

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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

Episode 2 – Spiritual Warfare

It's Halloween!

Last week we looked at the very real threat of demons and the spiritual warfare element of the Christian's life.

This week, we looked at Halloween, the background and history of it, and how we should interact with this as Christians. Do we need to rush out and buy pearls to clutch, or are we able to go and pick out a badass costume?

Let's get into it!

First of all, we had a quick peruse of the history of Halloween to see where we stand historically.

As far as I can tell, Halloween dates back around 2,000 years to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced [Sown](#), like 'down' but with an 's' not a 'd'), where they had a big sacred bonfire, burned offerings and made sacrifices to their Celtic gods, then capered about like lunatics in costumes (probably made of animal heads and skins). The reason they

did this was down to their new year, which was November 1st. October 31st, since it was the death of the year and the summer, was when they thought of the dead and believed they were able to return to earth as mischievous spirits. The sacred bonfire was then used to light their hearth fires as a symbol of protection for the coming winter. They also used this time to make prophecies, sooth-saying if you will, and trying to communicate with the spirits.



“Karl, I’m really sorry mate, but if I’m reading this right you might want to start planning for AD19... this isn’t going to be your year”

Fast-forward a bit and we land in the Roman empire, around 40AD, a few years after Jesus’ death & resurrection, as Christianity is just starting to take root in the East. By this point, the Roman empire had more or less crushed the Celts to the point where they were little more than a memory, and Roman life had taken over.



“Know what this place needs? A massive flippin’ wall – someone get Hadrien on the blower”

The Romans, ever the masters of being economical, decided to usurp this festival with not one but two of their own. This was a very common practice since, hey, people were celebrating then anyway and would continue to do so because that's just the tradition – put it this way, if we got conquered by another nation and they said “right, you lot, we have a celebration similar to Christmas, so we'll celebrate that now on January 18th, and December 25th is no longer a holiday so don't celebrate”, would we really swap over? Of course not. What if they just changed the name or some of the activities but kept the date? Far more likely to go along with it, since we're doing stuff anyway – better yet they may actually bring in *better* traditions!

Anyway, let's get on with this history.

So, as I was saying, the Romans put two of their own holidays together and put them in the place of Samhain. This was the festival of Feralia, when they commemorated the dead, and Pomona, worshipping the goddess of fruit and trees. Fruit, specifically apples, which may well explain why we do the whole apple-bobbing thing. Also, dressing up in a costume was done to avoid being tricked or cursed by the spirits of the night, as they would think you're one of them. Let's fast forward again – to 609AD, Pope Boniface dedicated the pantheon in Rome in honour of all the Christian martyrs. This was done on May 13th, but this eventually became a festival that observed all martyrs and Christians, which was moved by Pope Gregory III to November 1st.

Go ahead a bit again, to 1000AD, and Christianity has basically swept over Europe and the Celts are just... gone.

The church tried to replace this Halloween stuff with a church-sanctioned holiday and made November 2nd All-Souls Day, when they celebrated the dead. They celebrated in largely the same way, with big bonfires, parades and dressing up in costumes as saints, angels and devils. Then the night before it, the traditional night of Samhain in the Celtic religion, began to be called All-Hallows Eve and, eventually, Halloween.

So, we basically have a load of pagan and demonic stuff, which eventually gets moulded into some other Roman festivals with little changing, then the church decides to take the day and make it a time to revere saints but still doesn't change much of the festivities (except they take the proper demonic stuff out).

But where does trick or treating come into this?

Well, as far as I can see, this comes from America in the 1800's when they decided it was still a bit spiritual and needed lightening up, so they tried to make it more neighbourhood and community-friendly, and added in this neighbourhood interaction element (which hasn't really made its way over here)!



