Question: What advice do you have for Christians concerning things like Santa, the Easter Bunny and even Halloween?

Boy, that’s kind of a loaded question but nonetheless a good and relevant one. In truth, we may have two separate subjects here, but I will attempt to give the best answer I can.

Let’s start with the issue of Santa and the Easter Bunny. These are two very popular icons of our day and age. What fascinates me about these two icons is that both are the world’s answer to the high festivals of our Christian faith. As I sit and contemplate this interesting fact it finally dawns on me that perhaps Satan has achieved a marvelous coup and we seem to be helping him. What do I mean?

Why is it that the two high festivals of our Christian faith have ended up with these two icons, characters perhaps developed in innocence but who have now become the focus, the heart and core of most of the world’s celebration of Christmas and Easter? Don’t we recognize that these two have become the world’s replacement for Christ our Lord and Savior? It strikes me as curious that no other religion to my knowledge has such things, such counterpoints to what their faith is about. Take Ramadan or even Hanukkah. Have you ever heard of something like Sheik Omar during the festival of Ramadan? You know, the Sheik gives gifts, visits all the boys and girls and generally replaces Allah during this festival? Ever hear of something like the "Twinkle Fairy" during Hanukkah, where you can have fun and celebrate but you don’t have to do focus on all that "god stuff?" Yet in Christianity we have these counterpoints and we Christians seem all the more willing to promote them. Perhaps it’s time for us to say, "NO!"

Now there would be some that would simply say, "Hey, what’s wrong with having a bit of fun and teaching our children these fun "fairy tales" to enhance their holidays? After all, Santa and the Easter Bunny are no worse than Snow White, Cinderella and Harry Potter!" Fun stories that our kids can learn and it helps their celebrations.

I would have no problems here if this were the simple case. Children love fairy tales and stories. I have shared with my daughter many such tales always with the understanding that this is "make believe" and "pretend land." And while she may have in her simple childishness played "princess" and had knights rescue her and such, there is nothing wrong with promoting such imaginations as an exercise of her own mind. Teaching fairy tales as fairy tales is fine. I will even go as far as to say that teaching Santa and the Easter bunny as "fairy tales" would also be fine. But in my experience, and perhaps your’s too, that is NOT what we do.

We take our children and we bring them to believe (please note that word!), to hope and concentrate on these icons, not to embellish their celebration but rather, at least for many years of youth, as the very heart and core of their celebration! As a kid growing up, I was taught Santa and Peter Cottontail as the reality. I can even think of the many ways and lies we perpetrate to keep these icons alive and well in our children’s hearts. We take them to see Santa. Our news shows track his sleigh and travels. We label the gifts, "From Santa." The same with the Easter bunny, but to a lesser extent. You see, we don’t just teach these as fairy tales, we lead our children to "believe" and to hope and focus on these icons for quite a few years.

Might I ask how this fits in with the First Commandment? That’s my problem. Leading our children to believe in these characters, these false characters is surely as close to idolatry as you can imagine!

Here is the way I settled this for myself. I asked myself this question. "Would I be sure and certain of my child’s eternal salvation should the Lord take them during those months when Santa or the Easter Bunny are foremost in the belief of their hearts?" There’s the question that made me shiver. It made me shiver because I think I can honestly say that in my own life had I died during those times when these icons were my heart and core, I am not sure, knowing what I know now, that my soul would be in heaven. I had been led to believe, believe in these icons!

And I know what all of you might want to say. You are going to say it is just innocent fun. You are going to say that Jesus died for my sins and that heaven is His sure and certain gift. Yep, I know that. But I also know that there is this thing called faith. If my faith has been replaced (even though it be a short span of years and only a short time during a year while I am being led to "believe") is that not absolutely contrary to what the Lord my God has said? Could you be sure and certain of God’s gift in Jesus when you as a parent have lead your child away from faith in Jesus to faith in Santa? There’s the rub.

