

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

Striving For Righteousness

Romans 10:5-15

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14) Analysis by Kris Wright

5 Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.”
6 But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 “or “Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? “the word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” 12 For there is not distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” 14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

DIAGNOSIS: Striving by Achievement

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – Zeal Without Enlightenment

It is Paul's heart's desire and prayer that his people, the Jews, be saved. What breaks his heart is that they love God, desire God, are zealous for God but don't understand what makes them acceptable to him. They don't understand because they haven't heard. They remain unenlightened not because the gospel has not been proclaimed, but because enlightenment is the work of the Spirit and their ears have become deaf to the Spirit's call. So, since they have not understood the righteousness of God in Christ, they are doomed to strive for a righteousness of their own. They live by the letter of the law rather than the Spirit. Though we are loath to admit it, we Christians, too often live unenlightened live-as if we have not heard the gospel. We, too, try bookkeeping our way into God's heart. We live in the half-light (and half-life) of "Christ plus," keeping our ledgers to prove our own worthiness (and usually someone else's unworthiness) and allowing Jesus to fill in where we feel we fall short. An "other gospel" is no gospel and thus we find ourselves ...

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Striving Without Believing

We think ourselves "faithful to a fault" only to find we instead have faulty faith, believing in what we can do rather than what God has done in Christ; believing in the law itself rather than Christ as the "end" of the law (either termination of the law or its fulfillment). We actually prefer earning our own righteousness to receiving righteousness by grace. Our sin and our culture tell us not to trust or value what we haven't worked for. Again and again we choose slavery to the law over freedom

in Christ. We cry out, “I believe, Lord, help my unbelief.” We yearn for God, but are left ...

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Searching Without Finding*

We search the Scriptures for eternal life but miss God’s will in Christ. We search our laws, texts and commands but find death instead. We cry out, “Who will go up to the heavens to bring Christ down or to the depths to bring Christ up.” We search high and low, round and round but only become more lost, alone in the wilderness. And God leaves us to this futile search.

PROGNOSIS: Pursued by Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Finding Without Searching*

While we have been striving, seeking for righteousness of our own, searching for God in all the wrong places, we discover that “surely the Lord was in this place and we did not know it.” He is right here in our hearts pursuing us to death and beyond, not by law to convict, but by grace to forgive. By his redeeming work, his descent and ascension, Jesus died to the law—died because of the law, which actually killed him unlawfully, and put an end to the law. Jesus is the One who takes all our separations, with God and with each other, and exchanges them for his righteousness and makes that righteousness ours. The law has, therefore, lost its power to enslave us, and by Christ’s Spirit we are set free for ...

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Believing Without Striving*

God does, indeed, help our unbelief. And faith is the response of the heart to what God has done in Christ. This faith is not the result of striving or searching or “good honest work.” It is the result of an indwelling of God’s life and Spirit in us. By this faith we are all gathered into God’s embrace, both sinners

who keep the law (Jews) and sinners who don't (Gentiles). "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Now we can believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead, and so we cannot help but go about...

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Zealously Proclaiming

Jesus is Lord! Enlightened by the gospel, we now become light. Being found, we set out to find others. By faith, we understand that the righteousness we could not achieve by law-keeping becomes ours through Jesus-God's gospel to us and for us. The message we proclaim is the story of the One who came down and was raised up. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." We are set free from striving, from searching, from sin; set free to continue the story: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."