

Philippians 1.9-11 Sermon / COB / 08.07.16

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** I think this whole church thing would be more fun if we had tests. At least for me, since I am the teacher. Don't you think you would study more if you knew you had a test coming up?
- We could do it orally if you like, so you would not have to write. I could call out a name or two and see what you know each week. [Do some examples.] What do you think? No? You think our attendance would diminish? I bet those who continued to come would be stronger for it though!
 - We do not have tests in church services. Yet you are tested all the time in life. Are you failing? Are you excelling? Are you just getting by with a C-? Today we are going to talk about God's plan to boost your grades over time. Let's pray and then we will get started.

Exposition

- † **[2: 1.9-11]** We are studying Philippians 1.9-11 today, if you want to open a Bible. I will have the passage in the New English Translation up on the screen as well. This is not an isolated passage, it is intimately related to the first eight verses, which we have studied the past two weeks.

Philippians 1.9-11 NET: And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight so that you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere 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.

- † **[3: Outline]** As we've seen the past two weeks, Paul follows the usual form of Greco-Roman letters by naming the writers and readers, offering a greeting, then offering a statement of thanksgiving and/or prayer. But Paul uses these forms for his theological purposes. This is not just a formal "hope you are well" part of the letter, rather it is Paul's introduction to the themes of the letter.
- Last week, we saw that as Paul expressed thankfulness for the Philippians, he reinforced the notion that their past partnership with him in the gospel mission was a good thing and he was confident that God would continue that work in them.
 - This prayer, which comes next in the letter, builds on that idea. Paul's emphasis in this prayer is that the Philippians grow to be able to discern what is right – discern which gospel is of Christ, which spiritual teachers are aligned with Christ – and having discerned this they would continue to partner with him in the gospel mission. That's his point in a nutshell. We could wrap this up now and get out early!
 - On the other hand, the way Paul expresses himself in this prayer gives us the opportunity to explore some theological concepts in the background here, things Paul would have taught the Philippians when he founded their church, and which inform what he is saying to them now.
 - So, if you will give me half an hour, I would like to talk with you about three types of sin, two types of righteousness, and a process that can transform any person from a frog to a prince. Put on your thinking caps and hold onto your hats! Here we go.

- † **[4: fruit]** The fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ to the glory and praise of God the Father is God's solution. The problem is every person in here is plagued with three kinds of sin. Test Question #1. . . Can you name them? Imputed sin, inherited sin, and acts of sin.
- **[5: Inherited]** Adam and Eve were created in God's image, to reflect his character and represent him here. When they first sinned by failing to represent God, their capacity to reflect his character was damaged through a corruption in their human nature. This corruption was passed on to their children and to their children's children and so on through the generations, and you got it from your parents. For that reason, we call this "inherited sin."
 - Because of this corruption to our human nature, some say we have a "sin nature," but that can be misleading if you start to think you have multiple natures; it is better to think of our human nature created in God's image but now corrupted, that corruption being called "inherited sin."
 - **[6: acts]** Because you are born, even conceived, with that corruption, every person commits acts of sin. Sometimes this is a willful choice and sometimes it is through ignorance or accident. You have done this, you have gone against God's will and failed to reflect his character time and again. So we are burdened with inherited sin and acts of sin.
 - **[7: imputed]** The third type of sin is called "imputed sin," which means it is accounted to you. You have this imputed sin, because God accounted to all of us the guilt of Adam when the whole human race went astray from God. Adam was the head of the human race – and he and Eve were the only two members of it at that time – so in that moment when they rebelled, we experienced the fall of the entire human race, so God declared our whole species guilty. That is sin and guilt which God imputes or accounts to us.
 - Three kinds of sin. I thought of coming off the stage and sniffing a few of you. Then I would say, "Pyoo! Y'all wreak of sin!" I fantasized about this prank. I figured Rich sat closest, and he is a kind and gentle man, so I would be safe with him. But Robert is next back, and he likes to talk about the pain he inflicted as a football player; so that thought ended my little teacher fantasy. But hey, from the safety of standing behind the pulpit, pyoo, y'all wreak of sin!
- † **[8: imputed righteousness]** On the bright side, God resolves the imputed sin problem with the grace gift of imputed righteousness: he accounted to you the guilt of Adam, but when you put your faith in Christ as your savior he accounts to you the righteousness of Christ.
- You could never in your own power be that righteous, because you were born with guilt and internal corruption in your nature, and you have committed acts of sin. But God will justify you, which means God will account you as 100% pure and righteous in his sight when you put your faith in Jesus as your personal Messiah-savior or Christ-savior, because he will impute to you the righteousness of Christ.
- † Before we go on, I have a question for you, test question #2. If God declares you to be righteous in his sight as a gift, based on the righteousness and faithfulness of Christ instead of your own, can you ever lose that justification, can you ever lose that imputed righteousness?
- No. Once you are justified and have received imputed righteousness, you are assured of your salvation forever; it is based on God's grace and Christ's righteousness and faithfulness, not your own intrinsic worthiness.
 - Can you imagine if we could lose our salvation? We would have to get saved again every day! Sometimes the children at the Good News Club will accept the gospel several weeks in a row,