Pictured: Me, every Halloween, waiting for the trick-or-treaters to knock on

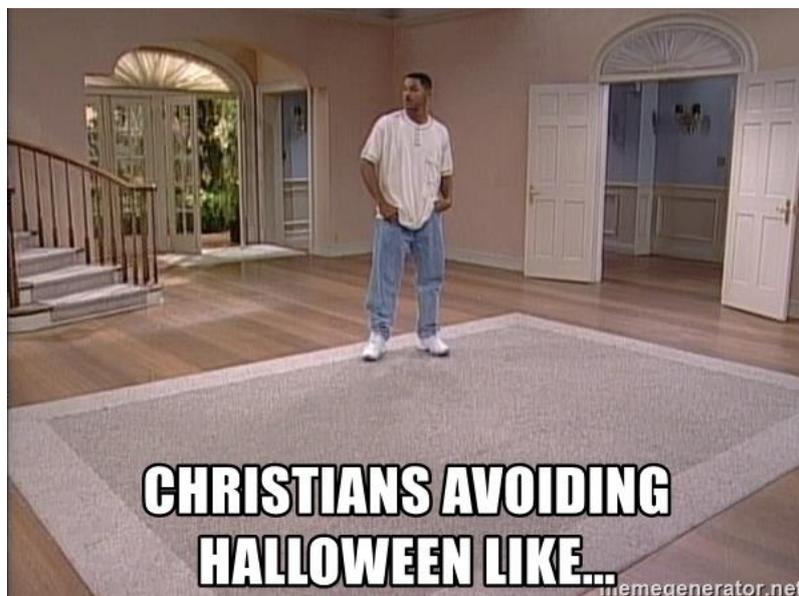
So, we have to decide at this point if all of that is worth us saying “it’s demonic and we shouldn’t have anything to do with it”.

There we have 3 options I want to spell out for us so we know how to deal with us – we can reject, receive or redeem. We can reject it, say no it’s demonic in every form so we won’t partake at all, receive it, say we love it and we’re 100% in even the dodgy bits, or redeem, we can take what is good or could be used for God and chuck out what isn’t.

Let’s go through each one.

Reject

So, we can choose to say ‘absolutely not’ to everything Halloween-related... but, should we? Let’s just clutch them pearls, board up the windows, put on some hymns and pray all night so the devil doesn’t break in.



Now, that sounds lame, so let's see if it's necessary.

What might we want to reject here?

- Communing in some way with spirits – we know dead people don't talk, if we try to communicate with the spirits then we're invariably going to be chatting with demons (or a charlatan, let's be real).
- Sacrifices – look, since Jesus died the sacrificial method of atonement is no longer in effect, He ended the need for sacrifice in the OT, so we shouldn't do it anymore anyway, but this was even worse – this was sacrifice to *demons*. Don't do this.
- Dressing up for the purposes of blending in with demons, or playing evil tricks – so, don't hear what I'm not saying! I'm not saying 'dressing up' full stop, I'm saying dressing up for the purposes of kicking it with demons and playing evil tricks.
- Anything ritualistic – so the purposes of the Celts in having a bonfire, burning sacrifices, dancing and wearing animal skins was all for the ritual of the death of the year and asking for the nature gods' blessings on them in the winter. We want to avoid ritualistic behaviour, as that's demonic.

So, that's our reject position, that's essentially the list of 'cons' from the historical view of Halloween. On this view, these would outweigh any pros of the festival. What about receive though?

Receive

This is the complete other direction – what is there, historically and currently, that is worth saying 'yes' to? Bearing in mind, if we choose to 'receive' Halloween, this means the whole lot of it, evil stuff too.



Including sitting in a séance with a bloke who looks like Stan from Space Jam in jedi robes

Let's see if there's anything we could say yes to here.

- Remembering saints and other dead Christians – it’s not bad to remember the dead Christians who have gone before us. I’ve read biographies and articles about dead Christians many times, including church fathers like Aquinas and Calvin, and they were truly fruitful. We just need to ensure it’s not done in a ritualistic or worshipful nature.
- Dressing up as saints – I mean, I’m not going to make a big positive case for dressing up as Martin Luther or something, but on the same vein as before, acknowledging and honouring the contribution past Christians have made to the faith is a good thing! Plus, who doesn’t think a 4-year-old dressed up as John Calvin would be hilarious?
- Neighbourhood and community-friendly – I know in this country we don’t really do the whole trick-or-treating thing, and we certainly don’t during a pandemic lockdown, but there are still good positive community-based aspects here! For example, every Halloween my wife and I have friends round, hang out, catch up, share our home and our food and our big TV etc etc with them and build our little community.

So, there’s clearly some good stuff here.

I would just suggest that, if we take the historical overview of Halloween and the ways it *could* be celebrated if it were to be done so in the historical way, these would not out-weigh the negatives.

But what about our third option?

Redeem

Our final option, and in this we will take what is redeemable and remove that which is not. In order to do this, we have to ask ourselves two questions – is the historical Halloween the same Halloween we see now, and is the reason something is done historically more important than the reason something is done now?



Well, last week in the companion I introduced something called the 'genetic fallacy'. Here's what I wrote:

"[the genetic fallacy is the idea] 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."

This, to my mind, is a decent-enough argument to open the conversation.

