

The Portrait of the Readers Prior to Their Coming to Faith According to Ephesians *Christoph Stenschke, Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, University of South Africa*

Abstract

On a number of occasions the Epistle to the Ephesians comments on the status and behaviour of the readers before coming to faith and/or explicitly contrasts the former life of the predominantly Gentile readers to their present existence in Christ. These statements indicate how the Epistle sees Gentiles prior to their coming to faith and the differences made by conversion and allegiance to Christ. While this portrayal is by and large bleak, there are also some noteworthy statements that the Gentiles are not excluded from God's concern. The article then describes the functions of this portrayal in the argument of the letter for ethical admonition and the unity of the church. These functions have an impact on the absolute way in which the readers' preconversion past is characterised and need to be considered. A final section relates the portrayal of the readers in its original context to some the challenges of the church in our own day and age.