

# SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Two crossed swords with red blades and silver hilts, positioned centrally below the title.

## Episode 1 – Spiritual Warfare

It's Halloween!

Ordinarily this is the time of year Christians clutch their pearls, board up their windows, light the candles at their 'light party', and try to pray the night away without doing something to magically invite the devil into their lives. If you were to ask this particular Christian their thoughts on Halloween, they would say it's the night people turn into witches and warlocks, summoning the undead and pledging allegiance to Satan.

Note: There's nothing wrong with Light parties, Emma is doing one with the kids this year, I'm just exploring whether this is the *only* way to interact with Halloween.

Well, that seems a little extreme to me, so instead of hiding from something the culture embraces, why don't we look at it and see where the truth lies? My estimation is somewhere between having a light party and praying the devil away, and wantonly abandoning Christ in favour of a Ouija board. There must be a middle ground.

So, to give us some direction here, let's ask – why do we, as Christians, often eschew Halloween?

Well, the general idea out there in the land of the heathen is that Halloween is the night the divide between our reality and that of ghosts and ghouls is thinned, allowing access between the two. It's a night when witchcraft and the occult are more potent, when the fabric of our reality stretches to breaking point under the pressure of malevolent forces! Therefore, for some reason, you must dress up as a goblin or some such. The church seems to have taken on this opinion of the festival, and see this as something to avoid.

In case you think I'm lying, let's take some time to consider [this article](#) on Bibleinfo, with its wonderfully entertaining lack of nuance.

In case you can't be bothered to read the article, let's focus on this specific passage shall we?

*“As a logical thinking person, consider for a moment what you are celebrating and what Halloween is all about. Is the holiday uplifting? Is Halloween pure? Is it lovely, praiseworthy, or of good report? Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” Is Halloween based on godly themes such as the idea of peace, freedom and salvation or does the holiday bring to mind feelings of fear, oppression and bondage?”*

Honestly, some of this is hilarious, but I won't absolutely rail this author because, frankly, they are 100% coming at it from the right heart and motive – are we acting righteously, are we considering Jesus, are we focusing on the right things?

The difficulty here is that it comes at the end of a fairly long-ish delve into the history of the holiday, from its pagan origins of the Celts, to its assumption by Catholics when they landed, to the celebration of saints, to the purely commercial event we see now.

The argument seems to follow, though it isn't explicitly stated this way, that because it's very first origins were pagan and evil, therefore the holiday as it stands now is still evil.

Is that a good argument?

Not in my opinion. This, to my mind, commits the genetic fallacy – that the origin of something, where it came from, bestows its entire value. For example, if a clown taught you maths, would that mathematics be completely invalid because it came from a clown rather than a maths teacher? Not if the maths is correct, no! If that clown is saying  $2 + 2 = 4$ , and  $3 \times 3 = 9$ , then it doesn't matter what the origin of the information was!

The same could be said for Halloween – just because its earliest adopters did it for wrong, evil reasons, doesn't mean it's still evil and wrong now.

I hope that's clear.

Also, the question at the beginning of that excerpt (we'll ignore the subtle jibe that anyone who doesn't agree is somehow illogical, which seems a bit rich given they've just used a logical fallacy of an argument), is to *“consider what Halloween is about... is the holiday uplifting? Is Halloween pure? Is it lovely, praiseworthy, or of good report?”*

My thoughts?

Well, it depends, doesn't it?

If we consider the original format of putting animal heads and skins on, dancing around a fire and worshipping spirits, then... yeah, all right, that's bad. But I don't know anyone who does this (I hope).

If we take the current format of Halloween – dressing up, having fun at parties playing harmless games, visiting neighbours and sharing treats, then... I don't see the issue. Stay with me here.

Is going out into the community with the intention of having fun and building community spirit not uplifting?

Is the charitable giving of treats and sweets not lovely and praiseworthy?

Is getting together as a family or group of friends to play games like apple bobbing not lovely?

This is the nuance I believe a lot of Christians neglect with regards this holiday.

