

# **Christians, Freedom and Pagan Expression**

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## Christians, Freedom and Pagan Expression

Multi-culturism, the current politically correct social construct, embraces a tolerance of all religious expression, Christian, pagan or otherwise. Of course, Americans have confronted various forms of paganism since colonial days, but the revival of neo-paganism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century brought to the forefront a variety of pagan expressions that have been dormant or at least subdued for many decades. Currently, there is a pronounced openness to spirituality of all kinds as Baby-boomers, Baby-busters, Generation Xers and Millennials have rejected the thoroughgoing rationalism inherited from the Enlightenment. For many, there has been a wholesale loss of meaning in the rigidity of rationalism. New forms of mysticism, eastern thought, paganism and cybernetics are to be found on every hand. *Symbolism* (visual art, tattoos and piercing), *music and video* (where sound and image is combined), *games* (Dungeons and Dragons) and *fantasy and virtual experience* (computer and internet adventures) are only a few of the venues in which the various spiritual thought forms are promulgated.

The tendency of conservative Christians has been to create bans-lists of forbidden activities or expressions in the hopes of stemming the tide. No tattoos, no rock music, no fantasy games, no Halloween, no Cabbage Patch dolls, no Christmas trees, no symbolism, and so forth. These efforts have been only partially successful, and furthermore, they have spawned heated debates (usually between young people and their parents) over “what is” and “what isn’t” acceptable. Parents are unnerved at the new styles, because they fear the styles represent deeper issues. Their kids see style as largely innocuous.

Furthermore, Christians frequently assume (mistakenly) that the public participates in such expressions on a rational basis. In fact, most people participate in such expressions on an emotive basis. Bringing out the heavy guns of rationalism to shut down contemporary expressions has proved largely futile, since such arguments hold no weight with a culture that is fueled by feelings. Jean Paul Sartre, the atheist existentialist, was surely right about one thing, when he said that for the modern person, *in the end, feeling is what counts*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Sartre, “Existentialism,” *Basic Problems of Philosophy*, eds. Bronstein, Krikorian and Wiener, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.

Christians are not exempt from this cultural trend. Recently, a church growth expert described the model for 21<sup>st</sup> century church worship by referencing a particular congregation: “Michael doesn’t preach a sermon any more. He and the music people, the drama people, and the graphic people create an experience.”<sup>2</sup>

## **The Christian Message Confronts a Pagan World**

The first Christians preached the gospel in a world that was largely pagan. The message of Jesus came face-to-face with various other sorts of religious thought forms claiming to explain the meaning and mystery of the universe, both visible and invisible. One thing seems clear from the study of both the New Testament and 1<sup>st</sup> century Greco-Roman culture: there were many elements in both Christianity and paganism that, on the face of it, seemed similar. Following is a sampling:<sup>3</sup>

*Immersion Rituals:* Immersion rituals were not unique to Christianity. In the Greco-Roman mystery religions,<sup>4</sup> immersion rituals also occurred in which candidates for initiation were purged with water.

*Death/Resurrection Themes:* The mystery religions also had at their center the mythology of an annual death and resurrection of the deity that corresponded to the rhythms of the seasons. Raised from the underworld of death, these deities were believed to bestow immortality on the initiate.

*Language of Salvation:* Words like “gospel” and “savior” were commonly associated with the imperial cult in which the Caesar was announced as the divine “Savior [Benefactor] of the World” and his birthday was proclaimed as the “gospel”.

*Names of Power:* Citizens in the Greco-Roman world were fascinated and apprehensive about the power of the stars and star spirits. To gain

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(Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 618.

<sup>2</sup> Lee Hinson, “The Changing Face of Worship and Church Growth,” *Church Musician Today* (July 2000), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed information about such ancient religious expressions can be found in various sources, such as, E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); H. Kee, et al., *Understanding the New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973); H. Koester, , *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Philadelphia, Berlin & New York: Fortress and Walter de Gruyter, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> The religions commonly known as mystery religions (from *mysterion* = initiate) included the Eleusinian Mysteries, the cults of Cybele-Attis, Isis-Osiris, Dionysus, Demeter, Cabiri, Mithras, Astrology and Magic, cf. H. Vos, *ISBE* (1988) IV.113-116.

favor with what they believed to be the hostile forces of nature, they adopted formulae by which to drive away evil, pain and danger. Often, these formulae invoked the name of deities, such as, Zeus or Serapis, to gain control over a hostile universe.

