as Stingy Jack. According to the legend, Jack tricked the devil and was condemned to wander after death. He supposedly carried a lantern to light his way.

Now remember, this is folklore. We cannot prove that the legend itself originated the carving tradition.

**P3 JACK-O'-LANTERNS — Carved lanterns associated with Irish Halloween customs and Stingy Jack folklore.**

Eventually, pumpkins became the preferred material in America. But let's consider something. A pumpkin itself is simply a vegetable. Carving a pumpkin does not automatically constitute occult worship. However, what we choose to portray through our decorations can communicate different things. And Christians should consider what those images represent.

## 3. TRICK-OR-TREATING

Now we come to one of the most familiar Halloween traditions. Children going door-to-door saying, "Trick or treat!"

*But where did that come from?*

Modern trick-or-treating developed from several historical customs. One was a practice called souling.

**SOULING** — A custom in parts of medieval and later Christian Europe, especially England, in which people went from house to house around All Souls' Day seeking food or small gifts. Visitors could sing or offer prayers, including prayers for the household's deceased relatives, in return for small cakes known as soul cakes.

The exchange joined a social custom—visiting neighbors and receiving food—with a religious belief about praying for the dead. Practices varied by place and period. Explaining the custom does not mean endorsing its theology. Souling is one historical background discussed in the development of door-to-door Halloween customs. Modern trick-or-treating also reflects guising and North American seasonal mischief; it cannot be traced to a single custom alone.

Another was guising. Disguised visitors entertained neighbors in exchange for gifts. And in North America, Halloween became associated with pranks and mischief. These traditions contributed to the development of modern trick-or-treating.

## WHAT DID "TRICK OR TREAT" ORIGINALLY MEAN?

**P3 TRICK OR TREAT — Historically, a choice: provide a treat, or risk having a trick played on you.**

Now think about those words. They weren't originally just a greeting. There was a connection between receiving a treat and avoiding a trick. In some communities, Halloween pranks involved moving objects, soaping windows, and sometimes damaging property. And the historical newspaper record is interesting.

**P3 1917 — An early Canadian newspaper example of "tricks or treats."**

**P3 1927 — The familiar phrase "trick or treat" appears in Canadian reporting.**

These are early documented examples, not proof of the first time anyone spoke the words.

*What were children communicating when they originally said "trick or treat"?*

Essentially, give us a treat or risk having a trick played on you. Now here's the next question.

*What are children communicating in modern trick-or-treating?*

Usually, they're simply asking for candy. They're not necessarily threatening anyone. They're not invoking spirits. They're not practicing witchcraft.

*But should Christians repeat and participate in traditions without ever examining their meaning?*



*And when a tradition changes its meaning over time, does that automatically settle whether participation is spiritually appropriate?*

#### 4. HALLOWEEN BECOMES AN AMERICAN TRADITION

During the nineteenth century, Irish and Scottish immigration helped bring Halloween customs into North America. By the early twentieth century, communities were holding Halloween parties, games, and celebrations. Following World War II, neighborhood trick-or-treating became increasingly widespread. Candy, costumes, pumpkins, and family entertainment became central features. For many people, the older supernatural beliefs disappeared from their understanding of the holiday.

But witches, ghosts, monsters, death, and frightening imagery remained prominent. And here's the point:

**P3 Something can become culturally acceptable without automatically becoming spiritually beneficial.**

##### TRANSITION:

History tells us how these traditions developed. But history alone cannot tell Christians how they should live. For that, we must turn to Scripture.

**TEACHER REMINDER:** Pause for questions or clarification.

## SECTION 4 — THE BIBLICAL EXAMINATION



### 1. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE ACTUALLY FORBID?

The Bible does not mention Halloween by name. But it does speak clearly about certain spiritual practices.

#### DEUTERONOMY 18:10–12 (KJV)

10 “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch.”

11 “Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.”

12 “For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.”

#### P4 **DEUTERONOMY 18:10–12 — God forbids divination, witchcraft, sorcery, and consulting the dead.**

Notice the practices God condemns. Divination. Sorcery. Consulting spirits. Attempting to communicate with the dead. These practices involve seeking spiritual knowledge or power through means God has forbidden. Now we need to make an important distinction. A child wearing a costume is not necessarily practicing witchcraft. A person eating candy is not necessarily participating in an occult ritual.

But someone deliberately engaging in divination or spirit communication is participating in something Scripture explicitly condemns. We need to recognize the difference.