Now, spoiler alert: as the episode goes on, as you know if you have now listened to it before landing here, I do share some very real issues on the topic of spiritual warfare that need to be considered with regards Halloween. Don't think I'm lambasting people who believe it shouldn't be celebrated by Christians, you do what suits your conscience and puts you in right standing with God, but I just want to point out some of the issues with the common Christian thinking so that those who may want to engage in it in a wholesome way don't feel judged or like they're doing something wrong.

But, before we tackle whether or not we should engage with Halloween, I think we need to review the actual threat of things like ghosts and ghouls, demons and witchcraft, i.e. whether or not they're even real.

So, let's head over to our Bibles and see what we can see! We're in Ephesians 6:12 –

*“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”*

Now... that doesn't sound good, does it? Apparently, there are evil spirits in Heavenly places? Does this mean there's demons in Heaven?

Don't be alarmed, when Paul talks about evil forces in heavenly places, he doesn't mean there are demons in Heaven with God – he's using the term 'heavenly places' to refer to the spiritual realm, i.e. not our own realm and reality, but the meta-physical realm where God, angels and demons reside.

Again though, not to alarm you, but there were once demons in Heaven! That's right, and they were called angels, but they rebelled against God alongside Satan. We read this in Revelation 12:7-9 –

*“Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”*

So, we have Satan, cast out of Heaven down to earth 'like a lightning bolt', as Jesus describes it in Luke 10:18, and he comes with his army of fallen angels, which we now call demons.

But could this all be poetic language on the part of John, the author of Revelation? Or is there more to this?

Well, Jesus regularly interacts with demons so there must be something to it. Let's have a look at two well-known stories.

We'll start with one my favourite stories in the Bible, Luke 9:37-42:

*"On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father."*

And Matthew 8:28-34:

*"And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region."*

Here we have Jesus deliberately interacting with people who are 'possessed' by evil spirits, AKA demons.

Now, this opens up a new area of concern – demon possession!

So, not only do we have Paul in Ephesians saying there are rulers and authorities that are evil spirits, a history of demons being angels who rebelled and were booted out of Heaven, Jesus confirming the existence of demons, but now we have humans being possessed by immaterial entities!

Let's look into these stories a bit more.

In Luke 9, we see Jesus healing a demon-possessed boy. This is my absolute favourite story in the book of Luke, if not the entire Bible. The reason for that is because I can so massively relate to the father! Across the different gospels that record this encounter, we see that the boy is rendered unable to speak, he foams at the mouth, he gets thrown to the floor, he often falls into fire or water when the spirit seizes him, and apparently it 'shatters' him. Imagine being the father of that son! You'd never leave his side, you'd sleep at the foot of his bed, you'd be too afraid to let him go anywhere! It would have ruined the lives of the entire family. Lifting this curse from the child, changes the entire family's present and future. Absolutely amazing.

In Matthew 8 we have the demon-possessed men, that Jesus casts the demons out of and into a herd of pigs, who then run off the edge of a nearby cliff.

But what's the picture we're getting from these stories?

Demons are real, are possessing people (and animals), and Jesus has the authority to get rid of them!

How does He have the authority to do this? By nature of His divinity! Even the demons themselves acknowledge this, in Luke 4:41 –

*“And demons also came out of many, crying, “You are the Son of God!” But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ”*

Note: There's a terrifying thought – we as a generation and a culture are more blinded to the person of Christ than the *demons*. We believe more likes than *demons*.

So, when we consider our quote in Ephesians, how we wrestle against the authorities in this world, we know we are fighting the last skirmishes of a battle that has already been won!

Jesus has the victory, on the cross claiming it over Satan, sin and death.

He also gives us His authority over demons as His representatives on earth in Luke 9:1

*“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases”*

So, the next time you're watching Paranormal Activity or Ghostbusters, or whatever, and you wonder what you would do in that position, the answer is obvious – speak out in Jesus' name. The demons can't reject the authority of Jesus that has been given to you! I've personally had experience of this. I won't go into the story, but suffice to say I have experienced demonic activity in my life and have prayed out in Jesus' name to rebuke and remove that activity!

But what of demon possession, is that a thing?

Well, not for Christians!