*Dualism:* The polarities of light and darkness, good and evil, matter and spirit were set in sharp contrast by the Gnostics, who probably derived them from Persian Zoroastrianism. Gnostics believed themselves to possess superior knowledge (*gnosis* = knowledge), and they believed that redemption and freedom from the bondage of material existence was possible through this revelation-knowledge.

*Miraculous Healings:* The cult of Asclepius featured the hope of divine healing, and temples to Asclepius were in most of the major cities (including Athens, Corinth and Pergamum).<sup>5</sup> Associated with the temples were hot baths, gymnasiums and sacred rooms where cures were effected during dreams. Asclepius was known as the “Savior” and “Friend” of humans, and he was depicted as compassionate, sympathetic, forbearing and especially concerned for the poor and socially disadvantaged.

*Sacred Meals:* Many of the pagan religions featured sacred meals in which the food was dedicated to the deity before being eaten by the religious community. Of the food dedicated to the deities, the pagan worshipper was allowed to use a third for sacred banquets, sometimes held in the temple.<sup>6</sup>

The similarities between some elements of Christianity and some elements of paganism gave rise to the danger of syncretism. On Paul’s first missions tour, for instance, after he had been instrumental in the healing of a cripple, the response of the Lycaonians was that Barnabas and Paul were really Zeus and Hermes (Apollo and Mercury) in human form (Ac. 14:8-18), a perception that Paul was at pains to dispel as quickly as possible. At Corinth, there seems to have been some confusion about the similarity between the Christian Eucharist and the sacred meals of the

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<sup>5</sup> There is evidence for more than 300 Asclepius sanctuaries in the ancient Greco-Roman world, cf. H. Koester, p. 174.

<sup>6</sup> A typical invitation to such a sacred meal might read like the following actual invitation from a papyrus scroll: *Antonius, son of Ptolemaeus, invites you to dine with him at the table of our Lord Serapis*, cf. W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians [DSB]*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 72.

pagans, for Paul had to clarify that *sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons* (1 Co. 10:20-21). The Jerusalem church, in its encyclical letter for all the churches, forbade the consumption of food sacrificed to idols (Ac. 15:28-29). A sorcerer in Samaria tried to buy from Peter and John what he believed to be the magic power of the name of Jesus (Ac. 8:9-11, 18-19), and a group of Jewish exorcists in Ephesus tried to include the name of Jesus in their list of incantations (Ac. 19:13-16). The Christians at Colossae attempted to mix Jewish superstition, pagan spiritualism and Christianity all at the same time (Col. 2:16-23). What Peter describes as “blots and blemishes” in the Christian community meals may well have been a lapse into some kind of Bacchanalian revelry (2 Pe. 2:10b-22). We know that by the end of the first century, John was indicting some of the Asian churches for these very deviations (Rv. 2:14-15, 20-25).<sup>7</sup> Even earlier, Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus to warn against the matriarchal pagan theology of the mother goddess of all life as the first created being and the source of all wisdom (1 Ti. 3:11-14).<sup>8</sup>

The testimony of the earliest Christians was clear. Conversion to Christianity meant turning “from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Th. 1:9). Though formerly they were “influenced and led astray to dumb idols” (1 Co. 12:2), after becoming a Christian they were obliged to be judicious in assessing spiritual manifestations, especially any manifestation that might be so blasphemous as to announce, “Jesus be cursed” (1 Co. 12:3). In Greco-Roman culture there certainly was no shortage of gods, goddesses and lords, but for Christians there was “one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Co. 8:5-6). While there were mother deities who were elevated as supreme, in Christianity the only notable mother figure, the mother of Christ, was firmly reminded that she did not control her son (Jn. 2:3-4; Mt. 12:46-50//Mk. 3:31-35//Lk. 8:19-21; 11:27-28), and in fact, she was only one candidate among many others for the messianic gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Ac. 1:14). Pagan gods were not gods at all (Ac. 19:26); they were “worthless things” (Ac. 14:15; cf. 17:16) and “nothing at all” (1 Co. 8:4). Worse, they were fronts for demons (1 Co. 10:19-20).

