

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

STANDING IN THE NEED OF PRAYER

Ephesians 3:14-21

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12)

Analysis by Norbert E. Kabelitz

14For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 10from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth. 19and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

NOTE: "Mystery of Christ" (3:4, 3:3; 3:5, 3:9) is the nuclear core that fissions into a cosmic vision for churchly mission crossed by the death and resurrection of Christ and energized by the "Spirit of Power" for a new humanity. I encourage you to read The Mystery of Christ and Why We Don't Get It by Robert Farrar Capon (Eerdmans), Why Christian? (especially ch. 6) by Douglas John Hall; Final Account, ch. 4 by Krister Stendahl. Missiological Reflections by a Former Zealot Romans 9-11. The

latter two are from Fortress Press.

DIAGNOSIS: IN CASE YOU DON'T PERCEIVE (See) THE MYSTERY

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Not Perceiving* (3:4)

The Ephesian writer (a disciple of Paul?) is intent to instruct to this Gentile church as if to fill a vacuum about God's christological plan to create one new humanity out of a crossed Jewish-Gentile community. The means is the Cross (2:16). The result is the breaking down of walls of exclusion and hostility. The goal is a "holy temple in the Lord" (2:21). Gentile ignorance, indifference, or incomplete knowledge of this mystery leads to Gentile pride and haughtiness (Romans 11:25). Justification by faith in Romans has less to do with individual assurance of God's grace and more with how Gentiles become part of God's people (Rom. 4), i.e., "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4) and Romans 11:26, "Out of Zion. ..."

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Pride and Prejudice*

This passionate plea and prayer, knees bowed before the Father who gives us a name, the plea for inner renewal, faith, grounded in the love of Christ, suggests that where such are absent (3:14-19) something sinister fills the void—perhaps a boasting of superiority over against "Israel" that precludes the kindness of God, a not seeing, not perceiving, and a crisis of faith that results in being cut off (Rom. 11:17-24). Too often pride replaces awe (Rom. 11:20). That's because we do not know or believe the wonder of the mystery of God's cosmic plan. The consequences are devastating!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Broken by Unbelief*

Earlier reflections on this problem of failing to perceive (Rom. 11:17-24) suggest “eternal consequences” (Rom 11:22), consequences even while there is “eternal purpose” carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:11). Similar to the parable of the “Unforgiving Servant” (Matt. 18:23); note both the kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who fall (pride comes before a fall; Rom. 11:22); kindness toward you, when you continue in his kindness; otherwise, you will be cut off!

PROGNOSIS: GIFTS OF GOD CARRIED ON THE WINGS OF PRAYER

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Revealing the Mystery*

While not known in former generations (3:5) the mystery of Christ crosses the Gentile experience with “the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel” (3:6), so that the hearers become fellow heirs and sharers in the promise: in Christ Jesus our Lord we have access to God through faith in him (3:12). This access, we have previously learned, was made possible “by the blood of Christ” (2:13) who put to death the hostility (and pride) that divides. Through Christ’s cross (vertical/horizontal) “God intends to gather up all things in heaven and earth” (1:10).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Gifted by Prayer*

If we have “lost heart” (3:13) by suffering, by enduring the imprisonment of our spiritual leader, now we Gentiles are offered up in prayer for power. That prayer becomes our prayer: that Christ, rich in glory, might take over our hearts. And, Christ who is faithful, comes to dwell in our once-lost hearts; and, by the power of the Spirit, creates faith for us in him. The Spirit is of Christ and the resurrection. The Spirit gifts

us in the love of Christ, its height, depth, width and breadth. (See Lutheran Book of Worship [LBW] hymn # 88; sing it to the tune of "From Heaven Above," LBW #51.)

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Extravagant Accomplishments

Doxology. To God be the glory that through the Church the wisdom of God is demonstrated in its rich variety (3:10). Make it known! To look upon ourselves creates despair in us; but to look to him who is able becomes our empowerment to accomplish more than we can imagine.

A Fred Beuchner quote regarding the mystery of Christ and the Church illuminates this:

"The visible (institutional) Church is all the people who get together from time to time in God's name. Anybody can find out who they are by going to look. The invisible (cosmic vision) Church is all people God uses for his hands and feet in this world. Nobody can find out who they are except God... Think of them as two circles. The optimist says they are concentric (share a common center). The cynic says they don't even touch. The realist says they occasionally overlap." (From Wishful Thinking, Frederick Beuchner) This prayer for the Ephesians makes the realist view (above) possible.