because they don't understand that they only have to do it once; it sounds good again the next week! Praise God! Even though most of you are saved, you still stink of sin, so it is a good thing your salvation is secured by the righteousness and faithfulness of Christ, instead of your own.

- † **[9: sanctification]** Let's talk about another type of righteousness. As part of the salvation process, the Holy Spirit regenerates your spirit, you are "born again" in that you are reborn spiritually, to have a connection with God. Since you were born in sin with corruption, you were a dead wire, with no connection to God, but now that connection is live and you are spiritually alive for the first time.
- At that moment, the Holy Spirit indwells you. That kick starts progressive sanctification, the spiritual growth process in which you grow to become the person God created and saved you to be, one of his people, reflecting his character, willing and able to represent him in every situation of life. That's God's goal for you, that you become like Christ in character, while still retaining the unique characteristics he gave you. Progressive sanctification reverses the corruption in your nature, making you more righteous in character, so this is God's answer to inherited sin. It also is a gift of grace.
 - **[10: experiential righteousness]** As you grow spiritually, as you grow to be more like Christ, you will grow in what we call "experiential righteousness"; that is, you will be more righteous in character and start to live more righteously, to live up to the righteousness God has already given you legally. This is God's reversal of our tendency to live in the flesh with sin. He renews our mind and thereby transforms our character and thus changes our way of life!
 - So over time, you should stink of sin less and less, right? You not only will be *declared* righteous in God's sight, you actually will *become* righteous in character and start to *live* more righteously. Why, if I walked among you, I might say you smell like perfume from a thousand flower petals!
- † Let me ask you test question #3. If you are declared righteous through God's gift of imputed righteousness, and as a result you start the sanctification process in which you are made less corrupt and more righteous in character by the work of the Holy Spirit, which also is a gift of grace, does that give you any reason to boast or feel prideful?
- No. Paul wrote elsewhere [Ephesians 2.8 NET], "For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast." Results from grace bring glory to God, not to us. We had nothing to do with acquiring any of this righteousness, so all the glory and praise is due for God.
 - In fact, if you boast about your righteousness, that is an unrighteous sin! and a sure sign that you don't really understand the gospel.
 - Test question #4. If you are burdened with three types of sin and have no way to generate righteousness on your own, is it correct to think of yourself as worthless? No. You were created by God in his image, you were saved by the blood of Christ, and you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and being sanctified by him: you have incredible value to God, and you are growing more capable of serving him. It's just that we have to remember the source of our value is God by grace, not ourselves.
- † **[11: fruit]** So we have imputed righteousness which leads eventually to experiential righteousness. Now we have to ask, what is the *fruit* of righteousness Paul mentions? Are we talking about the imputed righteousness God gives us at salvation or how our way of living comes to exemplify

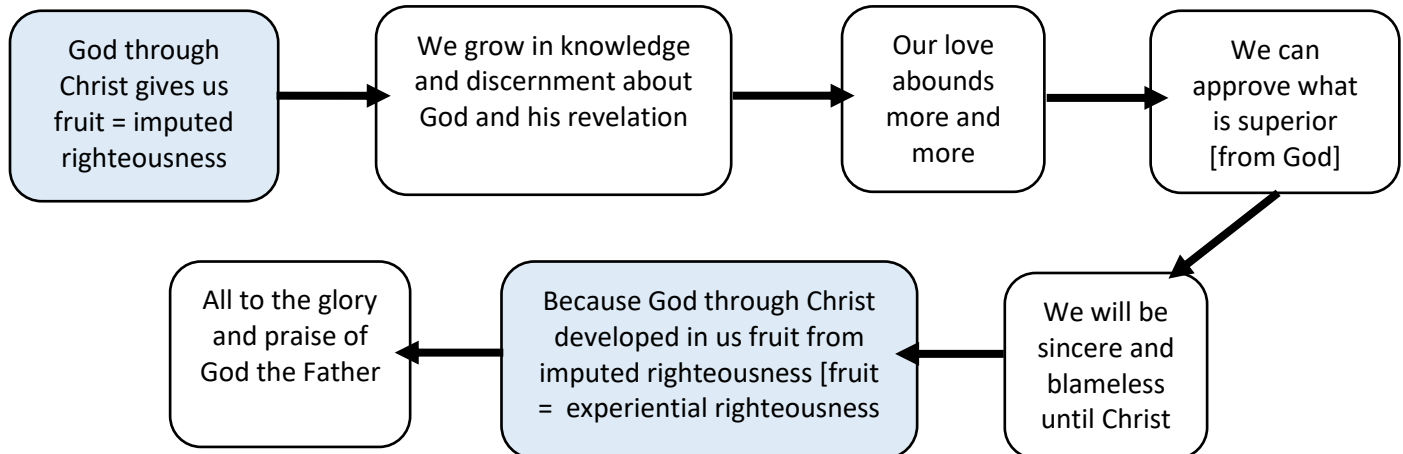
experiential righteousness? Either way, does the fruit result *from* righteousness or is this fruit that *consists of* righteousness? All this is as ambiguous in Greek as it is in English.