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<sup>7</sup> Some critical scholars, such as Rudolf Bultmann, even suggest that Christianity borrowed many of its symbols and ideas from the pagans and Gnostics, though his opinion notwithstanding, there is little evidence for Christian indebtedness to paganism in the first century. Similarity does not equal a causal connection. In any case, borrowing need not have been in one direction only, cf. Ferguson, pp. 237-238.

<sup>8</sup> See the extensive coverage of this matriarchal religion in R. and C. Kroeger, *I Suffer Not A Woman* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

Caesar was not Lord; Jesus was Lord (Ac. 17:7)! The paraphernalia and literature of paganism was fit to be burned (Ac. 19:18-20). The whole world was under the sway of the evil one, so the charge for Christians, in view of their faith in the one true God, was to “keep yourselves from idols” (1 Jn. 5:19-21).

### **Partly Right, Partly Wrong**

Given the significant conflict between Christianity and paganism, we might be inclined to think that Christian evangelism consists of erasing from the minds of pagans all vestiges of their former world view, and then, starting with a *tabula rasa*, reconstructing a new Christian world view from the ground up. This approach, however, is probably impractical if not downright impossible. No one can erase his or her past, but everyone brings from the past a collection of concepts, values, preferences and tendencies. Furthermore, the erasure/reconstruction model does not seem to be what we find in the New Testament. Rather, Paul is willing to use elements of truth, even in paganism, to build a bridge toward the distinctive Christian worldview.

Take, for instance, his quotation of pagan poets. Paul draws from two poems to support the Judeo-Christian belief that 1) all human life is derived from the divine, and 2) all humans originated from God (Ac. 17:28).

**They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one-**  
*The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!*  
*But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest forever;*  
***For in thee we live and move and have our being.***

Epimenides

*Let us begin with Zeus: never, O men, let us  
 leave him unmentioned. Full of Zeus are all the ways  
 and all the meeting-places of men; the sea and the  
 harbors are full of him. It is with Zeus that every  
 one of us in every way has to do, **for we are also his  
 offspring.***

Aratus, *Phainomena*

In one of his Corinthian letters, Paul quotes from a comedy by the pagan poet

Menander:

***Bad company corrupts good character.***<sup>9</sup>

Menander, *Thais*

Such daring employment of pagan literature is neither a general endorsement of the inspiration of pagan literature nor of these pieces in particular. Paul does not equate Yahweh with Zeus, even though the pieces of literature by Epimenides and Aratus are about Zeus. Rather, he carefully uses the elements of truth to be found in the worldview of his listeners. This is no more than the belief that mathematics as well as any science or literature or philosophy, insofar as they express truth, belongs to God. In this sense, Paul advocates the defining principle that *all truth is God's truth*.

The challenge for Christians, then, is to distinguish between what is true and what is not true. The integrating and discriminating factor is the Word of God. Only in this way can Paul charge Christians that they must *demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and..take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ* (cf. 2 Co. 10:4b-5). It is in this same sense of the unity of truth that Paul can write:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things.

Philippians 4:8

So, the saying is true: "Where the truth is, insofar as it is truth, there God is."<sup>10</sup>

In the larger sense, this means that the various world cultures are full of a mixture of truth and error and partial-truth. Even pagans are not entirely wrong about everything. Furthermore, Christians, even though they are deeply loyal to Jesus Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), are susceptible to mistakes of interpretation and shortfalls resulting from human limitations.

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, it may well be that Paul was not consciously quoting Menander, since this saying may have been simply proverbial in the same sense that a modern person might quote Shakespeare without realizing the words were from the bard. Nevertheless, the point still stands that Paul is appealing to wisdom from a tradition other than the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>10</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, trans. J. Cohen (Middlesex, 1950), p. 490, quoted in F. Gaebelein, *The Pattern of God's Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), p. 22.

