

Holy Trinity

THE TRINITY IS CODE FOR THE GOSPEL NAME OF GOD: THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

John 3:1-17

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Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, and no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, and no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 11"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14And 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. 16"For 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. 17"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

DIAGNOSIS: Wrong

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Right*

A leader, as was Nicodemus, has power. He has the taxes of the people as the source of his pay. His leadership and vision for his kingdom is shaped by the law of God, but that law was also used for the leaders' own advantages. ("For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother' and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God)- then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this." Mark 7:10-13) Nicodemus thought he had the kingdom of God and that he served in the kingdom of God. He was doing what God wanted, the highest assurance that he was right. To be right also means that one's relationship with God is right, and being right is the basis for one's relationship with God and others. But when Jesus did those signs (changed water into wine and cleared the temple while promising to build a new one in three days) Nicodemus had to learn how Jesus fit into his kingdom of God. Jesus did not use his signs for his own advantage but for the benefit of the people. And those signs replaced the law of God with Jesus' forgiveness as the way to relate to or serve God.

Each person has their own kingdom and their way of being right. Hard work is a way to be right. Doing everything one can for one's children and their sports is a way of being right. Having fun, getting drunk, admiring the celebrities, and having moral outrage on moral issues are ways to be right. Again, if one is right, then one's relationship with God is right, or one's relationship with one's children is right. All that matters is being right.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Right?*

Jesus offers Nicodemus a new kingdom to live in, a kingdom that one is given by being born from above, which is to be born to new life through the death and resurrection in Jesus. But not just born to new life, but born to a new way to relate to God, relating to God through Jesus instead of through doing what is right. The new way to relate to God, and thus to each other, is mercy, love, forgiveness, the gift of being good, instead of doing what is right and being judged on one's performance and punished for failing to do what others think is right. Nicodemus had faith, just as all people have faith. People have faith in their kingdom and their way of being right. People talk of "This is what I think is right." People do not talk of "This is what I have faith in; this is what I have set my heart on." [So when preaching for faith, the preacher needs to use words that show people what they have their hearts set on, or what people think on, or what people think is the best thing to do, the right thing to do. Their word for faith is "think" or any other word that the preacher hears people use. After all, why do we do what is best for our kids? Because we have faith in that way of living.] But even though faith is not a word used daily or known to be a part of daily life, faith is always part of what people do. And as faith is trust in a promise, the promise people trust is, "Do this and you will be right." All that matters is being right.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *When Rightness Is Wrong*

There is a problem with having your own kingdom based on being right according to what you think. That problem is that all such kingdoms are judged on how well you did what was right. If a person at any point does not do what is right, they have failed. They are condemned. They are not right. When one is not right, then all relationships say you are not right. That alienates people from one another and from God. Trusting rightness, being right, is to trust a god that is not the God who created us. So, to trust what is right is wrong. And the system of rightness demands punishment for wrong. Death is the final punishment, God's final say on those who trust the false god of rightness. Death says we are not right with God.

PROGNOSIS: Right

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Wronged to Accomplish the Right*

God gives Nicodemus (and all people) Jesus. God gives all people Jesus on a cross. Jesus on a cross is on the throne of his kingdom. God promises us to make us right with God because Jesus died for us, so that all who "think" Jesus is "right" have a relationship with God now and forever (eternal life). In Jesus, God's kingdom is not about judging and condemning. God's kingdom is Jesus laying down his life for us. God's kingdom comes as Jesus' welcomes tax collectors, prostitutes, parents who neglect their kids, abusers, murderers-all those who have not done what is right according to God. God's kingdom in Jesus is mercy, forgiveness, and the declaring all people are good for the sake of Jesus who died for them. To be good, accepted, loved, as a gift, is grace. Our relationship with God is based on Jesus, not on our being right. It is the new way to be right.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *To Make Us*

Right

Jesus makes his promise to Nicodemus (all people). Jesus promises eternal life to us. Eternal life is not just life forever, but life in relationship with God, a relationship with the characteristics of mercy, forgiveness, declaring us good. Contrast that to relationships in the former kingdoms, for they are not based on mercy and forgiveness, but are based on the conditions that one do what is right first and then you get accepted. The former relationships always use judgment to determine if we have done what is right. So there is no love, no trust, just conditionally accepting each other until we don't want to anymore. Jesus promises us his mercy and love, his welcome of us as a gift, and the Spirit blows trust into us. The Spirit only acts through the Promise of Jesus, because the only way we know and trust God's welcome of us is through Jesus' Promise. The Spirit gives us faith in Jesus, who is our relationship with God now and forever. Faith in Jesus is how our new relationship with God functions. Faith in Jesus makes our relationship with God good, one of peace and comfort, and no fear of being judged because of God's perfect love for us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : So that We Can Be Right with Each Other

There has been no specific talk of Trinity in this Sabbath theology. The Trinity is usually spoken of as a description of God, a teaching we have to believe in order to be right in our faith, that is, right in our relationship with God. For example, the constitution of the ELCA in its section on Confession of Faith (Chapter 4, as if in fourth place of importance) states that this church "confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" as if it is the chief article of the ELCA's faith, as if everything else is based on it. The Christian faith has one chief article (teaching) and only one, not one plus others not as important. The one chief article is

the promise of Jesus to justify us by his dying and rising for us. In that one chief article the Trinity happens. God sent his Son to die and rise as the reason God chooses to welcome us, forgive us, and to always be in relationship with us. Only the promise's power (the Holy Spirit) works faith in us, as when the father of a daughter who had just died was told not to bother the Teacher anymore, but Jesus says to him, "Do not be afraid; only believe." And the father followed Jesus to his home and his daughter was raised back to life. If Jesus had said nothing, the Spirit would have nothing to work with. The father would not have followed Jesus. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is just the Gospel name for God, not some right teaching we have to understand and agree to as truth, as if getting the Trinity right makes us right with God. Instead, now that Jesus is our relationship with God, we get to use Jesus in our relationship with others. We use Jesus by using his mercy and love toward others. We use Jesus' by forgiving others in his name (saying his name, "I forgive you in the name of Jesus."). When giving mercy and love, one cannot judge, one cannot use words that make others feel not right with you. Mercy has no room in it for greed or profit. Mercy only has room for serving others. Our kingdom is now Jesus' mercy. Mercy is all that matters.