- Before your eyes glaze over and you insert your ear buds, let me happily tell you that it doesn't matter much, because these options are all related.
- **[12: chart of fruit]** As we just discussed, we are first given the gift of imputed righteousness for salvation, which leads us to begin the grace-inspired process of sanctification or purification to be more like Christ, which results in us better experiencing righteousness.
- Fruit that consists of imputed righteousness leads to fruit resulting from imputed righteousness which is the same as fruit that consists of experiential righteousness. So there are two choices and they are related.



† In Greek, 1.9-11 is all one complex sentence, with difficult sentence structure. And this is one of those times when the verse numbers we have imposed on the text might make it more difficult to translate in a way that conveys Paul's meaning.

† **[13: chart]** I have struggled with this sentence for a number of years now, and I pondered on it for a significant number of hours this past month. I'll tell you, even though Paul mentions being filled with the fruit of righteousness near the end of his sentence, I have always thought this fruit consisted of imputed righteousness, in which case it is actually what comes first in the process.



- That is plausible, given this is all one sentence in Greek and word order in Greek does not necessarily imply logical order. Also, the word "filled" [in the NET] translates a Greek perfect participle; I know you don't know what that is, but trust me that it usually indicates causality, so we could translate "because you are filled..." This whole concept Paul is discussing can come about only *because* they are filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, meaning *because* they are given imputed righteousness.
- On the other hand, if this fruit consists of *experiential* righteousness, as the *result* of imputed righteousness, then it is kind of a summary statement representing the results of the sanctification process. I honestly don't know what Paul meant, even though I have spent hours

analyzing the Greek, the context, the theological point, and commentaries. But the thing is, both of these possibilities fit, so rather than worry about it, let's look at Paul's logic using both.

- † Grace leads to knowledge of God and his will, which leads to character change, which leads to behavior or lifestyle change, all for God's glory. This is a model of how sanctification works. Let's look at the steps Paul outlines.
- † **[14: knowledge]** The word for knowledge here is the Greek ἐπίγνωσις. In Paul's usage, it referred to knowledge of God through Christ in the sense that we come to know him, know about him, and thus become like him. In this letter, Paul will teach about Christ with the intention that the teaching would transform us to be more like Christ.
 - Once saved, how do we get real knowledge of God the Father and Christ the Son? Primarily we get it through absorbing scripture. That's why we come to hear sermons, we read the Bible daily, we memorize verses and study some passages more deeply, and we reflect on all that we learn, so we can apply it to life. God has revealed what we need to know about him in scripture.
 - We gain relational knowledge of God through prayer and worship. These experiences help us to sense God's presence, to sense the Holy Spirit's leading, to be convicted of sin and inspired to active obedience. All that leads us to a better relationship with God.
 - And there are other activities that also can help us learn to hear God's voice and learn his character, things like stepping out of our comfort zone in faith and ministry, sharing the gospel with others, loving sacrificially and unconditionally, and sacrificially serving each other.
- † **[15: discernment]** The NET says we need knowledge and "every kind of insight"; the NASB says "all discernment." The Greek word αἴσθησις meant your capacity to understand, especially morally.
 - How do we learn spiritual discernment or insight? Let's think of an illustration. Suppose we had a set up like a game show, where there were three people out of sight with microphones, who would give advice about a life situation. Suppose the situation were that Carolyn was not sure what to do about supper tonight. We hear Katelyn's voice say, "we should go out to a steakhouse"; then we hear Dale's voice say, "I think you should cook something simple"; then we hear Melinda's voice say, "I want ice cream!" Never mind what Carolyn herself desires [her desire is for the ice cream, though she won't admit it]. How does Carolyn recognize which opinion is wisdom from her husband? She recognizes his voice and she knows his preferences, his character.
 - We learn spiritual discernment as we gain knowledge of God, because we come to know God's voice and character, so it becomes easier to discern his will among the many competing voices in our lives. "Every insight" or "all discernment" refers to knowing what to do in all situations, because we are informed by scripture and led by the Spirit.
- † **[16: abounding love]** Paul has already expressed his love for the Philippians; now he expresses his hope that their love would grow. As we come to know God better and he changes our hearts, we learn to love as he does. Note that this love is grounded in knowledge and every kind of insight; it is not merely a feeling or emotion.
 - Paul is praying that believers would come to know God through Christ, learn how to reflect his character and represent him here, and be transformed by God's love such that they come to