## Christian Freedom

Given the unity of truth and the mixture of truth and error in the cultures at large, Christians are urged to discipline themselves so that they can “distinguish between good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). Such perception is not merely a matter of lists but of maturity and training and experience. Especially, they are to grow toward maturity through the inward leading of the Holy Spirit. They are to “live by the Spirit” so that they “will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). They are to “count themselves dead to sin,” refusing to let sin reign over them. They must not offer themselves as instruments of wickedness but rather offer themselves to God (Ro. 6:11-14).

All such language presupposes Christian freedom, that is, that Christians are free to make moral decisions in the fear of the Lord. Clearly, this is not a naked freedom but a responsible freedom to be shaped by Scripture, godly values and the inward work of the Spirit. Still, such freedom presupposes that while some issues are clear, others are not. Paul offers several suggestive lists of clearly sinful behaviors in the New Testament (e.g. Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-7; Col. 3:5-9). At the same time, everything cannot be handled by a list. Some issues differ with the individual, and individual Christians are granted liberty to exercise their sense of moral discernment under the guideline of Christian principle. Thus, Paul urges, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free,” and also, “You, my brothers, were called to be free” (Gal. 5:1, 13a). Equally he urges that Christians must take care that they “do not use their freedom to indulge the sinful nature.” Instead, they are “to serve one another in love” (Gal. 5:13b-14).

## A Case Study in Corinth

In order to explore in a practical way the foregoing discussion of Christian freedom and moral decision-making, it will be instructive to observe how Paul taught the early Christians. One of the debatable issues among the Corinthian Christians directly involved the face-to-face confrontation between Christianity and paganism, especially the eating of food that was clearly tainted with pagan ideology.

In Greco-Roman religions, it was customary for an animal, bread, meal, oil or wine to be offered to the god or goddess. Part of the offering belonged to the deity, part to the priest and part to the worshipper. Some temples had adjoining rooms for cultic meals, but sometimes the worshipper might take home the portion allotted to him.<sup>11</sup> With this, the worshipper held a feast, inviting neighbors and friends, and it was assumed that the god or goddess would be spiritually present as a guest. A papyrus invitation to such a feast still survives:

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<sup>11</sup> E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds to Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) pp. 144-148.

Antonius, son of Ptolemaeus, invites you to dine with him at the table of our Lord Serapis.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to private sacrificial meals, the state offered public sacrifices. From these, some portions of the meat went to the priests, some to magistrates and others, and some to the open markets and shops for sale to the public. Thus, even when a Christian bought meat in the agora of his city, he had no guarantee that it was free of pagan contamination. Further, it was a popular superstition that demons and evil spirits gained entrance into humans by sitting on their food. For this reason, most animals were dedicated to pagan deities before slaughter as a measure of protection against evil spirits, and the meat was blessed in the name of the god or goddess before being eaten. Sickness and disease were often attributed to such spiritual influences, and spirits were believed to be everywhere in the water, the trees, the mountains, the rocks, empty houses, crumbs on the floor and the air.<sup>13</sup>

It is out of this milieu that the Corinthians wrote to Paul while he was at Ephesus, asking him concerning such food. Paul's response occupies the larger share of 1 Corinthians 8-10. At issue are not only the problem of eating tainted food but also the problem of protecting Christian freedom. Paul does not simply offer a list of forbidden food or activities. Rather, he offers principles to help guide the Corinthian Christians into making sound moral choices.

First, Paul warns against the insensitivity of the person who bases moral decisions on intellectualism alone. While the intelligent Christian may very well know that pagan deities are fabrications, and therefore, that eating meat dedicated to an imagined deity is meaningless and theoretically permissible, knowledge is not the only consideration (1 Co. 8:1-6). Not everyone has the same level of intellectual sophistication. The exercise of freedom based on superior knowledge can be dangerous for the person who may be less mature, and one must be willing to give up freedom as an expression of Christian deference to others who may be less sophisticated (1 Co. 8:7-13).

Second, Christian freedom must be balanced with a concern for others. Freedom to make ethical decisions is a Christian right and privilege, and it includes the freedom to choose what one eats and drinks, the freedom to be married or single, and the freedom to choose a vocation (1 Co. 9:1-6). Here, especially, Paul defends his right to be supported by his ministry without working. At the same time he shows that he voluntarily gave up his right to such support in the interests of the gospel (1

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<sup>12</sup> W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 72.

