

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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Ephesians—Real Reality

Selected Passages

I. Introduction.

- A. I want to introduce you to this important book in a unique way for the next few weeks. I am unsure how long this will take but I want you to view this as very important.
- B. Today we will only lightly touch on this book but I hope that when we are finished you will see that it was time well spent.
- C. First, let me give you some basic background to the book of Ephesians.
- D. Second, I want us to talk about angels and demons.

II. Background.

- A. It was written by Paul while in chains. Not actually in a prison but chained to a guard living in an apartment.
- B. It was likely not written to the church in Ephesus.
 - 1. In several of the very old and key manuscripts "in Ephesus" is not present.
 - 2. An early church leader, Marcion, speaks of this book but identified it as the letter "to the Laodiceans."
 - 3. It was probably what is called an encyclical which meant that it was designed to be sent to many churches and as each church made a copy they would insert their city's name in the copy.
 - 4. If so, then trying to connect the letter to the culture of Ephesus is not helpful and even potentially distracting to the actual meaning of the letter.
- C. It is not a letter.
 - 1. The style is not really a letter. Rather it is more in the format of a sermon, or what would be called a homily.
 - 2. This would help explain the lack of "in Ephesus" in that it would be designed for a broader use. This is why it does not have personal elements in it, mentions no one by name except his assistant, Tychicus, and gives no personal greetings to people in the end, even though we know he spent 3 years in Ephesus.
 - 3. Ephesians is not a letter in any real sense, nor was it written particularly to Ephesus in all probability. . . . Ephesians, unlike Colossians and Philemon,

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is not a problem-solving document and is not focused on the future, but rather offers a series of praises and testimonies about the nature of salvation, the unity of the church, the character of Christian marriage, and the like. (Witherington, 3)

4. At the same time I will consistently call it a letter.

D. Word of the day—Epidictic.

1. This letter is written for an Asian people and there is a style of writing that they would know and appreciate. In other words, this letter is not written in the same way Romans was written.

2. It is marked by eight very long sentences. 1:3-14; 1:15-23; 2:1-7; 3:2-13; 3:14-19; 4:1-6; 4:11-16; 6:14-20 (Witherington, 9).

3. The reason for this is that Paul is writing this letter in a very specific manner and in a specific style called epideictic. Many of his letters are polemics—making an argument and correcting error.

4. Long sentences are a hallmark of this epideictic style. In addition, this style of writing is unique in that it is not making an argument, not refuting error but rather making a pronouncement that is to be received, believed, and enjoyed.

E. When we approach Ephesians we will often approach it wrongly.

1. What I mean in this is that we come to it and refuse to read it as it is designed to be read. We turn it on its head and treat it like it is a theological treatise or a systematic theology.

2. We take out the theological truths but as we do it we also remove them from their context and we rearrange them so they fit into our system of theology.

3. There is a big picture that is painted by Paul for us to see. As we keep that big picture in view we can then look at the details and enjoy them as they fit into this bigger picture.

4. An example of this is that this unique letter has narratives (stories) within it.

a. In chapter 2 we read the story of God's victories against sin, Satan and death through Jesus. Read it sometime like you would a story and you will see that I am correct.

b. In chapter 3 we have the story of Paul's ministry and work as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

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5. Listen to a quote by a scholar who writes something painful to hear but true.

There is a definite difference between this conception of reading Ephesians and a typical modern approach to Bible interpretation. Conceiving of the task of Bible reading as the discovery of isolated principles in the text that need to be recognized, extracted and arranged in a systematic outline of theology leaves interpreters in a situation where there is no demand that they experience transformation. That is, interpreters who might be living wayward lives can happily engage in Bible reading with no change or without being drawn into a richer relationship with God and other believers. On a modern conception of the interpreting individual, the task of interpretation is relatively isolated from the rest of life—I, as an individual, can sit down, read my bible, recognize and isolate one or two truths from Scripture and get up and go on with my life, regardless of whether I ever do anything with these truths I have found in Ephesians. I may find some way to apply these things to some aspect of my life, but if I do not, there will not be any marked difference in how I conceive of my place in this world, how I conduct myself in relationships or how I play a role in society. . . . Bod does not merely aim to inform or to provide Christians with material for an abstracted theological system that I am supposed to prune and maintain in good order. God wants to radically transform communities, made up of individuals and their complex and varied relationship with on another and others. . . . There is nothing about us and our communities and the world that God is willing to leave untransformed by his grace, love and power (Gombis, 17).

