

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

IN CHRIST, UNITED WE STAND

Ephesians 1:3-14

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10)

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

DIAGNOSIS: Divided We Stand, Without a Plan

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Us vs. Them*

Old, bad habits tend to creep back into our lives when things go wrong. And things were going wrong in the Ephesian community: Christ had not returned, as Paul had preached he would; Paul was now in prison-a public scandal and congregational embarrassment; members of the church were beginning to feel discouraged, some were leaving the church, and those who stayed were riddled by a sense of purposelessness. If Christ wasn't going to return soon, how were they to live? Worse, this community of Jewish- and Gentile- Christians needed to know, how were they going to live with each other? With all this stress on the community, they began to fall back into old ethnic rivalries of "us versus them" (Jews versus Gentiles).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Dried Up*

Their rivalry merely concealed a deeper faith dilemma, the Ephesians weren't sure they could trust their pastor's preaching and, more importantly, God's promises. Their faith had dried up and shriveled while they were waiting. Perhaps, they thought, Jesus wasn't going to return for them at all. Maybe they had trusted empty words.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Purposeless, Unforgiven, Deprived*

Why invest in empty promises? The Ephesians must have wondered. Deprived of any sense of purpose, deprived of the assurance that comes with trusting God's promises, they drifted-drifted from the church, and drifted away from the gift of forgiveness that Christ had given them. And, living outside the forgiveness of Christ left their community Godforsaken.

PROGNOSIS: United We Stand, With a Plan

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Destined, Forgiven, Lavished*

The Ephesians had deprived themselves of the pinnacle of God's promise: Christ may not have returned yet, but he had still died and been raised for their sake. And the good news of Christ's death and resurrection had laid claim on every one of-and all of-them: Together they were destined for a whole new life and way of living (v. 5), they had been forgiven through Christ's blood (v. 7), God had lavished them with the riches of his grace (v. 8).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Saturated*

Faith can only be constituted (or, in the Ephesians case, reconstituted) by a living Word which claims the hearer, and which the hearer (in turn) claims. So Paul preaches them that living Word for the sake of reconstituting faith: Things were not as they had been before Christ died for them: Whether Jewish- or Gentile-Christian, all were "in-Christ" Christians. Each had been destined for adoption in Christ; each was called to live under the household management plan of God (v. 10, *oikonomian* in Greek), each was marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit (v. 13) through baptism. Their source of salvation was the same, their destiny was now the same.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Us and Them*

The promises of Christ do not distinguish between Us and Them. Instead, the promises of Christ call Us and Them forward, into a future that is for both Us and Them. So Paul assures the Gentile Christians (and reminds the Jewish Christians) that the word of truth and gospel of salvation is for "you [Gentiles] also" (v. 13). Worthiness to stand before Christ depends on Christ himself, and not old ethnic or cultural distinctions. In fact, God's new household management plan depends on Christ breaking

down the walls of hostility that have separated them for so long (2:14). And, with a faith reconstituted by the promises of God, the Jewish and Gentile Christians could look forward to Christ doing exactly that. And maybe, just maybe, they could begin to live toward that common future together.