I wish I had a farm full of the fruit of faithfulness. I’d have that fruit picked, place in containers and shipped in refrigerated trucks all over the world. Imagine how the fruit of faithfulness would change the world!

Think of it in government. If you gave the fruit of faithfulness to those who govern our country, or other countries, there would be no place for bipartisan politics, self-serving interests, deception, unethical decisions or the misuse of power.

Think of it in the realm of business. If a person’s heart is full of faithfulness, there is no room for greed. If there is no greed, 90% of all unethical behavior in business would be eliminated.

Think of the fruit of faithfulness in marriage. What if there was an actual fruit of faithfulness we could give every couple before they got married? (We’d be rich!) We could ship them a case of fruit every month! How many families would be changed by the fruit of faithfulness?

Imagine faithfulness in the classroom, the military, healthcare, religion, sports, the judicial system, and law enforcement. This is some powerful fruit!

The dictionary defines faithfulness as; true or trustworthy in the performance of duty, the fulfillment of promises or obligations; loyal. (Standard Encyclopedic Dictionary). The question is, “Loyal to what?” To whom, or to what are you faithful?

ABC’s Ted Koppel once said, “What Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai were not ten suggestions, they are commandments. Are, not were.” (Duke University Commencement Address, May 10, 1987). The first commandment is likely the bedrock of the rest. “You
shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3) Get that one wrong and the rest don’t matter.

To whom, or to what are you faithful? What determines your moral compass, your ethical decisions, how you vote, spend your money, set your goals or how you relate to others? Knowing to whom or to what you are faithful is the key to life! It determines all the rest.

* 

If there is a disease that is affecting the health of our nation, some would say that disease is moral ambiguity. There are many names for this disease; secularism, pluralism, hedonism, radical individualism. At the core of them all is the question, To whom, or to what am I faithful? What are my core values, my guiding star, my stakes in the ground? It takes a lot of honesty with one’s self in order to answer that question. Some people never do.

We drift when we don’t know to whom, or to what we are faithful. When that remains an unanswered question in our lives, then anything could be the answer. Anything could come along and try to fill that void, take that seat of authority in our lives. And sometimes it does.

* 

I had a front row seat in Charlotte, North Carolina to watch the banks crash in 2008. People were faithful to the wrong god.

As a pastoral counselor, I sat with many people who were faithful to the wrong thing. Sex, drugs, affairs, money, power. It was all the wrong stuff.

Being faithful to the wrong thing is what got Jesus crucified. People had the wrong god. We’ll do anything to protect our “other gods.” Lie, cheat, steal and even kill.

How foolish we are. The God of the universe wants to have a relationship with us, to dwell in us, and yet we choose lesser things? It’s like having a loving parent and choosing not to love them in return.

* 

Paul is not saying, Try to be more faithful. He’s not saying, Try to love some more, to have more joy, more peace, more patience or kindness. Christianity is not the Boy Scouts, or the Girl Scouts. It’s not about earning merits for badges. It’s not a self-help program, volunteerism, or a charitable organization. It’s more than a comfort station along life’s busy highway.

If Christianity is anything, it is about God dwelling in human flesh. It is about a Spirit, a power, a presence that is beyond one’s self. It is beyond any one nation, color or creed. It is about God taking up residence in human containers, flawed as we all may be.
This is radical thinking, but it is biblical thinking. Paul writes; “Do you not know the you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16) How can that be when we are but microscopic cosmic dust?

There are at least 100 billion galaxies in the universe. The Milky Way is just one! We can’t grasp how huge all of creation is, yet we can have a relationship with the God of all that? That’s what the Church ought to be talking about in a world that wants and needs more than pietistic squabbling, religious rules and regulations, divisions, anger, judgment and a church that is consumed with self-preservation.

We’re the ones who have tamed this truth to something we can control and understand, even manipulate. We have reduced this truth to a religious club with membership and dues, programs and services, budgets and buildings. We’re the ones who water it down, or reduce it to an issue-driven institution. But it is so much more than all that.

Paul is talking about transformation. He is talking about the change that happens in a person’s life when the fruit of the Spirit is born within them. Without that transformation, without God’s Spirit dwelling in us, we are like a swimming pool with no water. The structure is there, but there is no function. We are like a lamp with a cord that is not plugged in, or a plane with no engine. Form without substance. That’s deadly!

Maybe that’s why a lot of people have stopped going to church in our country. They’re hungry for something powerful, something life changing. Augustine wrote, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.” (Confessions 354-430).

Have we watered down Christianity to something less faithful, less transformational, less important? Have we drifted from our faithfulness to God and replaced it with something else? Perhaps we should look at ourselves before we blame others for not coming to church. To whom, or to what are we faithful?

I can think of no greater tragedy than to come to the end of one’s life only to realize that you have been faithful to the wrong thing. You can’t get that time back. You can’t reproduce those opportunities to be faithful to God. To whom, or to what are you faithful? It’s never too late to answer that question. That’s grace!

• We should pray for the fruit of faithfulness to dwell richly within us.
• We should pray for faithfulness to dwell in our government and in our business leaders.
• We should pray for the fruit of faithfulness in our marriages and relationships.
• We should pray for this fruit to be born in our children and our grandchildren.
• We should pray for this fruit of faithfulness for people of faith and for people of no faith.
• We should pray for this fruit, because when it is born within us, it changes the world. It changes us.

   Lord, hear our prayer.

   In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

   Congregation: Amen