

Student 4: High Achieved

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The Historical Critical method of interpretation helps a person to understand what the person was originally writing about and why. So this means that the person reading or interpreting the text using this method will look at the historical situation that the author of the text wrote in and about. It helps the reader to understand what the author was actually trying to say, by explaining things like date of the text, where it was written, the author's identity and why they wrote what they did. The method also looks at what relationship the author had with the audience. The other method I will look at is Literary Criticism, which is looking at the meaning of the text as if it was a finished piece of literature, like a book. (2)

I will look at Ephesians 2:1-10 with these two methods of interpretation in the Catholic Church.

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians is the tenth book in the New Testament found between Galatians and Philippians. It is found in the midst of the "Pauline corpus", the collection of letters attributed to the Apostle Paul. Throughout the New Testament the word salvation can be seen many times. This letter expresses the literary form of an epistle, this is a writing sent to a person or group of people. It is usually written in an elegant didactic manner, a clear teaching. This letter was a general letter to Gentile believers, which are non-Jewish people, with a major theme of unity and reconciliation as a whole through as foundation from Christ as part of the will of the Father. (2)

Ephesians 2:1-10 can be broken into three main sections, the first that can be identified is the main problem. This is verses 1-3 where Paul informs the Gentiles how they are dead in sin and looks at their going from death to life, he focuses on the fallen man and his hopeless condition as the result of sin. This is similar to Rom 12:21 (Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals and Apocrypha, 1993) where we hear "do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good". Both lines refer to a life before Christ, and how before the coming of Christ humans were in a sinful state, finding it difficult to overcome the powers of evil. The next section is about God's Grace. This is verses 4-6, where the Gentiles are told to be alive in Christ. Paul focuses on God and his mercy in making Salvation available through Christ, and showing God is rich in mercy. The final section that this reading can be broken up into is God's Purpose. This is verses 7-10 where we read of Paul focusing attention to the purpose of salvation and praising God for his grace. (1)

Verses 1-3, "And you were dead, through the trespasses and sins"

When first reading this letter we must establish that Paul was writing this letter to the Gentiles. The first important aspect of this verse is how Paul refers to the Gentiles as "you". This can also be seen in Colossians 2:13 where we read, "you were at one time spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were Gentiles of the Law", here we see a very similar verse alerting people of the same faults. This referral of not being alive is the living without God. The Greek word for this is 'Atheoi' meaning to be without God. This is where words such as Atheism and Atheist can be derived from. (1)

Crimes and sin are the main reason Paul refers to us being spiritually dead, we can see evidence of this from the first book of the bible, Genesis, where God's first human creations committed the sin of temptation in the Garden of Eden. (3)

The sinful ways of how the gentiles lived is further described in this verse 2. They are said to be a sinful humanity obeying 'the ruler of spiritual powers in space', referring to a demonic angelic power, where evil powers are dominating the present age. These sinful ways are further talked about in Romans 11:30, "As for you Gentiles you disobeyed God in the past". Spiritual power in space, pushing and tempting us to sinful living which again is a close reference of action to the Bible's most famous recall of a devil in the story of Adam and Eve, Genesis 3. This is further reinforced in Romans 12:2 where we are informed not just to conform in the world but allow God to transform us through strong faith and then we will be able to know what is "good and pleasing to him" (God). This has direct correlation with Paul's letter as he also informs the Gentiles of how they have simply conformed in the "world's evil ways". Once again we see Paul referring to the Gentiles as "you" as opposed to the Jews because Paul was a Jew. This verse shows that the Gentiles know that God is the ruler of all, but they live in rebellious ways and chose to disobey him. (3)

In verse 3 it is the first time Paul uses the pronoun “we” meaning he too is now taking some ownership on behalf of the Jews and admitting collectively that they were weak in giving into temptations. In doing so he no longer singles out, he unites us. He wants to illustrate that all man have the potential to change from sin.

When we read “doing whatever suited the wishes of our bodies and minds”, we see it is a direct reference to the temptations of sexual sin. When we read, “were destined to suffer God’s anger”, this fits the depiction of Gentile ignorance of God which can be seen in Romans 1:18-32, Human Guilt, which outlines all the wrongdoings that are done. The word nature can have several meanings but in this versed it shows that nature is something that we can have no control over (nature of sin) and that the first choice was from God.

In verse 4, Paul emphasises God’s love for us. Swain, L. focuses on how God is rich in mercy and says, “according to Paul our salvation is not a matter of making “reparation” for sin, of “satisfying” the demands of God’s justice, of “placating his anger”. However, he instead says “It is purely and simply a matter of God’s love”. This is also seen in John 3:16, ““Much loving Kindness”, showing how God loved us so much he gave Jesus to us, illustrating his love to mankind. This verse also begins with the words, “But God’s” which indicates to us the turning point in this letter to the Ephesians where Paul starts to speak of salvation. Paul is also saying that through God is the only way to salvation. Again we see Paul using the pronoun “us” bringing us together. Paul truly illustrate God’s ‘agape’ (Greek word for love) here by showing graciousness to those consumed in sin, the same people that turned away from him. This shows that even though there was much sin against God, God made us in his image so he knew it that we were good, causing him to be generous with his mercy.

Verse 6 gives us evidence that after salvation God expresses his love for us and when we go to heaven to live with him, through his son. This is mankind experiencing liberation, to be freed from a situation that limits freedom of thought and behaviour and our sins, from God through Jesus. This reference is reinforced by Romans 6:5..., this is a clear exemplification of how we regained faith from God, through Jesus. We then begin to understand that Men can wreck the world but only God can save it, although he didn’t help us because we were good or worthy of his help but because of his goodness. The goodness is not in the recipient but the receiver and through Gods salvation he is demonstrating his power, as well as his love for mankind, in the poor, sinful situation they were in.

This is the final verse of the paragraph expressing God being full of mercy. In verse 7 we are told by Paul why God granted us our salvation. He refers to salvation as “this” in the verse but underlines how it is through Gods extraordinary greatness, of his grace and love that we were granted our salvation. When Paul says, “for all time to come” he implies that this is an ongoing gift from God providing we don’t turn away from faith like humanity did prior to the coming of Christ Jesus. This verse can be read alongside Romans 2:4.... In these two verses we are encouraged to repent. We must understand that although atonement is unlimited, salvation is not and the only way for salvation, full freedom, is through Christ. Because of this Jesus Christ is now a big part in the forgiveness of our sins. We see an example of this through Penance.

In verse 10 Paul has used all pronouns of unity such as “us” and “our”. He talks to us collectively about Gods creation of us and his plan for us. We are a product of God’s grace; our change has only come about because he gave us the ability to change. This change required the turning away from a life in which God is absent. This new transformation of humanity, people of goodwill, people who have been granted salvation, people who shall now receive eternal life is the new creation of Christ. This idea is best represented in 2 Corinthians 5:17...This is a reference to the change in humanity that has been brought about by salvation by Jesus. To conclude, Paul shows us in Ephesians 2:1-10 that salvation is something that is not granted but is available to someone if they are willing to accept it. Through Jesus dying on the cross we see the metaphorical message that we were once dead in faith but have now been resurrected.