

## Ephesians – Living in Sync with Reality Part One

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### Alternate Versions of Reality

At the debut of the ballet ‘The Rite of Spring’ by Igor Stravinsky, a riot broke out in Paris. The music was so violent and bombastic it led the crowd to react with violence.

Riots are an expression of communal anger and anger is a boundary defense. Whether over politics or sports, riots are about more than just our opinions; they’re about what we think is real.

In Acts 19, we read of a riot in the city of Ephesus. Paul’s preaching and the power of Christ’s name caused a mass revival that upset the social and economic balance of Ephesus that led to a riot.

These Expressions of violent anger and the lines it draws between groups are an expression of our competing visions of reality. And, increasingly, our world is becoming a place where we can’t even begin to agree on what is real.

Ephesians is a book about reality and living in sync with it.

### Ephesians: One of Paul’s Greatest Hits

The *who, what, when* and *where* of Ephesians:

**Who:** The Apostle Paul.

One of Christianity’s biggest haters who was knocked off his high horse by a vision of the risen Jesus to become Christianity’s most prolific missionary and church planter.

**What:** Ephesians is not a book. It’s a letter. Most likely a general letter to be circulated among the churches of the first century.

**When:** Most scholars believe Paul wrote Ephesians from prison in Rome 61-62 AD.

**Where:** The oldest manuscripts of Ephesians 1 do not include ‘in Ephesus’. Our oldest copies of Ephesians have no address.

So, Ephesians is Paul's most general letter, and therefore his most contemporary. If Paul didn't know you, this is what he'd want to say to you.

It's for this reason that if you want to know Paul's theology best, Ephesians is most likely the first place you should turn.

## **This Present Darkness**

What's wrong with the world?

The political left tells us its our broken systems of capitalism and materialism leaving people impoverished or left to racist, sexist agendas.

The political right focuses on personal responsibility and bring order from chaos.

Both miss a large aspect of the problem. In Ephesians 6:10-13, Paul tells us our battle is not with flesh and blood but with the 'rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world and spiritual forces in the heavenly realms.'

Which leads to our first core tenet of the Christian reading of reality in Ephesians:

*The world is moved in part by forces we cannot see and cannot fully comprehend or control.*

John Mark Comer in his book *Live No Lies*, says the way evil works is like this:

Deceptive ideas from the Devil and His minions play to our fleshly desires and end up becoming systematized in our sinful human systems.<sup>1</sup>

So, dark spiritual forces work by spreading lies. Jesus confirms this when he says:

"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

**– John 8:44**

The devil is a liar. He spreads false ideas.

Are ideas that important?

Well, what is communism or capitalism or fascism? An idea. What is satanism, that cult down the road or that radical group that wants to kill another people group? An idea.

Put succinctly by Dallas Willard:

People are fully at the mercy of their ideas.<sup>2</sup>

The greatest truth of this spiritual warfare, however, is that the war has been won.

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<sup>1</sup> See John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*.

<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Allure of Gentleness*, pg. 17.

## **Christ over the Cosmos**

Who is really in charge?

The book of Ephesians, more than any other book barring the Revelation of John, demonstrates the reality of the risen and ascended Christ over the cosmos. In Ephesians 1:20-21 we read that God has vindicated Jesus and raised Him ‘far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.’

Often, some Christian traditions tend to ‘leave Jesus on the cross’. They end Jesus’ influence at His redemptive sacrifice. However, in Ephesians we get the clearest reminder that of the unseen forces dictating reality, the risen Christ ascended to the heavenly throne is chief among them.

## **Reality: The Outrageous, Generous, and Abundant Love of God**

Most people on the internet or news are good at asking and answering, ‘what’s wrong with the world’. But here’s another question:

‘What’s right with the world?’

Why haven’t we blown ourselves up with our nuclear weapons? Why does every dictator eventually fall? Is this all a ‘happy little accident’?

For Paul, you always start with the good news. Ephesians chapters 1-3 lays out the reality of God’s gracious gift. It ends with that poetic blessing that we may grasp “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:18-19)

I recently heard a doctor say that all our organs are an expectation of something. Our lungs are expectations of air. Our hearts are expectations of blood.

When you take a person as a whole, he said, human people are an expectation of love. As a new father, I see this. My little guy was born absolutely dependent upon others in every way to the world, he would not survive without a commitment to sacrificial love from me and my wife.

And this continues into adulthood. We are always an expectation of outrageous, generous, and abundant love.

That expectation we are born with, it’s there to be fulfilled. Because the outrageous, abundant, and generous love of God is holding all things together.

## Living in Sync with Reality

If Ephesians 1-3 is about reality, Ephesians 4-6 is about living in sync with reality. At the center of that section, we read:

“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

– Ephesians 5:1

Sacrificial love holds the world together, it’s reality. So, to live in sync with reality is to be like the God who made reality.

And the greatest mystery of all this, for Paul, is that this love brings together Jew and Gentile—two groups with centuries of bad blood between them.

It’s so central to Paul’s theology, so magnificent, it’s hidden in the way he says ‘hello’:

Paul’s standard greeting is ‘grace and peace’. Grace or ‘*charis*’ was the standard Greek way of saying hello—imparting blessing or gift on the person you were speaking to. Wishing them unmerited favor.

If you were Jewish, peace or ‘shalom’ was how you said hello. You were wishing them holistic wellness in all aspects of their lives.

As Darrell Johnson puts it:

“‘Grace and peace’ to you is a multicultural greeting for a multicultural people.”<sup>3</sup>

May we be those who live the reality of this outrageous, generous, and abundant love.

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<sup>3</sup> Darrell Johnson, *Ephesians: The Wonder and Walk of Being Alive in Christ*, pg. 22.

## Discussion Questions

### Open Up

When have you ever had a conversation with someone and thought: this person is living in a different world from me?

### Dig In

#### *Spiritual Warfare (Ephesians 6:10-13)*

- C.S. Lewis once wrote:
  - “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”<sup>4</sup>
- Which of these errors do you tend towards?
- What do you wish you knew about ‘spiritual forces in the heavenly realms’?

#### *The Risen and Ascended Christ (Ephesians 1:19-23)*

- How have you previously understood the ascension of Jesus?
- As you look at your life and your difficulties, what might seeing Jesus as King on the Throne help you most in?

#### *The Outrageous, Generous, Abundant Love of God (Ephesians 3:16-21)*

- What might have our culture so biased towards the negative? How do we recapture a vision for ‘what’s right with the world’?
- How do we hold on to the reality of God’s outrageous, generous, and abundant love in our daily lives?

#### *Living In Sync with Reality (Ephesians 5:1)*

- Given all the division in our world, and even in the church, how do we live out the reality of unity in Christ?
- What would a world with God’s love as the core reality really look like?

### Prayer

Choose any of the above four sections to pray about.

- Perhaps pray for spiritual protection and endurance.
- Or for a reminder of Christ’s Kingship over the areas you are worried about in your life.
- Pray the love of God over each other.
- Or pray for the strength to love more like God loves.

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<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*