

Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 2: 1-10) in the New Testament is a text historically written to the Ephesians, by Paul, for the people of Asia Minor, to educate these people upon the theme of salvation... The text's Literary Form is that of an Epistolary Form, which Paul used highly in his texts, as he used epistles (or letters) to teach, and advise, warn or praise communities or persons upon the message of Jesus, the Christ. Paul of Tarsus was highly educated, wrote Greek fluently and was deeply versed in the tradition of the Old Testament, yet commentators upon this text are still not sure as to Paul's authorship due to Historical and Literary Criticism as Paul was imprisoned at the time of Authorship and the style is distinctly different to Paul's natural style, thus one is uncertain to the text's composition (Bible Gateway, 2012). ①

In the text, Paul picks up on previous ideas expressed in the Old Testament and New Testament. In verses 1-3, Paul picks up on the idea of how spiritually poor humans were before the resurrection of Jesus "dead through the trespasses and sins" and also how all humans were once like these people "by nature children of wrath, like everyone else", describing the sinful condition of humanity. 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.

In verses 4-7, Paul picks up on the idea of a loving God, "rich in mercy", who by his good grace has made Catholic believers "alive together with Christ", even though previously we were "dead", now Catholics have been saved and wait for him to show the "immeasurable riches of his grace in Kindness" towards Catholics through the second coming of Christ Jesus. We hear of a similar idea in Exodus 34:6 (Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals and Apocrypha, 1993), where we hear "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness". Both lines refer to the grand capacity of God's kindness and love, due to his presence in grace. ①

In verses 8-10, Paul picks up on the idea of salvation being simply a gift from God, not the result of one's good works, but simply saved through faith in Christ Jesus, for "we are what he has made us". This is similar to that in Rom 3: 27-28 (Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals and Apocrypha, 1993) when we hear of the Pauline "works of the law" and boasting excluded by faith, meaning that salvation is entirely God's gift, not the result of human effort, rejecting works (Kieck, 1994).

There are two methods of biblical interpretation which allow the ability to derive further meaning from this text, including Historical Criticism and Literary Criticism. In terms of Historical Criticism, this is a critique of the date and place of composition, authorship (including the identity of the author and the author's method of composition), to whom the work was addressed and the circumstances that existed between the author and the audience.

In terms of Literary Criticism, this is a critique of the text as a finished piece of literature, examining use of language, style, literary genres, the unity and integrity of the text, character portrayal and interaction, plot, mood, tension and literary perspective. For this text, one can notice that Paul's style of writing and common use of language is not always present as in this text, he uses 50 sentences, 9 with over 50 words (Thielman, 2010), whereas the closest other letter, Romans, has 3 out of 581 sentences of such length. Also Ephesians contains 40 new words, e.g. 1:3 "heavenly places"; "family, or fatherhood" (3:15). 1:19 has four different words for "power" (Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals and Apocrypha, 1993). This again creates doubt as to Paul being the legitimate author of "Paul's Letter to the Ephesians" yet in the modern day these letters are the closest documents the Catholic Church has to understanding classical topics such as salvation. To look at this text as a whole, the text seems to develop upon ideas in all of Paul's other letters, constantly referring to these other texts (as shown above), yet one can infer that this seems to show Ephesians a sort of summary of Paul's ideas, potentially written by a disciple of his, which would make perfect sense seeming Paul was imprisoned at the time. Hence, both Methods seem to show the same idea: Paul may not have been the legitimate author of "Paul's Letter to the Ephesians". ③

Within the text there are certain phrases and words that again show a deeper meaning in the text. For example, in verse 2 we hear the phrase “by nature” which relates to the Greek word “physei” meaning a man’s concordance. In the context of the verse, this word gives a much deeper meaning to the text as previously we understood that “by nature” humans were beings of wrath before salvation, whereas now we can understand “by nature” to mean that without the law (torah) human beings are by nature idolaters, they worship things other than God (Kieck, 1994). Previously we had the understanding that humans acted instinctively in ways of wrath, but now we understand the influence of Paul’s relation to his audience attempting to relate his message to both a Jewish and Gentile audience.

2

Another example is in verse 10 where Paul introduces the image of Christians as God’s special creation. We hear the phrase “for we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life”. This related to the Greek word “poiema” translating to English as “we are God’s work of art”, which is actually used in the Septuagint referring to creation as God’s work.

This gives us deeper meaning to the text because not only does it relate to the Old Testament ideas and ideology, but it affirms that Catholics both in the modern day and for those believers that Paul was writing to, that both Jew and Gentile are God’s creation made in his image.

4

Paul himself reiterates the ideas of the Old Testament through his text when he refers to “the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient”. Paul is referring to the devil and the “malevolent forces which inhabit all spaces” (MacDonald, 2000), which is referred to in the Old Testament in Genesis 6:5 (Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals and Apocrypha, 1993) where we hear “then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”. Here we can see this idea of an ‘evil’ presence within man which Paul having read the Old Testament during his period of writing, would have influenced Paul to touch on such a subject seeming it was relevant to his time.

2

The meaning of this text within the Roman Catholic Church is significant because it grants all followers in Christ, no matter what ethical background, hope that they will be united with Christ once again due to God’s gift of grace and kindness because of faith in him, due to salvation. For the modern day Catholic one can only wait in hope for Jesus’ coming, but this text in particular can educate the modern reader on the divine love which is offered to Catholics and the presence of God in their lives. How that there was a time when evil ruled the air, yet due to his son’s sacrifice for Catholics, salvation was granted to all his believers, no matter if Jew or Gentile, so in current times the God Catholics look to in times of strife is one who is accepting of all walks of life, as was his son.

2

In summary, Paul’s main theme of his text was salvation. He was attempting to educate the early Christian communities of how through Christ’s salvation all believers have been made ‘alive’ in Christ, as previously, they were spiritually dead (Gentiles) and were not receiving God’s grace. But after the resurrection of Christ and the freedom of sins, those who were ‘dead’ became ‘alive’ and could share in the love and kindness of God and hope to be delivered into heaven when Christ comes again. This is simply an act of God’s grace and not that of good works, as God made all Christians in his image.

2

In conclusion, it was interesting to analyse this text and understand it from all angles, critiquing effectively through Historical and Literary methods of Biblical interpretation and relation to local language of that time (Greek) and to the Old and New Testament. One can see how Paul relates this text to others in the Bible yet even though the authorship of Paul for this text is unlikely, the meaning of the text is still valid in both modern day, and to those of that earlier time.

3

The wider implications, which arise from my analysis, are that socially, this gives one a more realistic understanding of how the word of God was understood by its first recipients yet a testament to its endurance over time as modern Catholics can still relate to it. Historically, this text puts many other classical documents in perspective in terms of ownership as modern people cannot be sure of the authorship of certain texts. Geographically, we can see how the world has changed in terms of place names and country names, and personally, as a Catholic myself, my understanding of Jesus Christ and God comes to a much higher level.

4