

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

Alien Righteousness

Philippians 3:4b-14

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22)

Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

Phil. 3:4b If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee; 6as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12Not that I have already attained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

DIAGNOSIS: The Righteousness that Condemns

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Civility*

Visible creation. Everything. Time. History. Cause and effect; life and death; good and bad. Culture. We. Human love, sexuality, family, compassion, friendship. Morality. Accountability. Power, law, reason. Race, nationality, gender. The best of human endeavor . . . and the worst. Human judgments. Work, religion, appearances. “Flesh . . . member of . . . born of . . . as to law . . . as to zeal . . . as to righteousness . . . gains” (vv. 4b-7). All our hopes, all our dreams; all our failed hopes, all our failed dreams. Honesty and deceit. Civility and war. Human acceptance, joy, suffering, tragedy. Peace. Every-thing. All that matters . . . and all that doesn’t matter.

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

Invisible creation. Me. Human will. The human heart, where secrets are hidden. Loyalty, purity, absolutism, relative “confidence . . . blamelessness” (vv. 3:4b, 6). The zenith of human being. From some point of view: righteousness, legality, freedom, innocence, privilege, progress, ideology, justice, ownership. No-thing. All that we think or want to think, believe or want to believe, imagine or want to imagine, intend or want to intend, trust or want to trust. Whatever we call “God” or “Godless.”

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Judgment*

Creation, all of it . . . under judgment, under the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Preservation and destruction. God the giver; God the reclamer. Order and disorder together. Morality and immorality together. Idolatry. Sin. Death. Evil. Satan. Demonstrative judgment: the failure of human will, the futility

of the human heart, false worship, inhumanity . . . finally and ultimately, Death itself (Rom. 1:18-32). No immortality, no resurrection, no eternal soul. Retrospective judgment: “The loss of all things . . . rubbish” (v. 8). God: a stranger to us, because we are estranged from God. God: against us, because we are heart-set against God. God: our executioner, because we desire the death of God. Because we (without exception) push God away; because we (without exception) seek to crucify God: therefore God (without exception) seeks our destruction. O God, who can save us from Thee?

PROGNOSIS: The Righteousness that Saves

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Our Surpassing Value*

God the promiser . . . Lord of death and life. Sonship: trusting the Father. “Jesus . . . emptied himself . . . obedient to the point of death” (2:6-8). Why? “Because Christ Jesus has made me [and us] his own” (v. 13), taking upon himself our sin, our judgment, our death. God alone is righteous. Jesus: the faithful Son and our “surpassing value” (v. 8) because, in making us “his own,” Jesus bestowed upon us his own righteousness as beloved Child. “Therefore God gave him the name that is above every name, so that . . . every knee should bend . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (2:9-11). Having no righteousness of our own (except that which condemned us), we are now Christ’s own – thus also the Father’s own, enveloped with the righteousness properly belonging to Another, an alien righteousness . . . “to the glory of God the Father” (2:11).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Our New Faith*

God the faithful . . . trustworthy and true. As Jesus trusted his Father “to the point of death,” so also may we trust the Father. “Knowing Christ Jesus my [our] Lord” (v. 8) is “knowing” that the faithful relationship between Father and Son is

constituted by a life bound together with us, being secure in this new relationship beyond the power of death. Our new reality is a new creation, destined for glory. Our new life in Christ is no longer based on ourselves, but on Christ crucified and risen. This is what it means to say that our righteousness before God “comes through faith in Christ” (v. 9).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Our Resurrection from the Dead*

Life under the law and its righteousness (which leads to death) has given way to life under Christ and his righteousness (which leads to resurrection). Now, “I [we] want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death” (v. 10). Knowing Christ = power of his resurrection = the sharing of his sufferings = becoming like him in his death. Jesus is Christ for us only by the faithfulness of God who is able to bring life out of death. Faith’s form, empowered by God, is thus like unto Christ’s form (2:6-7). Faith-in-Christ is thus participating with him in everything, entrusting ourselves to his future: “not that I have already attained this . . . I press on . . . forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead . . . I press on toward the goal . . . the prize . . . the call of God in Christ Jesus” (vv. 12-14). May it be so for us as well.