### 2. FELLOWSHIP WITH DARKNESS

**READ EPHESIANS 5:11.**

#### P4 **EPHESIANS 5:11 — Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.**

Notice that Paul speaks of fellowship. He is warning believers against participation in the works of darkness. Christians cannot avoid living in a world where darkness exists. But we can decide what we choose to celebrate.

*Can something become so familiar that we stop recognizing the spiritual concerns associated with it?*

*Can repeated exposure to certain themes make us more comfortable with things Scripture warns against?*

### 3. CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Now let's consider an important passage.

**READ 1 CORINTHIANS 10:20–23.**

Paul was addressing questions about food offered to idols. In verses 25–27, he permitted Christians to eat ordinary food sold in the marketplace without investigating whether it had previously been associated with idol sacrifice. But in verses 20–21, he warned against participation in idolatrous worship. That's an important distinction. Eating ordinary food is not necessarily an act of idol worship.

Participating in an idolatrous religious ceremony is something entirely different. And then Paul gives us this principle:



**P4 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23 — Not everything permissible is spiritually profitable.**

Something can be allowed without being beneficial. Something can be culturally acceptable without strengthening our walk with God. And as Christians, we should desire more than simply discovering how much we can participate in without crossing a line. We should desire to please God.

**4. THE CALL TO HOLINESS**

**READ ROMANS 12:2.**

**P4 ROMANS 12:2 — Be not conformed to this world.**

Christianity calls us to more than cultural acceptance. Our choices should reflect a renewed mind. We should not measure everything by what the world considers normal.

**TRANSITION:**

*But what about the argument that Halloween is simply harmless fun?*

*And how do we apply these principles consistently?*

**TEACHER REMINDER:** Pause for questions or clarification.

**SECTION 5 — THE CHRISTIAN'S DILEMMA**



**1. "BUT WE'RE JUST HAVING FUN!"**

For many families, Halloween is about costumes, candy, decorations, and spending time together. Their intentions may be entirely innocent. We should acknowledge that. But intentions are not the only consideration when evaluating our choices.

**P4 Good intentions do not eliminate our responsibility to exercise spiritual discernment.**

*Does something become spiritually beneficial simply because we enjoy doing it?*

*What are we teaching children to celebrate?*

*What kinds of imagery are we making familiar?*

**2. WHAT ABOUT CHRISTMAS TREES?**

Someone may ask: "If Halloween has historical associations with pagan traditions, what about Christmas trees?" That's a reasonable question. A Christian family may decorate a Christmas tree as part of celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. That does not mean they're worshipping the tree. Likewise, a child receiving Halloween candy is not necessarily participating in occult worship.

So the question cannot be based on historical associations alone. We must examine present meaning. We must consider actual participation. We must consider biblical principles and spiritual influence. For Christians, Christmas can be intentionally centered upon celebrating the birth of our Savior. With Halloween, we should ask what the celebration is centered upon and what themes it continues to emphasize.

**3. THE GREATER QUESTION**

Instead of asking only, "Is this technically allowed?" we should ask, "Is this spiritually profitable?"

*Does it strengthen my walk with God?*

*Does it reflect the values I want to teach children?*

Let's review the question.

**P1 Does this practice help me love what God loves, or make me more comfortable with what He warns against?**

**TRANSITION:**

We've completed our examination. Now we must consider the diagnosis and our response.

**TEACHER REMINDER:** Pause for questions or clarification.



## SECTION 6 — THE DIAGNOSIS AND THE DECISION



### 1. WHAT HAVE WE DISCOVERED?

We began this lesson by placing Halloween on an examination table. We've examined its history. We've investigated its traditions. We've considered how those customs changed over time. And we've brought these things before Scripture. We've discovered that Halloween's history is complex. Not every tradition has the same origin. Not every person who participates has the same intentions.

But supernatural beliefs, death, witchcraft, and frightening imagery have remained recurring themes.

### 2. WHERE DO WE STAND?

After examining these things, we should come to the conclusion that Christians should reject occult practices, refuse to celebrate evil, and choose what strengthens their walk with God.

Deuteronomy 18 forbids divination and consulting the dead. Ephesians 5:11 warns against fellowship with the works of darkness. First Corinthians 10:23 calls us to consider what is spiritually profitable, and Romans 12:2 calls us to live with a renewed mind. These principles give us strong reasons to refrain from Halloween celebrations that make darkness, death, witchcraft, and supernatural fear central themes.