Just because it began evil, doesn't mean it's evil now. If penicillin had been made with the express intention of poisoning people, and it turned out it cured people of various ailments, would you avoid penicillin because it was intended for harm? Nope, I doubt it.

So, the actual ideological reasons behind the first traditions shouldn't really be an issue, if we're no longer celebrating for those reasons, but what *are* the reasons for our doing them *now*?

I don't know many people that would put their hand on their heart and say "I dress up like a goblin at Halloween because I want to be part of the hordes of demons that roam the land on All Hallows' Eve, and if that doesn't work, I'll sacrifice some animals and dance around a sacred bonfire to get the spirits to notice and bless me".

Maybe you do, but I don't. That's not what Halloween is about anymore.

Quite frankly, Halloween has gone where Christmas and Easter seem to be going more and more each year – the actual 'reason for the season', as we've heard so many times, is totally forgotten and it has simply become a commercial holiday designed to generate profit.

For example – Easter is about Jesus rising from the dead and being confirmed as the Son of God who has conquered Satan, sin and death, and in so doing created a means for us to be justified and made righteous in the sight of God... but we dress up as bunnies and razz about in the garden looking for chocolate eggs.

Christmas is about the virgin conception and birth of the Son of God, God incarnate in human form, the Creator condescending to created in order to love us and experience what we do... and we dress up as Santa, look out for flying reindeer, sing carols about snow and jolly fat old men, then buy presents that inevitably end up in landfill.

Neither of these holidays really resemble or honour their specific reasons for existing, and yet we embrace them anyway with variations of old traditions.

With Halloween, what we see is a completely commercialised. The event is worth billions of dollars every year in the US alone – costumes, decorations, sweets and candies, parties, all of this is just a money-churning machine. The celebrations that go on may have some link to old traditions, costumes in particular, but the reasoning behind it is completely different.

So, what can we redeem? What do we need to reject?

Well, it goes without saying that we need to reject the explicit spiritual and pagan elements of the holiday, so no animal skin sacred bonfire ho-downs, all right?

Right.

But the idea of community-spirit, neighbourhood-building, fun and enjoyment can be redeemed! This comes down to your conscience as well – if you feel your conscience is violated by dressing up as a zombie, then don't do it. If you don't feel you can do it without

feeling the weight of the historical aspect of the practice, then don't do it. If you feel, however, you can dress up like the Stay Puft man from Ghostbusters purely for the reason of fun and camaraderie, then go for it! If your parents disagree and would rather you didn't, then honour them until you're old enough to do your own thing.



whistles happily

My best case scenario is you dress up as Thomas Aquinas, go over to your cousin's house, bob for apples and have good fun, honour God in your conversations, then go home with a bag full of sweets.

Worst case scenario is you dress up in a sheep skin and goat head costume, dance around a sacred bonfire honouring demons, sacrifice an animal on a pagan altar, then sit at a Ouija board and try to chat with Gramps.

Scenario 1 is fine, scenario 2 is absolutely not.

If you feel you need to call your party a light party, because even the name 'Halloween' is too closely associated with the original practices (even though it isn't even related, technically), then fair enough. But don't feel like a bad Christian if you have a Halloween party, or bob for apples, or eat sweets from a pillow case, etc.

Hopefully that's cleared some stuff up for you all, let's do our scripture of the week!

Romans 14:13-19 – "Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. 14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. 15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. 16 So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."

Why is this our scripture of the week?

Well, Paul is giving us a window into how we can approach Halloween, inadvertently admittedly.

“Let us not pass judgement on one another any longer”, so don’t cast shame and guilt on people who aren’t at the ‘light party’, but are out there bobbing for apples dressed as James Bond.

“Decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother”, if your parents don’t feel comfortable with Halloween, then just don’t engage! If your friends are weird about it, don’t pressure them! Don’t do something that causes someone else to struggle. This comes up again when Paul writes “if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died” – be humble in your treatment.

“Nothing is unclean in itself, but is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean”, so if you or someone else can’t see past the historical issues of the holiday then that’s their prerogative to abstain. If you can, then you can!

“Let us pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding”, this is not casting someone else down for their beliefs (whether pro or against Halloween) but building them up in what they do. Perhaps for one person your witness to non-Christians is your refusal to engage with something you feel is unclean, and this shows your moral standard as light in the world. Perhaps your witness is showing Christians aren’t all uppity moralisers who can cut loose and have fun! It’s how God convicts you and can use you.

That’s it for this series, guys! I really hope you enjoyed it. Next week, we’ll head back into our What in the World?! Series as we look toward some big stuff happening, particularly in America.

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!