

# Christ the King Sunday – Epistle

War and Peace

Colossians 1:11-20

Christ the King (Proper 29)

Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

Col 1:11 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully <sup>12</sup>giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup>He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. <sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup>for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

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**DIAGNOSIS: Total War**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Can't We All Just*

### *Get Along?*

As the world's peoples and governments collapse ever deeper into total war, the gutsy question must once again be asked, "What is God doing?" [The question was proposed by H. Richard Niebuhr in *The Christian Century* (May 1942), "War As the Judgment of God."] A precise analysis of the present situation is not nearly as important as its deeper meaning. The civilized world is right to defend itself against terror, for the sake of life itself. But those who engage in war as a quest for civil justice do so, under God, not absolutely but under the divine judgment as articulated by the Fifth Commandment. [Any distinction to be made between "kill" and "murder" only justifies war as a simple matter of self-defense.] In any case, war cannot be confused with that godly love demonstrated by "the Son . . . the image of the invisible God" (1:13, 15).

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *We Have Met The Enemy and He Is Us*

We are not the only enemy, to be sure, but Pogo's dictum is fair warning that we (the relatively good) are not guiltless before God, even when we ourselves are the instruments of God's wrath upon those whom we would kill in war (the relatively bad). There is more than enough wrath to go around! But like all other creatures of God, the fault lies deep within, in the dark recesses of the heart beyond our ability to see, where sin dwells. We, too, are enemies of God transfixed by "the power of darkness" (1:13). And until we are "made strong" (also "prepared," "enabled" and "transferred" by God, 1:11-13) to confront and to confess this inward truth (in biblical terms, to repent), we remain in the dark and cannot begin to answer the question, "What is God doing?"

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** – *At War with God*

The truth is, we simply do not and cannot trust that God is our Father; nor, indeed, do we even want to! For to do so means

death. Having no strength of our own, either to confess our sin before God or to repent, the war within us will inevitably consume us. Because “what God is doing,” in us and all around us, is demonstrating the consequences of war with God (in biblical terms, wrath and unbelief) which comes upon us, incrementally but with utter finality, as a sentence of “death” (1:18). Because we are children of sin and our ultimate enemy is our creator, we are in a war that we cannot win. Our deepest need, well beyond our own abilities, is to be “rescued” (1:13) from sin and “reconciled” (1:20) to God.

## **PROGNOSIS: Total Peace**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *At Peace with God*  
Surprisingly, beyond all human ability or imagination, God has demonstrated a new reality for us in Jesus Christ, “making peace through the blood of his cross” (1:20). The Hymn to Christ (1:15-20) establishes the divine origin of “what God is doing” in Jesus. It is not possible to comprehend the love of God for us displayed in the crucifixion of a first century Jew. Nonetheless, “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things” (1:19-20). The cross “makes peace” (1:20) with God because in the death of Jesus the wrath of God is totally expended, not upon us but upon the Son. As “the firstborn from the dead” (1:18), the “beloved Son” (1:13) embodies in himself the new reality or “kingdom” (1:13) open to all who, in faith, likewise die. In the strongest possible terms, with accolades and prerogatives reserved for God alone, the Son is qualified to act for God; hence our everlasting “joy, giving thanks to the Father” (1:11-12) and our celebration of “Christ the King.”

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** – *Inheriting Humility*

Now that we know, by faith in the Son, what lies beyond death

(the “strength” and “inheritance of the saints in light” 1:11-12), our war with God is ended. Such faith is total peace with God (Christ having us and we having Christ), and the inheritance we have received is the selfsame humility or spirit as the Son, the image of God (1:15). Indeed, our strength is in Christ alone “so that he may come to have first place in everything” (1:18).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *What Do We Do Now?***

With the humility that comes with faith, we “are made strong . . . prepared to endure everything with patience” (1:11). Now that we are no longer at war with God, we may brave the other question posed by Niebuhr in the same article cited earlier, “What do we do now?” Even though we may be instruments and vessels of godly wrath in a world at war, for us humility and godly love prevail. We have been made strong, not for worldly things, but to bring Christ into the world bodily, even if in a hidden way. We have been made strong to enter into the sufferings that entangle others so that it also entangles us; made strong to bear one another’s burdens; made strong to disregard our own lives (because they are dead in Christ already) in favor of others; to be “little christs” (Luther); to be the hidden presence of God’s mercy; to be crucified to the world; to be God’s children in the midst of hell. Of such love, God is well pleased (1:19-20).