love God, that they would have God's kind of love for each other, and they would return Paul's love and thus remain aligned with him in the gospel mission.

- He prays that this love literally would "abound even more and more." The Greek verb is *περισσεύω*, which means to abound, to be abundant, to overflow. By God's grace, he transforms us, to become more like Christ, more like his image which we were created and saved to be, such that we become so filled with the character of Christ that we learn to love like Christ, with a love that abounds more and more, with unlimited potential. Elsewhere, Paul used this verb to say Christ *lavished* his grace on us [Ephesians 1.8].

† **[17: approve]** The NET says Paul wants you to have this knowledge and discernment and thus love "so that you can decide what is best." The Greek literally says, "so that you approve that which is superior." The Greek verb *δοκιμάζω* suggests approval following an examination or proving the worth of something through examination.

- Why is it important to Paul that believers approve the things that are best or superior? The Philippians were getting confused by false teachings. They needed to determine, to discern, what they should approve as correct and what they should despise as false.
- They also were succumbing to anxiety and doubt because they were focused on the wrong things. They needed to determine what they should approve as worthy to influence their thinking.
- Here is the connection with what Paul has been discussing so far in this letter: If they were growing inside to be more like Christ and could approve godly teaching and perspectives, that would lead to experiential righteousness. One example of that would be changes in behavior to better reflect the character of God; the other example would be their unity in the true church and thus their continued partnership with Paul in his gospel mission.

† **[18: sincere]** Having received imputed righteousness, they would learn to have experiential righteousness. They would be sincere and blameless in every aspect of their *lives* and as a community, just as they already were blameless before the throne of God thanks to their imputed righteousness, so when Christ returned, he would find them a people prepared for their king.

- These results of the sanctification process – our experiential righteousness – provide evidence of God's grace at work, miraculously transforming our character through the renewing of our mind. Salvation and purification are worthy of praise and glory ascribing to God's name.

Conclusion

† **[19: 1.9-11]** Paul's focus for the Philippians in this part of the letter is that they would discern what is right and thus choose to remain his partners in the gospel mission. We talked a lot about that partnership last week, so I thought today we would explore the theology behind the scenes here, about our struggle with sin and God's solution through a grace gift of imputed righteousness which leads by more grace to experiential righteousness.

- My hope for you is that you buy into God's vision to grow you into the person he created and saved you to be, that you will become eager to experience real knowledge and discernment through an intimate relationship with God. I might not test you, but life is testing you, evil is testing you, your own flesh is testing you. You have to work at this to pass these tests.

- My hope for you is also that you come to experience God's amazing kind of love growing in your heart, such that the influence of worldly desire diminishes to be replaced by a desire to serve Christ and his people. I hope that you learn to approve what is superior, from God, both as to correct doctrine and as to best behaviors for the Christian life, so that you start to live in a way that is sincere and blameless, ready for the return of our king, because you already are communing with him.
 - I keep thinking about our experience in Bolivia. As Andrew said, we had no tv, no internet, no video games, and we did not miss them. In fact, we found life there more fulfilling. It is not that Bolivia has anything special to offer, nor even that the orphanage was a good one, it is that we had there a life of purpose, a life with meaning, a life of activity centered on Christ instead of on entertainment. I want that for you, right here! I want that for me. Are we willing to pursue it?
- † Before we move on, here is a parting thought. Paul has mentioned Christ seven times in the first few sentences of his letter. His perspective is entirely influenced by a focus on Christ as savior, Christ as head of the church, Christ as master and he the slave, Christ's mission as the purpose in life, Christ's promised return to judge and rule as king, and Christ's grace to transform us. This affects his view of himself, his circumstances, and what is happening in Philippi. We should learn from Paul to focus on Christ, to live for Christ, and to pray like this in Christ's name for our fellow believers. Let's pray now . . .