

The Baptism of Our Lord – Epistle

No Partiality

Acts 10:34-43

The Baptism of Our Lord

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all. 37 That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40 but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

DIAGNOSIS: Partial

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Impartial?*

Peter was hardly impartial when it came to the Gentiles. He knew their practices were profane and unclean (10:14). So, he reasoned, neither could God look at Gentiles impartially. How could God care for those who didn't care to observe God's law? That was the advantage that the Jewish people had—knowing that God was partial toward them. They were, after all, “the chosen people.” We all like having someone who is partial toward us. Partiality makes us feel special—set apart. And, in case anyone should try to horn in on our attention, we like to keep that partial someone to ourselves—even (maybe especially) if that someone is God.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Ignorant*

But when we call others profane, the truth is, God doesn't like it (10:28). Maybe that's because our judgment underestimates or limits God's power. Worse, when we judge some as unfit for a life with God, we fail to acknowledge God's desire to be Lord of all. When we hoard God's attention—as if God doesn't have enough to go around—we act ignorantly. We fail to see that God acts—particularly in Jesus—on behalf of all. And we make Christ's sacrifice (v. 29) vain. Which means that our faith is in vain.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Uninspired/Breathless*

Such half-baked faith is un-inspired—literally; the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with it. But it's not just our faith that is dead. We too are dead—breathless, uninspired. Because we have made God (and, consequently, Christ) judge only of “those-who-are-not-us,” we overlook the frightening reality that God judges the living and the dead (v. 42), including us. In other words, by judging ourselves the only ones to whom God could be partial,

we bring judgment upon ourselves, because in truth God shows no partiality (v. 34).

PROGNOSIS: Impartial

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Inspired

But the same news that kills us gives us life: God shows no partiality (v. 34). God doesn't favor those who have the right ancestry, or those who claim greater allegiance to God's law. God makes this clear in Jesus who hung on the tree (v. 39), but whom God raised vindicated (v. 40). God will make peace with the world (Jews and Gentile, all of the us-and-thems) through Jesus Christ (v. 36) alone. Jesus is God's anointed and inspired (v. 38) proof that God shows no partiality; sinners of every make and kind find peace with God through him. This is the gift that Baptism into Christ bears: We receive Christ's impartial judgment of grace (forgiveness of sins, v. 43), while Christ takes the brunt of our partiality with him to the grave.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Witnesses

Peter understood this as he stood facing Cornelius, a Gentile, and observed that he was a God-fearing man (v. 35). And he witnessed to Cornelius about God's impartiality—known in Christ. Solomon (Proverbs 1) said it first: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." But Peter said it in a whole new way: "Anyone who fears him ... is acceptable to him" (v. 35). To love God, to be faithful to God, is to fear the unlimited power God wields to judge the living and the dead. To love God, to be faithful to God, is to witness the way God is completely impartial through the cross of Jesus Christ for us and people of every race and nation.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Impartial!

Christ impartially judges all us believers as righteous—not because we are, but because he is. And so we copy his gracious, impartial attitude. Rather than keep God's goodness to

ourselves—we take it to those whom some might think are beyond God’s reach. God has commanded us to preach Christ to all people (v. 42). And we take that “all” very seriously.