<sup>13</sup> Barclay, pp. 72-73, 91-92.

Co. 9:7-23). His point is that Christian freedom means one has the liberty to surrender rights as well as to maintain them, especially if surrendering one's rights will benefit evangelism. Though Christian freedom is real and must not be discounted, responsible Christian freedom means that moral decisions are not made for personal benefit alone. The effect of one's decisions on others must be considered, too.

Third, consciously participating in the feast of a pagan deity compromises one's Christian integrity. The profound incompatibility between the Christian Eucharist and pagan feasts demands that one not participate in both. The pagan view was that participation in a sacred feast meant a participation in the spiritual reality, which the feast represented. The pagan deity was the guest at the feast, and by eating, one paid homage to the deity. Participation in the Christian Eucharist also meant a participation in the spiritual reality, which the Eucharist represented. Paul seems to assume the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. However, one cannot pay homage to both. One cannot drink the cup of demons and the cup of the Lord too or eat at the table of demons and the table of the Lord too (1 Co. 10:14-22).

Finally, Paul offers some concluding guidelines and applications. While Christian freedom makes it possible to say, "everything is permissible," Christian responsibility raises other concerns. Everything is not beneficial, nor is everything constructive (1 Co. 10:23). One does not live to himself alone; the spiritual welfare of others counts, too (1 Co. 10:24). In applying these principles, Paul seeks to balance freedom and responsibility. If a pagan invites a Christian to a meal, he should feel free to go without asking awkward questions (1 Co. 10:27). However, if the food at the meal is clearly described as tainted by a pagan dedication, then the Christian should refrain from eating, not because there is anything wrong with the food, but because his participation might lead to the downfall of someone else (1 Co. 10:28-30). The crucial factor in making decisions for eating and drinking, as in all other areas of life, is whether or not a behavior glorifies God. Glorifying God involves caring for others as well as caring for oneself (1 Co. 10:31-11:1).

As a corollary, Paul offers similar principles when writing to the Romans. Here, he warns against judgmentalism from either side of the issue. Those who eat must not judge those who do not, and those who do not must not judge those who do. God alone is their judge (Ro. 14:1-13). Still, the principle of being concerned for the welfare of others must be maintained (Ro. 14:14-21). Privately, Christians can make their own choices, but within the larger body of Christians, they must also be concerned for the welfare of others (Ro. 14:22-23).

Contemporary Christians face a wide array of moral decisions with respect to pagan practices, decisions that in some respects are similar to those faced by first century Christians. All the following are believed, at least by some Christians, to

have pagan associations in one way or another: rock music, tattoos, piercings, virtual reality games, role-playing games, Halloween, Easter, Christmas, certain liturgical practices in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, some health food theories, acupuncture, some energy theories of healing, the prosperity gospel, and dozens of others. Here we shall address one of these issues, the celebration of Halloween, since it is the practice most overtly connected to paganism.

There is little doubt that the roots of Halloween are pagan, going back to the celebrations of the Lord of the Dead among the Celts and Druids of Britain and Gaul. At the autumn festival called *Samhain* (= summer's end), a feast was held using leaves, cornstalks and pumpkins as decorations. The pagan priests of the Druids believed that ghosts, spirits, fairies, witches, warlocks and elves came out to harm people on this night. Hence, huge bonfires were built to ward off malevolent spirits. While the precise origins of the many specific Halloween symbols are debatable, since they are largely preserved through oral tradition, there is consensus about some. For instance, particularly wicked persons, after they died, were believed to be resident in black cats. The Irish say that a man named Jack was unable to enter heaven because he was so stingy during his life, but he couldn't enter hell because he had played practical jokes on the devil. So, he was forced to walk the earth with his lantern until the last judgment. The jack-o-lantern celebrates this story. The playing of tricks originally was believed to be the work of witches, warlocks or other evil spirits who flew abroad on Halloween night.<sup>14</sup>

The name Halloween derives from the fact that in the Christian calendar it occurred on the evening prior to All Saints Day (or All Hallows Day, "hallow" meaning sacred), which was established in the 700s. In more modern times, Halloween has been celebrated in both serious and casual ways. On the serious side, Halloween is the most sacred of the four quarterly sabbaths of Wiccanism, and in Britain and Europe, practicing witches and warlocks take this celebration very seriously indeed. Americans have tended to observe the holiday in a not-so-serious way, using the day as an occasion for community gatherings and parades and an evening for children to solicit candy from the neighbors. For most (though not all) contemporary Americans, the reality of the spirit world is dismissed out of hand. Costuming, even including skeletons and goblins, is not perceived as a participation in paganism, but harmless fun.

