

The Fruit Of Righteousness Through Christ

Philippians 1:3-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is the fruit of righteousness? It is not a persimmon or a kumquat, nor an orange or a tangerine. Neither is it a pineapple or a pomegranate. So, what fruit is it? It is the good fruits that are the very life of the Christian. Yes, that's what I said, the fruit of righteousness is the life of the Christian, the good fruits of the life of the Christian.

Some of you may be confused, for there are many Lutherans who have learned well what they have heard from Lutheran pulpits that it is not your good works which save you. They have learned well that Christians are saved by grace, apart from works of the Law. The doctrine of justification, by God's grace, through His gift of faith, is indeed, as Luther says, the teaching upon which the church stands or falls.

Many then are the good Lutherans who have learned that they are forgiven for their sins, and this is indeed true. They have learned to revel and rejoice in that forgiveness, as we should gladly rejoice. Some then have also learned the fine art of abusing that forgiveness. They have taken the free gift of forgiveness to mean that they can live however they please. Some have taken that free gift of forgiveness as a license to live with abandon, disregarding God's law altogether. After all, they believe, Christ died for all sin.

Your best friend calls you up and invites you out to dinner. He is celebrating a new job and a nice raise, so he says it is his treat. Out to eat that night, what do you do? Do you run up the tab as high as you can? Do you order the most expensive drinks and a multitude of them? Do you have the most expensive appetizer? Is that outrageously expensive bottle of wine necessary for that ostentatiously priced hunk of beef, slathered in a sauce you really don't like, necessary? And, although you are full, and don't normally indulge, but since your friend is picking up the tab, you order a double helping of the highest priced dessert?

Let's face it, you wouldn't do that to your friend. You would not do it for you know that your friend would probably never invite you out on his dime again if you did. What's more, you probably realize that, while your friend is being generous, there are limits which a courteous friend won't tread underfoot.

So, why do Christians tread underfoot the grace of God?

Yes, God promises that all sin is paid for – in full. Does that mean that God gives you license for free and licentious living? Since He's picked up the tab for your sins, does it mean that God says, "Go ahead, trash my Law... Be disobedient to my will... Live your life as if I do not care...?"

Indeed, God does say that all sin is forgiven. But have you considered the cost?

I have a friend who is counting down to Christmas, and I saw Christmas decorations in a store the other day. With the snow we experienced the last couple weeks, others are also wondering if it is winter, and thoughts of a white Christmas. While the world is governed by the marketing of the latest and greatest products, stores hoping to make a year's profit in the sale of gifts to be wrapped and snuggled under over-decorated evergreens, Christians will be pondering the true visitor to earth, God's gift for Christmas.

You know the story! Wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger is the Christ-child. Mary's infant son, born to free us from sins. Some do not like to hear talk about the fact that this child is born to give His life unto death – at least not at Christmas. But this is the whole point of the story. Innocent flesh wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger will be beaten and whipped, spit upon and mocked, jeered and nailed to a cross to suffer and die.

That, dear friends, is the cost of forgiveness. That is the price of your righteousness and mine.

So, how will you live? Do you trample your friends underfoot? Is it a double 100 year old single malt Scotch before dinner, to help wash down the escargot and oysters on the half shell? Do you really need the Cheval Blanc Red Bordeaux, at \$900 a bottle, to wash down the Chateaubriand? And let's face it, who really likes baked Alaska enough to want a double serving?

So, do you trample the love of God underfoot by blatant disregard for His desires for your life?

Yes, your sins are paid in full! How will you then live your life?

Paul talks, in our text about the fact that he remembers the Philippians with joy in his prayers. He compliments them! He is sure of this, that he who began a good work in them will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. He holds them all in his heart because they are all partakers of God's grace.

Paul says to them, "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

Dear friends in Christ, Paul isn't simply writing to those Christians living in Philippi in the year 60 AD, he's writing to you.

You and I know the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is why the entire Old Testament points forward to Christ. You want to know the love of God, all you need do is consider that He gave His only begotten Son to die for you, His pain and suffering on the cross.

Have you seen the wonderful colors of the northwoods autumn? God's paintbrush people will comment. Did you ever consider what God paints with? It is pointing all to Christ. It is in death that the landscape becomes vibrant with color. It is as if in these dying leaves that God screams, "you think this is beautiful? You think this shows my love for you? These dying leaves only point to the death of my Son as that which gives the greatest glory!"

Christ's sacrifice, the love of God, is why, dear friends, we desire to live lives pleasing to His holy will, righteous and holy in His sight. It is out of love for God and His gracious gifts to us that we desire to do those things which bring joy and gladness to God's heart.

Paul said so very much when he recorded God's Word for us. You and I need to take a serious look at ourselves, for we have become very comfortable in our sins. If the truth be told, if you are like I am, you do not like to hear it when I point out sinfulness. You and I don't like to repent. We like to think of ourselves as forgiven, but to think that God really demands that we amend our sinful life? To think that there is no forgiveness without works in keeping with repentance? Those are things we do not like to hear.

Though we don't like to hear such words does not mean they are not true. Therein lies the dilemma. I cannot do it! I cannot live up to God's righteous demands! I cannot live perfectly without sin!

That doesn't mean that we stop trying. And in the midst of your trying, when you realize your helplessness, then you need to hear me speak to you, "I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you, will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ, for you are all partakers with me of grace."

There is no sin for which Christ did not die. Your sins are paid in full! They are all forgiven. As Christ continues to bless you with His grace, feeding and nourishing your faith, *it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.* Amen.