

Wanted: Dead or Alive. Signed: God

Ephesians 2:1-10

How can this study help me?

Jesus said on one occasion that those who are forgiven little love little (Luke 7:47). If you want to love Jesus with all your heart, soul and strength you must develop a deeper appreciation for what you have been forgiven. It is very important that we never forget what we have been forgiven. This will preserve us from arrogance, pride and elitism.

What is going on in this story?

There is no way this section of Ephesians can be understood apart from creatively visualising life in Ephesus on the basis of Acts 19:11-41. There we are told about a failed exorcism, miracles associated with Paul's clothing, wholesale destruction of valuable spells and the profitable trade surrounding the lascivious worship of Artemis. All things considered the impact of the news about Jesus on this town is unique in Acts. Ephesus sounds like a place obsessed with the manipulation of the spiritual. You don't have to look very far to find people obsessed with manipulating the spiritual today.

In fact, the indictment of 2:1-2 could easily be applied to our society. If this is true then the message of mercy and grace is what we need to communicate as well.

God's indictment against the Ephesians

In baseball, the umpire says to the batsman "Three strikes and you're out!" So Paul identifies that God had three indictments against the Ephesians.

1. They were "dead" (2:1). How else is this condition described in 4:18, 19? If you are "dead" spiritually, according to Paul what does really mean? (Rom 8:6-8)
2. Their "transgressions" (failure to follow the right path) and "sins" (failure to meet a standard) stood against them. When the Ephesians tried to control their destiny by magic spells what wrong path had they followed? (cf., Rev. 21:8) When the Ephesians worshipped Artemis what standard had they failed to meet? (cf., Acts 17:24, 25)
3. Paul says that previously, "like the rest" of the world, the Ephesians willingly "followed" another path. For the first time in the book we are introduced to Satan and spiritual powers beyond our comprehension (cf., 6:12). Why would this wilful choice generate God's "wrath"? (v. 3 cf., Romans 1:18-22)

- Did you notice the change in pronouns between verses 2 and 3? How could Paul, a religious man, think he and his friends were at one stage like the Ephesians? (1 Tim 1:15-16)

God who is rich in mercy

- Within one breath Paul talks about God's "wrath" and richness in "mercy" (v.3, 4). And the roots of this change are in his love, which Paul praised in 1:4, .5. There is much he presumes the Ephesians understand about how they, who once were "dead", now were "alive" and a part of Jesus' team. But what exactly is mercy? (cf., Rom.5:8, 10) Can you show mercy to good people? (cf., Titus 3:5).

What about us here and now

- Phillip Yancey says "We cannot do anything to make God love us more. And we cannot do anything to make God love us less." Why do you think he means and why is it important to include both sentences?
- Can you describe the change in God's attitude and the reasons in one sentence?
- When John Newton wrote "Amazing Grace" he was very conscious of his past as a slave trader. How can you recapture the reality of grace in a new way?
- Ric Warren's book about a Purpose Driven life makes much of 2:10. What are you praying for as a result of experiencing the grace of God?

So what can I do?

- If you really felt this was how God saw our society, what would it inspire in you?
- Can you remember the first verse of "Amazing Grace"? are there any connections between the words and this part of Ephesians? Do you think John Newton's description of himself as a "wretch" was unnecessarily hard?
- How do you find out what "good works" God has prepared for you?