- F. Understand that the book of Ephesians has an apocalyptic aspect to it.
 1. The word simply means "revelation" and it functions this way by giving us a heavenly interpretation of reality.
 2. To help you see this I want to spend the rest of our time looking at how the use of apocalyptic writing is used in Israel in the Old Testament.
 3. What you need to understand is that this style of writing is often used during crisis points. It gives an explanation of what is really going on while Israel (you can apply it to yourself here) is suffering.
 4. In other words, how can we call ourselves the "people of God" or the "beloved of God" when we are in the midst of oppression by our enemies. How can God truly be sovereign over all things while we suffer?
 5. I showed you this same thing a few weeks ago when I took you through 1 Peter 1 and why we need to rejoice even in the midst of distressing hardships and suffering.
- G. Today I want to begin to unveil for you that picture.

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1. 2 Kings 6
 - a. 8-14, the city of Dothan is surrounded by the army of Aram.
 - b. 15-20 the perceive reality and the real reality.

Francis Schaeffer gave a wonderful illustration of this idea. Essentially the universe is just a room and nothing else. Two men in the room, one a materialist and one a Christian. Years of examining everything in the room was done by the materialist. In the end he presents the Christian with man books he has written on the subject. The Christian then points out that it is incomplete.

Here is what Schaeffer writes, " Finally the Christian turns to the materialist and says, "Well, this is a tremendous work. You have really told me a great deal about my universe that I wouldn't otherwise have known. However, my friend, this is all very fine, but it's drastically incomplete."

And you can imagine this man, who has spent his lifetime pouring out his heart to do his measuring and his weighing, suddenly taken aback. He turns and says to the Christian, "Well, now, I'm shocked that you tell me it's not all here. What have I missed?" And then the Christian responds something like this: "I have a book here, the Bible, and it tells me things that you do not know. It tells me the origin of the universe. Your scientific investigation by its very nature cannot do that. And it also says nothing about where you and I as men came from. You have examined us because we, like the paint on the wall, are phenomena in the universe. You've studied something of our psychology and even given me several volumes on it, but you have not told me how we came to be here. In short, you don't know the origin of either the universe or us."

"Furthermore," the Christian continues, "I know from this book that there is more to the universe than you have described. There is an unseen portion as well as a seen portion. And there is a cause-and-effect relationship between them. They are not mutually exclusive, but are parts of one reality. It's as if you had taken an orange, sliced it in half, and only concerned yourself with one of the halves. To understand reality in our universe properly, you have to consider both halves – both the seen and the unseen."

In this sense "supernatural" is not a good word to describe the unseen portion. We must understand that the unseen portion of the universe is just as natural and as real as is the seen portion. Furthermore, the seen and the unseen are not totally separated. When we do certain things, it makes a difference in the unseen world and things in the unseen world make a difference in the seen world." (*Death in the City*, 141-2)

2. Ephesians is similar to the story in 2 Kings 6 and it opens to us the real reality
 - a. Ephesians 1:17-19.

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- (1) Notice what Paul prays for. It is very similar to what Elisha prayed.
 - (2) Notice also how Paul is not merely asking God to give us facts and truth about Himself. Rather he desires that God would transform their souls.
 - (3) Do you need that transformation? Are you more like that materialist in Schaeffer's illustration than you are like the Christian?
 - (4) We are in America where we are all doing quite well actually. Yet how many are discontent and grasping for more.
 - (5) We need this vision. We need the eyes of our heart to be enlightened so that we can resist the cloying effects of this age we live in.
 - (6) We need God to obscure our personal vision with His own, infinitely better vision. One that pulls back the curtain and shows us what real reality is.
- b. And that is what Ephesians does. If we read it rightly and we read it with a humble heart I think it will transform us by radically changing our understanding of reality.
- H. What Ephesians does is open our eyes to the full cosmic stage that includes both heaven and earth and both the seen and unseen.
1. To open our eyes requires us to realize that there are a lot more beings than we realize. A whole lot more. They are suprahuman beings. We know them usually as angels and demons.
 2. In Ephesians 6:10-18 we have the well known passage about spiritual warfare.
 3. In the Old Testament we find a common image being painted of God. He is portrayed as a warrior.
 - a. Exodus 15 celebrates the victory of God over the Egyptian army.
 - (1) He is called a warrior in 3 because He hurled the army into the sea (4).
 - (2) vs 6 we see that He shatters the enemy.
 - (3) His kingship is proclaimed in vss 1 and 18.

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- (4) And it even anticipates the temple where the people of Israel will gather to sing God's praises.
- b. This is then seen in the official hymn book of Israel.
 - (1) Psalm 24.
 - (a) This is a psalm that describes how the people were to enter the temple to celebrate and worship YHWH.
 - (b) Notice that it begins with an absolute statement about God as king and creator.
 - (c) That is not just a fact. It is in a sense a victory shout. It is Israel being instructed to shout out that YHWH is Lord over all.
 - (d) In vs 2 the statement of Him founding the earth upon the seas is a statement of the chaos that was at the beginning of creation and how God, personally, brought order and stability to it all.
 - (e) Now see the divine warrior imagery that flows from these proclamations.
 - i) He is the King of Glory.
 - ii) He is YHWH, strong and mighty.
 - iii) He is YHWH, mighty in battle.
 - iv) He is YHWH of the hosts/armies.
 - (f) Therefore we are to come to the Temple and worship Him and celebrate Him in a proper manner.
 - (2) Psalm 46.
 - (a) Here the people of Israel declare God as their place of safety.
 - (b) He is their true, divine warrior-king and He dwells with them in the Temple (4-5).
 - (c) He is the destroyer of nations.
 - (d) He is the exalted above the nations.
 - (e) He is the Lord of hosts.