Do we have the right to say, "It’s just for fun Jesus that I am going to replace you in my child’s heart for a while." If we insistently and persistently disobey and promote sin instead of Jesus, what does God say to us?

I believe we need to wrestle with this as followers of Jesus. It is not mine to judge your heart. It is mine to teach what God says. If you can justify leading your children to "believe" in these icons, then you do as you will and you take your chances with your child’s soul. Recently on Facebook one of my friends posted a sign that said something like this, "When you catch your child lying and tell them how wrong it is, what will you do when they say, ‘What about what you told me about Santa and the Easter Bunny?’" It is a funny little sign, but to me, it really makes me think of what we as Christians are doing to our children.

In my household, my daughter has never been lead to believe in Santa or any other such icon. I can safely say (she is now 12) that this has not hurt her one bit. For that matter, I marvel that each year when it comes time for Christmas, we her parents, are absolutely at a loss as to what gift we might get her to remind her of God’s gift in Jesus. If we ask her, she just shrugs her shoulders and says, "I don’t really need anything." Do you know she has never made this long list of things she wants or desires for either her birthday or Christmas. She has grown up a content child and quite happy with what the Lord has blessed her with. The Lord taught her contentment but is that what Santa and the bunny teach?

That’s is my response to the first part of your question. Dear Christian Friends and Parents measure and weigh what you do by God’s Word not the world. Measure and weigh and if your heart allows you to "eat" then have fun, but if you see I have a point and we are perhaps putting the souls of our children in jeopardy, then change what you are doing.

Then there is the second part. For the past 28 years I have lead my congregation to support and hold a "Reformation Party" for the children of the congregation. We offer this as an alternative to the ideas of Halloween. I came to my thought and understanding on this subject as I once again looked at what we say and teach in our very own, very simple Lutheran Catechism. As I studied the Second Commandment and what we have been teaching for centuries concerning witches, sorcerers, spiritualists, and the like, I began to think we have missed the boat.

The first thing that dawned on me is that here we are the very church of the Reformation and for us a high point of this Reformation is that day we consider it all started. You know, the posting of the Ninety-five Thesis by Luther. Posted on October 31st. That used to be "All Saints Eve." A time to remember the faith and the saints who have proceeded us, who have stood sure and true to the wonder and joy of Jesus. It is because of what this day was that Luther decided to use that day as the day to post. A day that shook the world as we can see throughout history.

Today this "high" point (it really should be for us, shouldn’t it!) of the gospel restored to God’s children now has this counterpoint of Halloween. My, over the years, what positive and godly things we find in this festival of the world. Witches, magic, sorcery, ghosts, ghouls, death, blood, murder, the living dead, horror, fear and the like. The only thing that remains in any way somewhat of a positive thing on this night is perhaps the trick or treating. But have we sold our Savior out for a bag of candy?

My solution has been to have a "Reformation Party." If the kids want to dress up we say, "Go ahead, but be something fun and godly. Don’t do those things that Halloween has become." As a part of this, we also encourage the congregation to bring candy and goodies to the church. We make up bags of said gifts for the children. In this way, we have eliminated the excuse of "I want the candy," from the kids and this all the more encourages them to our party. We also offer games and a hay ride, a pot-luck meal and great fun and fellowship for the adults too! It is truly a family fun night.

Just some food for thought. I encourage that as Christians we stop being like the world and all the more show our faith in what we do and don’t do.

Again, you will have to study God’s Word. I’m thinking when God said, "let no one be found among you...(Dt. 18:10ff) and "you will be defiled by them" (Le 19:31), I’m thinking he was serious and that even though Jesus has come and offers us salvation, the meaning of the Law is still not diminished.

If you decorate for Halloween, take a good look at those decorations. What do you see? Do you see life and Jesus promoted or is it something, anything else than that? Let’s give this our prayer and thought and let the Lord guide our ways.

That’s what I have to say. Thanks for your ear.