Christian responses have been varied. Some, because they do not accept the reality of pagan beliefs, find the celebration innocuous. Others issue a call to repent for the sin of past participation and require abstinence from any further celebration.

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<sup>14</sup> The pagan roots of Halloween usually can be found in most encyclopedia articles, such as, *Groliers* or *The World Book*, etc.

Still others stage a replacement of traditional Halloween activities with a harvest party for families at their local church. These responses parallel to a large degree the ancient Christian responses to eating meat contaminated by pagan dedications.

1. Just as some ancient Christians became vegetarians in order to avoid eating meat that might have pagan associations, some modern Christians find participation in Halloween activities to be repulsive and spiritually dangerous. Hence, participation is strictly forbidden.
2. Also, just as some ancient Christians were confident in their knowledge that pagan gods were no gods at all, and thus felt free to eat any and all meat without qualms, so some modern Christians have felt free to participate to greater or lesser degrees in the Halloween holiday as an evening of pure fun.

St. Paul's teaching still stands valid. Every Christian must take seriously the biblical principles for making such moral decisions.

1. **First, knowledge is not the only consideration (1 Co. 8:1, 4).** For the "strong" Christian, it is not enough simply "to know" that pagan ideas are false. One lives in community with other Christians who may be "weak," and if they see you participating in an activity that injures their faith, you may be responsible for your brother or sister falling into sin (1 Co. 8:9-13). Suppose, for instance, that fellow Christians have been converted to faith in Christ from neo-paganism. Might not they be confused if they see you participating in a holiday that they once celebrated as a pagan expression?
2. **Second, Christian freedom means that one has the liberty to give up one's rights, not just maintain them.** Yes, Christians are free in Christ to make moral decisions. However, even if for themselves they find nothing objectionable in a "simple, fun-living" celebration of Halloween, they must remember what Paul says: If what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall, and later, But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ and still later, Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible (1 Co. 8:13; 9:12b, 19). Did Paul himself become a vegetarian? Probably not. However, we have every

reason to think that he was very careful to avoid injuring the faith of those converted from paganism.

3. **Third, Christians cannot in good conscience participate in those features of Halloween that are specifically pagan.** It is one thing to dress up as clowns and historical figures and quite another to dress up as figures of evil. If Christians (usually for the sake of their children) wish to use October 31<sup>st</sup> for a fall celebration, they should avoid the clearly pagan parts. If a friend wants to share Halloween candy, then eat it without raising questions (1 Co. 10:25-26). If a neighbor invites you to a community party, then go, and don't ask awkward questions (1 Co. 10:27). However, be sensitive to the fact that there is a distinct element of paganism inherent in the traditional Halloween celebration, and refrain from any overt pagan participation (1 Co. 10:28-30).
4. **Fourth, remember that while everything is permissible, not everything is beneficial or constructive (1 Co. 10:23).** A Christian must seek to glorify God in everything he or she does (1 Co. 10:31-33).
5. **Finally, suspend judgment on other Christians who do not see the issue in the same way you do-regardless of whether that person seems to be "weak" or "strong" (Ro. 14:1-4, 10-13a).** As an individual, each Christian should be "fully persuaded in his own mind" (Ro. 14:5b) so that whether he participates or abstains he does so "to the Lord" (Ro. 14:6). It is entirely appropriate for Christians to establish for themselves a moral position, but they must be careful that their conclusion does not bring spiritual harm to others (Ro. 14:22-15:3). If Paul were alive today, he might have no objections to children going from house to house to collect candy, since he clearly says, "I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself" (Ro. 14:14). At the same time, the primary issue is not personal rights but love, Christian reputation, peace and joy (Ro. 14:15-18).