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4. And this is what is going on in Ephesians.
 - a. In chapter 6:10 he calls us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.
 - b. Notice that this was first said in 1:19. These two phrases function in what is called an *inclusio*. Essentially they are bookends
 - c. In 1:20-23 Paul makes it clear that Jesus Christ is exalted over all other "rule and authority and power and dominion." Those terms relate not to earthly powers but the spiritual beings who are at odds with God.
 - d. And in 6:11ff Paul tells us to put on the armor of God so that we can withstand the rulers, powers, world forces of darkness and the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
 - e. And what Ephesians teaches us is that Jesus is already exalted over these spiritual forces that exist in this current age and that we, as the people of God, are to orient our hearts and lives around that truth.
 - f. We are to be a people in rebellion. We are to, in the power of the Holy Spirit, embrace our roles and proclaim like Israel did in the Old Testament that He is our Lord and our King. He has conquered the enemies and we live in light of that truth.
- I. Who are these powers and authorities?
 1. Three times they are mentioned in Ephesians (1:20-23; 3:10; 6:10-18).
 2. They are not just something Paul came up with, nor are they ideas unique to the New Testament world. They have a very strong Jewish history .
 3. These were beings, created by God, who were in rebellion against God. Their job was to oversee humanity and to ensure the righteousness and justice prevailed. But they rebelled and instead drive and push the nations to evil, injustice and chaos.
 4. We don't have a clear picture of everything about them in the bible but we do have many places that make mention of them that helps us get a sense of them.
 5. Deuteronomy 32:8-9.
 - a. Part of a song Moses made the whole nation learn.

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- b. Here is where a complex sermon gets more complex. If you have the NASB or NIV it reads at the end of vs 8 "the sons of Israel." But if you have the ESV then it reads, "the sons of God."
 - (1) This is due to their choices in Hebrew texts. ESV is likely the correct one. It is interesting that in the LXX it reads "angels of God."
 - (2) That phrase, "Sons of God" always, in the Old Testament, refers to angelic beings (both good and evil).
- c. What is going on in this passage is that Moses is saying that all of the nations that exist or ever existed He placed archangels over them. In other words, there are angelic beings appointed to each nation.
- d. We see an example of this in Daniel 10.
 - (1) In chapter 9 we see Daniel making a prayer of confession on behalf of Israel. Gabriel, the archangel, came to him in a vision and gave him instruction on what was to come with the Messiah and the end of times.
 - (2) Now three weeks later, while he is still mourning over the vision (2-3) and Gabriel again comes to him. Notice what he says in vs 12-13 and try to get your head around it.
 - (3) Then read vs 20-21.
- e. What you have in this passage is what is going on all over the world. These angelic powers at war. They are all created by God and subject to Him.
- 6. Psalm 82 shows us a bit more about them and their responsibilities and failings.
 - a. They were to promote true peace (shalom), well-being and justice but they don't (2-5).
 - b. Because they did not obey God they would be judged (6-7).
 - c. Notice how they are referred to as "gods." This is not uncommon in the Old Testament.
 - (1) There is only the One True God. But these beings created by God are also referred to as gods. In the New Testament they are called powers and principalities.

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- (2) Again we see this in Psalm 29:1.
 - (a) The ESV again does a better job translating. But literally the Hebrew is " **יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ** " which is "sons of God" again.
 - (b) Now, what is going on in this Psalm? David is telling the angelic beings, both good and bad, to do proper worship and homage.
 - (c) Why? Because He alone is the Most High God, He is their creator and sustainer as well.
- (3) Also Psalm 96:4-5.
- (4) 1 Kings 20:23-30.
- (5) Genesis 6:1-6 is the great rebellion.

III. Conclusion.

- A. Next week I want to continue to develop this idea of the angelic world and how it affects us.
- B. How do we apply this? What is the take-away for each of you.
 1. I pray that God will begin to open your eyes to the reality of these beings, that they are at war again the Church of God.
 2. Ephesians 2 helps us here. If you are a Christian. Then vss 1-2 are no longer true. But a whole world is defined by Satan and they are blind to it for the most part.
 3. We have been richly saved the rest of the chapter makes clear.
 4. And now we are called to live a life that is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in direct rebellion to the god of this age.

Small Group Questions

- What stood out to you in this sermon? Where were you challenged to perhaps adjust your thinking?
- In all honesty, how often are you considering the reality of the spiritual world and these forces?