

# Fourth Sunday in Lent

## FATE-BASED ORGANIZATION

John 3:14-21

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Analysis by Marcus Felde

“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

16For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

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*Author's Note: I hope customary readers of our Sabbatheologies will forgive me for using this one as a sort of refresher course in what a Sabbatheology does.*

This pericope clearly includes all six of the steps in a

Crossings-style exegesis. There is something to put in each of the six boxes, if you are accustomed to that way of looking at the process.

At each of three levels, the text juxtaposes “bad” and “good” using translucent terms. And it links them together so they make sense.

On the surface, and most obvious to the world, there is a difference between bad and good behaviors. This text calls them “evil deeds” and, significantly, “deeds done in God,” or “what is true.” The latter phrase has been translated many different ways into English.

But the text also spends time on the internal issue of what kind of heart moves us to those deeds. The terminology it employs is “love the darkness” and “love the light.” Loving the darkness is also called hating the light.

Finally, a distinct fate is attached to each of these sets of “loves and deeds.” Those who love the darkness and do evil deeds “are condemned already.” Those who love the light and do the truth “are not condemned.”

So, there you have it. Deeds, love, and fate (in the sense of ultimate outcome) are inextricably linked to each other. On the one hand. And on the other.

The movement, Crossings-style, goes like this:

1. Doing evil	6. Doing the truth “in God”
2. Loving darkness	5. Loving the light
3. Condemned already	4. Not condemned

When we dwell in the left column, and who doesn’t, we are “at” levels 1-3 simultaneously. Still, the logical process of

diagnosis leads us from the presenting symptoms in 1 to ultimate outcome, or fate, in 3. In the outer darkness of condemnation, which we enjoy already (if you can really call that enjoyment) we are not awaiting final judgment. The gavel has already fallen. We “are condemned already.”

But lo, Salvation! God so loved us (here is the game-changer) that he gave his only Son, so that those who are “condemned already” but now believe in Jesus may not perish but have eternal life. This shift, which occurs on all three levels, is a movement at the bottom, from 3 to 4. “God so loved.” God’s love is the tractor, the forklift. When we organize our way of speaking about these topics, the most important rule is that it is God who saves.

On the right hand side, the priority of credit is entirely God’s. But people who are on the right, are there in deed and love and fate, all together, not one at a time. God saves; we believe; we live/love “in him.”

If you organize your thinking around the deeds of people, you probably think that “it’s all about” getting people to change their behavior. If you are more subtle, and think “it’s all about” faith, you probably coax, wheedle, and inspire people. Or at least try. If you are a fate-based thinker-and I’m not talking about karma, puhlease-then “being condemned already” or “not being condemned” is where you do your heavy theological lifting, and you are more likely to proclaim “Christ crucified,” per the premier homiletics textbook, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.

“Prefer power,” Pastor Firebrand, and you will attempt to force people directly from Step 1 to 6. “Desire wisdom,” Reverend Simpatico, and I am sure you eschew that in favor of attempts to move people’s hearts, so they love (and trust in) the right thing. But since all we are actually licensed to proclaim is

“Christ crucified,” our proclamation should consistently refer to the “Son of Man who was lifted up” to be the means of our crossing from death to life, from condemned already to not condemned, from loving darkness to loving light, from evil deeds to doing the truth in God. For [some types] demand signs and [other types] desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the former and foolishness to the latter, but to those who are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness-giving his Son-is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness-giving his Son-is stronger than human strength. The Good News is about what God has done, and John 3:16 says it pretty nicely.

If that isn’t clear enough, read the Second Reading for the day, Ephesians 2:1-10. “But God . . . made us alive.”