

DEVOTIONS

THE FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS - CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

"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 may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." Phil. 1:9-11

As followers of Jesus Christ we are repentant sinners. We know our sin and what it caused Him. Now in repentance we are to bring forth fruit, which is fitting evidence of our repented state. As a tree planted beside a deep and flowing stream puts down its roots and gains nourishment from that stream, so we are to go deeply into the Word, the Water of Life, and draw from it the nourishment we so desperately need. As the tree once nourished, brings forth fruit, so we are to produce and not be like the barren fig tree which was then cursed by our Lord. As the tree is continually nourished by the stream, so let us be continually nourished from God's Word that in season and out of season we produce fruit and the Lord does not find us empty and barren.

In the epistle to the Philippians we look at four fruits of righteousness or as we may call them Christian virtues. These are to show in our lives as the ripening fruit is clearly seen among the foliage of a tree.

LOVE

"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more..." 1:9

This word in its root meaning and in its usage in the New Testament does not mean a mild affection. It does not mean an on-again off-again affair. There is a totality to this, a self-sacrificing, a self-effacing dedication. Jesus said that no man has a greater love than when he is willing to lay down his life for another. There is the sterling example for us to view to grasp what this love is. And we see it in its completeness in Jesus. He laid down His life willingly. He bore the humiliation, the whipping, the mocking and death itself for us. And it was not just for us. He died once for all. Whether you are friend or foe to Christ; whether you are a devoted follower of or a stranger to Christ, He died for you. This is true love to die for all of us unrighteous ones.

Paul explained what this love was to the Corinthians, who incidentally were not showing it, "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." I Cor. 13:4-7 Read over that thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians and see that virtue in fine detail and look to the cross of Calvary and see it in its stark beauty.

Paul knew of what he wrote. He had been that hater of Christ who felt in unmistakable terms the love of Christ which he in no way deserved. Paul sought to have this Christian virtue as learned from Christ a part of his life. He would travel the world over and sacrifice to share Christ's love with others. He would endure untold hardships to bring the message of 'once for all' to those bound in sin and fettered by hate.

Love is a feeling and an attitude. It is also compassion in

action. How is it with us? Do we love in word but not in deed? If that is the case then it is not true love. Do we love the Muslims who hate us? Could we bring them the message as Paul brought it to new regions? Can we show forth this virtue in our daily lives as we deal with one another, not fighting and arguing, but loving and forgiving?

HUMILITY

"Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves." 2:3

This is a tall order for anyone. When we look around us, most of those we see in authority are more like Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar swaggering about in pride over themselves and their works, than the humble Christ who trod the dusty roads of Judea with no place to lay His head. Most people will readily confess to wanting the positions of Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar rather than that of Christ. And this is exactly what is wrong with the world. It is 'me first!' It is 'I am the greatest!' It is 'I deserve the best!' They do not know how spiritually wretched pitiable, poor, blind, and naked they are.

We look at our lost condition and then look at what Christ has done for us and blush in humility. "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." Phil. 2:5-8 As Christ put others ahead of Himself, so should we. If He who is true God did it, how about us? What a contradiction for us who are vile sinners to be haughty and lord it over others who are sinners, when the Lord of the universe was just the opposite.

The tax collector in the temple is the humble one. He in admission of his guilt did not lift his eyes to heaven. He pleaded with the Lord for mercy. In readily confessing his sin, he was forgiven. The pharisee exhibited just the opposite attitude - pride.

The promise is to the humble. Humble yourselves and you shall be exalted. The warning is to the proud. Exalt yourselves and you shall be abased. We know that humility, putting others ahead of yourselves, is not the way of the world. This is seen every time we try to line up at some counter. Nearly everyone crowds ahead. Pushing and shoving to get on a bus, people do not count others better than themselves. In little ways and in big ways we see the need for humility. In little ways and in big ways do we show forth this virtue?

JOY

It is an oft-repeated word in this letter to the Philippians. Joy is a simple word, but sometimes an elusive virtue.

"Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance." 1:19

Paul wrote this epistle while under house arrest in Rome. Paul is happy. Paul knows that all things will work together for good

for him because he has been called by Christ and has the love of God in him. This is the rock-hard foundation of his joy, such that even in adversity he could and did rejoice. He did not gripe and complain and bemoan his sad plight. He did not whine questioning why God let this happen to him. He did not kid himself into thinking he didn't deserve this. He knew his sin and he knew his Savior. So this would turn out for good.

"Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me." 2¹

Joy is to be infectious. When someone laughs, don't you at least smile. And think how several together have laughed heartily. If Paul while under house arrest and facing possible execution could be happy, why not those in freedom going about their daily chores?

"Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." 3:1

This Christian virtue of joy is not just laughing. It is not just hearing a funny story and laughing. It is knowing Jesus and that He has won all for you. It is knowing Jesus as your dearest friend who is with you at this very moment and will never leave you nor forwake you. The secret of true joy is in Christ. The joy in Christ is the only happiness that lasts.

"Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." 4:1

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." 4:4

"I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me..." 4:10

If we have our joy in Christ, we will find joy in each other. If we are happy in Christ, we will find joy in daily life. If we have the resilient joy in Christ, even in adversity we can sing hymns of praise to God, as Paul and Silas did when imprisoned at Philippi. Who knows who all we may influence when we show forth this Christian virtue?

CONTENTMENT

People do not have, but they want, so they steal. People are not happy with what they have so they lie awake at night thinking how they can get another's prized possessions. People are sure that they deserve far more than they have. How horribly sinful our flesh is! All of these attitudes originate in the sinful heart. This is the opposite of contentment. Let Paul disclose to us his secret for contentment, "Not that I complain of want, for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound in any and all circumstances. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me." 4:11-13

This is definitely a secret to the world around us. They don't know it because they do not read and study the Word of God. They haven't the secret because they do not with simple child-like faith follow Jesus.

With this virtue as with all the rest one must be 'in' Christ to possess it. In Christ are hid all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. He is the source of all our righteousness and virtue.

If we want and do not have something, we are to turn to Christ. He promises to answer all our prayers. His answer may be positive or it may be negative. If he gives us the thing we asked for then it was good for us. If He withholds the thing we asked for, then it would have been bad for us. Our Lord looks out for our good even when we are not.

If we begin to think we deserve more than what we have, then look again and remember what by your sin you deserve to have. Nothing! I mean absolutely nothing. We deserve God's wrath and eternal damnation. Do you want that? In Christ we have forgiveness for all our sins, which we do not and never could deserve. With His pardon of sins He also gives us all that is good for us as we should have it according to His good and gracious will.

If we are not happy for other people that God has blessed them, then we are lacking more than just contentment. We are lacking love. And if we lack love we are hollow and empty.

Let us learn to be content with whatever our God sends from His gracious hand. Afterall, we are in Christ, what more can we ask for?

May these virtues abound in your lives as Paul sought them to be multiplied among the Philippians. Love, humility, joy, contentment - they are yours in Christ. Continue to draw your nourishment from the stream of God's Word and these virtues will be produced in your lives for your personal benefit, the benefit of others and to the praise and glory of our Lord and Savior.