



This week at Magdalen Road Church we continued our Autumn series in Ephesians as we reached chapter 2. Due to the number of people at church at the moment who are not Christians, this was a deliberately outward looking sermon, as the passage raised the opportunity to deal with some common misconceptions of the Christian faith - we looked at 3 that the passage particularly addressed.

1. Isn't following Jesus just a crutch for the weak?

Paul's answer? No. It's life for dead people. It's not as if we're weak and in need of a pick-me up, it's as if we're dead and in need of new life. v1-3 clarify our status without Christ; dead in transgressions and sins (nb see v4v18 here to explain death), slaves to the world and the devil and deserving of God's righteous wrath. It is not good news. Until we reach v4. Because God is loving, kind and merciful so He makes us alive with Christ. As we trust him, so we are included in him – his death is our death, his forgiveness – ours. The problem is far worse than us just being weak and needing a crutch to get help us get through as cray world – it's that we need to be brought back to life.

2. Isn't following Jesus just about being good to make God happy with you?

This is very common and shows the natural bent of our human hearts towards works – even as Christians who 'get' grace we slip into thinking God loves us more if we're good. But Paul is clear it is all about and only ever about grace (see v5, 7, 8 etc). In Ephesus, both sides of the church would have likely got this wrong – the Jewish background believers had almost all lost sight of grace by the rules and regulations of the law, the gentile background believers would have a mindset of magic and incantations – "if you perform these then perhaps...". But grace says it's done. And although it's done – works do still have a part to play v9-10. "We're not saved by works, we're God's work to do his works". We *are* to live a certain way, but not to earn anything, or even payback anything, but simply because we're loved and a part of his family now.

3. Isn't following Jesus just for one kind of person?

In the final half of the chapter Paul explains again what God has done in re-uniting a divided humanity. Our rebellion against God, our sin does not just muck up our relationship with Him, but also with one another – and so God's plan in the church is corporate. The Law, which was meant to be good and reveal God's character had become much more about who's in and who's out; hence you have 2 sides – the uncircumcised and the circumcised (v11). But in Jesus the 'dividing wall of hostility' has been removed and the two have become one. We in the church are a grainy glimpse of what will be when all us

united under Jesus. And yet very often churches are just one kind of person – because of our sinful hearts that enjoy comfort we like to be among people who are like us, and so are left unchallenged by the diversity of the body of Christ, and dampen the glory and lessen the plan that God has for world. We are meant to be diverse. With diversity comes challenge as the authenticity of our Christian faith and the genuineness of our love for other believers is tested.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

What misconceptions about the Christian faith have you come across? Which do you think are the most common?

1. Isn't following Jesus just a crutch for the weak?

In what ways does Paul explain the natural state of those without Christ?

Why does he describe them like that?

Do we believe that?

Where does hope come from?

2. Isn't following Jesus just about being good to make God happy with you?

Why – from these verses – is that misconception false?

What part does works play?

What does 2v10 mean? How does that make you view your week ahead?

3. Isn't following Jesus just for one kind of person?

What's the danger of splitting the chapter at v10, rather than looking at the whole flow of argument?

From v11-22, how does Paul describe the practical function of the law?

What has Jesus done to the law? How?

What does this mean for the kind of churches we ought to see?

Why does this matter?

Why is this very often not the case?