Jesus gives us an idea of how demons inhabit a person in Matthew 12:43-45 when He says

*“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation”*

He's talking about the process of a demon inhabiting and then leaving a person.

He also alludes to the idea that a void is left when a spirit departs, which it soon returns to. 2 Corinthians 1:22 says that Jesus has

*“set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come”*

This means the void that is in us, that demons exploit, is actually filled when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us.

There's a debate open as to whether modern-day possession still happens, I won't weigh-in

on that because it's lengthy and, frankly, not that important. But suffice to say, demons have a very real-world influence and effect on us, so we need to be aware of them and how to rebuke them.

So, what of witchcraft then? Another complaint in the Halloween pearl-clutchers' playbook.



Pictured: A witch... apparently? I dunno, maybe their spell went wrong? They certainly look sheepish like "damn, I'm supposed to be a werewolf, not... **this**".

Well, there's definitely something to be said here.

In the OT, particularly in Leviticus, we see 'necromancers' referred to a lot, but what *is* a necromancer? It's essentially someone who talks to and summons the dead! Think of the guy in games and comics who summons the 'undead', he's a necro. It's also a playable character class in D&D and other RPG games, if you're as cool as me.

We also hear a fair amount about sorcerers in the NT. Revelation mentions them a fair bit, but here we have it explicitly mentioned in Galatians 5:20-21

*"Idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"*

So... not to scare anyone, but apparently sorcery and witchcraft are legit things. Spooky, certainly not good, something to be avoided.

This ties into our original question about Halloween in one major way – people often think it's a bit of a laugh to mess about with the occult on Halloween. Ouija boards, seances, rituals, all of this – it's evil. It's either evil because it's real and is communing with demons,

or it's evil because it's totally fake and a damnable lie.

We know from Galatians that it's at least reasonably believable, so why risk it?

You might even think 'oh, hey, it's just going to speak to someone so they can let me know how Gramps is doing', like, 'don't be a hater'.

Look, dead people don't talk. Gramps isn't chatting to you from beyond the veil. Demons pretend to be dead people to coerce you!

I will be a hater of that, thank you very much!

As will Mark Driscoll, in this hilarious video:



Note: I've time-stamped it so click through and you'll be in the right place, but the entire video is brilliant

Now, look, I don't want to scare anyone, so just remember – whilst these evil things do exist, we are safe from their direct effects because we are filled with the Holy Spirit! Jesus has won the victory, any effects we see from this realm is simply little skirmishes we're caught up in.

Let's have our scripture of the week, which is 1 Peter 5:8 –

*“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”*

Why is this our scripture of the week?

Because, look – we might be the victors in the war, but we are still soldiers in the skirmishes!

I don't know many Christians who have done something for the Kingdom, really chased after and served God, that haven't gone through some form of demonic opposition.

I have had several encounters with the demonic, I know several people who have equally chilling stories of their own experience, and we need to be aware of this.

It's not even the obviously overt stuff, like hearing strange voices in your room or a strange presence near you, because they're so overt they're almost funny, it's the subversive stuff.

This is the voice in your head you hear accusing you, this is the circumstances that seem to confound and damage you at every turn, this is the person who just seems to wish you harm at all times. Demons might not be able to possess you, they may not possess anyone anymore (who knows), but they can affect the world around you. They can even lead you into sin! Demons have been around a long time and they've been watching people a long time, they know our vices. They can use people and situations to pull you away from God and toward sin without you even knowing. The devil is waiting to devour you.

So, let's not be oblivious to this stuff!

I'm not saying we need to be fearful, we know we don't have a spirit of fear, but we have to be alert and ready for the fiery brands that the devil will toss our way!

I would suggest you read through Ephesians 6 on this.

That's all for this week, guys! That sets us up for our discussion next week about Halloween, and whether or not we, as Christians, should be engaging with it!

As always, don't be afraid to get into the youth whatsapp chat and let us know how you are, what you're up to and what you're thinking. Get your prayer requests ready for Thursday and get involved in our Bible study! And you can grab us on Instagram @chawnyouth.

Speak to you in the next one!