

# **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Epistle, Year A**

SOMEONE IS ALWAYS BETTER

Philippians 3:4b-14

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Peter Keyel

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

DIAGNOSIS: Our righteousness is not good enough

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Confidence in the

## Flesh

Paul writes to people who regularly do what is right. They are what we might call “good people.” They seem to have a good track record of telling right from wrong, and generally do what is right. They follow the rules and seem reasonably proficient in doing so. However, Paul can beat them at this game. He followed the rules, to quite an obnoxious extent.

### Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Self-righteousness

Paul is speaking about something that is near to his heart here, since in the past he has agreed with the Philippians’ approach to life. What he knows, and is trying to persuade his audience of, is that focusing fully on the rules ends up placing one’s faith in the rules. That “confidence in the flesh” leads to self-righteousness. Paul was good at self-righteousness, probably better than the Philippians.

### Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Trust in the Law

The problem with self-righteousness is that it is not God’s righteousness, and no matter how stellar, it will never measure up to God’s righteousness. Our self-righteousness will not save us from death—as Paul points out when he dismisses his own track record and self-righteousness as “rubbish.”

### PROGNOSIS: Christ’s Righteousness Is Good Enough

#### Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Trust in Christ

However, there is a righteousness that will bring the resurrection from the dead: Jesus. Christ brought God’s righteousness to sinners, for which he was crucified. Yet, this righteousness could overcome even death, as evidenced by Jesus’ resurrection.

#### Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): God’s Righteousness

This righteousness is what Paul proclaims for the Philippians, as an alternative to their prior law-righteousness. Paul says this righteousness comes not from works but “because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (v. 12). This righteousness is received with faith that God’s righteousness is ours freely.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Confidence in the Spirit

The result of this new faith-based righteousness is that as good as the old way seemed, it is seen as loss in comparison with the value of righteousness in Christ. Further, this righteousness energizes and drives Paul forward to push him on for the ultimate goal: “the heavenly call of God” (v. 14).