This conclusion does not require us to assume that every person who participates is worshiping the devil, that every costume or pumpkin carries supernatural power, or that every family has evil intentions. Each of us must examine what a particular activity celebrates, what participation involves, and what spiritual influence it welcomes. The question is whether our choices agree with the Scripture we have studied.

*What response do these passages call for in my life? Is there a practice I need to leave behind or a choice I need to change?*

Rather than asking only, "What's wrong with it?" let's ask:

**P4 What is right about it for my walk with God?**

### 3. THE DECISION IS YOURS

A doctor can examine a patient. He can explain what he has discovered. He can recommend a course of action. But the patient must decide how to respond. We have completed our examination. Now each of us must consider our own lives before God.

Our response should grow from understanding Scripture and a sincere desire to please Jesus Christ, rather than simply copying the opinions of a pastor, friend, or family member.

### 4. RETURN TO OUR FOUNDATIONAL SCRIPTURE

**READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:21–22 AGAIN.**

#### PROVE ALL THINGS.

Don't simply accept something because everyone else is doing it.

#### HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD.

When you discover something that strengthens your walk with God, embrace it.

#### ABSTAIN FROM EVERY FORM OF EVIL.

When you recognize something contrary to God's Word, have the courage to separate yourself from it.

Remember, the KJV phrase "appearance of evil" should be understood as every form or kind of evil, rather than merely anything that might look suspicious to someone else.

### THE FINAL THOUGHT

In this study, we placed Halloween on the examination table. But perhaps the greatest purpose of this lesson wasn't simply to examine a holiday. Perhaps it was to remind us that everything we allow into our lives deserves to be examined by the Word of God. Because the goal of holiness is not simply to avoid what is wrong.

It is to pursue what is right. And when our hearts genuinely desire to please Jesus, the question changes. We stop asking: "How close can I get to the world?" And begin asking:

**P4 HOW CLOSE CAN I GET TO GOD?**

**TEACHER REMINDER:** Pause for questions or clarification.

#### HISTORICAL REFERENCES - TEACHER ONLY

National Museum of Ireland — Halloween/Samhain traditions and Ghost Turnip collection. Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles — Historical newspaper evidence for "trick or treat," including 1917 and 1927. English Heritage — Halloween, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day historical overview; "No Tricks, Just Treats: Try a Medieval Soul Cake" (souling and soul cakes). English Heritage: Souling and soul cakes (source). Scripture quotations: King James Version (KJV). Hebrews 9:27; Luke 16:26; Deuteronomy 18:10–12. Verified against Bible Gateway.

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

**DEUTERONOMY 18:10–12** — God forbids divination, witchcraft, sorcery, and consulting the dead.

**EPHESIANS 5:11** — Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

**1 CORINTHIANS 10:23** — Not everything permissible is spiritually profitable.

**ROMANS 12:2** — Be not conformed to this world.

*Good intentions do not eliminate our responsibility to exercise spiritual discernment.*

*What is right about it for my walk with God?*

**HOW CLOSE CAN I GET TO GOD?**



# HALLOWEEN

## A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION

*Looking at its history, meanings,  
and what God's Word says, so we can  
walk in truth and light.*



## WHERE DID IT BEGIN?

**SAMHAIN** — A Gaelic seasonal festival marking the beginning of winter, traditionally observed around October 31–November 1.

**HALLOWEEN** — From “All Hallows’ Eve,” the evening before All Saints’ Day (November 1).

### A BRIEF TIMELINE

**Ancient era** — Samhain seasonal observance; exact origin unknown.

**Medieval era** — Irish stories associate Samhain with the supernatural.

**8th–9th centuries** — November 1 becomes more widely established as All Saints’ Day.

**Around AD 1000** — All Souls’ Day observances gain prominence.

*Folklore may not be historical fact, but beliefs inspired by folklore can become real practices.*



## WHAT DO THE CUSTOMS MEAN?

**GUIISING** — Wearing disguises and visiting homes for entertainment, food, or seasonal mischief.

**JACK-O'-LANTERNS** — Carved lanterns associated with Irish Halloween customs and Stingy Jack folklore.

**TRICK OR TREAT** — Historically, a choice: provide a treat, or risk having a trick played on you.

**1917** — An early Canadian newspaper example of “tricks or treats.”

**1927** — The familiar phrase “trick or treat” appears in Canadian reporting.

*Something can become culturally acceptable without automatically becoming spiritually beneficial.*

