

The Fruit of the Spirit (4): Peace

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- [0 : 00] The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. Peace. Peace is the universal quest of humanity. So says one author I've been reading. Peace is the universal quest of humanity. To be a real human being is to search for and to be unsatisfied with anything less than peace. Are you at peace today? Have you ever been at peace? Do you even know what peace is? Well, according to the Bible, peace is a fruit of the Spirit, the evidence and overflow of God's life within us. Of all the fruit of the Spirit, perhaps it is this one, peace. We want more for ourselves, for those we love, and for our world. Now I know you, and you know me. That's the relationship we enjoy as pastor and people. And I know that you want this entirely as much as I do.
- [1 : 21] To live at peace with God. To live at peace with ourselves. To live at peace with one another. Surely this is our highest goal. So this evening I want to help us realign our goals around the quest for peace. And help you to realize that you already have the peace for which you have been searching. All you have to do is to know what it is. And then to live in it. I want us to consider three things this evening. Peace and me. Peace and God. Peace and others. Again, as I say every week, I can only help you to dip your toes in the ocean of the Bible's teaching on these subjects. It's for you to go swimming in them. First of all then, peace and me. Peace and me.
- [2 : 24] Peace and me. Humanity cannot be defined by the world around us. But only by God himself in his word. Now when we understand this, we begin to see that the peace for which we are all searching is an illusion. It is a mirage in the desert. It is a shadow of reality of the peace God has for us in Jesus Christ. Let me explain by taking you back into the ancient world. For the Greeks and all their philosophy, peace corresponded to our idea of tranquility or serenity. It was, and I quote, The absence of pain in the body or trouble in the mind. So for Greek philosophers, peace was the absence of. It was the absence of pain in the body or trouble in the mind.
- [3 : 56] Peace is the search for tranquility. The stoic idea that somehow you're now living on a higher plane of existence, utterly untroubled by all that takes place beneath. It is very much Christ on the mount of transfiguration, not Christ in the valley of trouble. It is the person who sits cross-legged on the beach, waiting for the sun to rise, emptying his mind of all thoughts and living only in the moment. You don't find peace in hospital A&E; units. There can be no peace for the mentally afflicted, nor for the grieving.

The lonely and broken man or woman cannot attain to this kind of peace. It is the peace that we attribute to the dead when we say of them, Rest in peace, free from the troubles of the mind and the pains of the body.

[5 : 09] And I want to argue that by and large, we think of peace in the Greek sense of the word, as meaning the absence of pain in the body or trouble in the mind.

Of course, the problem with that definition of peace is that it is an illusion. It's a bait and switch the world shows us and then pulls from under our feet.

It is impossible that as human beings we should measure peace in these terms. For if we did, it is impossible for the terminally ill, for the mentally disturbed, for the grieving, for the anxious, for the lost, for the lonely to ever be at peace.

You see, what we've always thought of as peace, there's no peace at all. It is absence. It is emptiness.

Now let's move from Greece to Israel. For the Jews, steeped in the language and thought world of the Old Testament, peace was different, corresponding less to our idea of tranquility and more to our idea of wholeness.

[6 : 26] Wholeness. So according to one Christian writer, biblical peace is, and I quote, personal wholeness and beneficial relationships.

Personal wholeness and beneficial relationships. So for the Christian, peace is not the absence of pain in the body or trouble in the mind, but personal wholeness and beneficial relationships.

And this definition allows us greater freedom in what we understand as that peace, which is the fruit of the Spirit.

It is entirely possible for us to be at peace, though our bodies are wracked with pain and our minds are broken. It is entirely possible for us to be at peace, even though we are being pursued by ruthless enemies and we are grieving over the loss of a loved one.

When the Jews talked of personal wholeness, they were talking in the first instance of integrity of character, integrity of character, that we're not pretending to be different from what we really are on the inside.

[7 : 47] They were also talking about spiritual intelligence, spiritual intelligence, that we are capable of allowing what we know about God to impact the way we live and the way we feel.

Thirdly, godly realism. Godly realism. That we recognize that everything that's happening to us is for our highest good and for God's greatest glory.

It is the realization that we cannot attain to peace in glorious isolation. We need to be in relationship with others to experience its fullness.

So back to Galatians 5.22. That peace, which is the fruit of the spirit, is not the Greek philosophical idea of the absence of pain in the body or trouble in the mind, but the Jewish idea of personal wholeness and beneficial relationships.

Let me apply this by taking you on a road trip to a graveyard where on stone after stone, we read the words, rest in peace.

[9 : 03] In our worldview, dominated as it is by Greek philosophy, that person who has died is now resting at peace because he has no pain in the body or trouble in the mind.

The truth is that for our worldview, it is really only possible to be at peace in the grave because the rest of life is a valley of tears.

But for the Christian, it is altogether different. It is entirely possible for us to rest in peace before we die because for us, peace is not the absence of pain in the body and trouble in the mind, but the positive presence of personal wholeness and beneficial relationships.

Don't you want that for yourselves? That you don't have to wait until you die to be at peace? Don't you want that now so that it can be written on your gravestone?

In life, she rested on the peace of Christ. In death, she now rests in the peace of Christ. Peace and me.

[10 : 29] Second, peace and God. Peace and God. Perhaps I've already managed to persuade you that the Jewish or the New Testament definition of peace is superior to that of the Greek philosophers.

You've listened carefully and you'd rather live in peace now before you die than after. The other reason that we don't want to take our definitions and descriptions of peace from the world around us is that by and large, they not only describe it as the absence of pain in the body, but also the absence of God from my experience.

Remember John Lennon's famous words? Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try. It is possible to attain peace by meditation, by imagination, by mindfulness with no reference to God at all.

The world tells us that you don't need God to be at peace. The Bible, history, and the sober record of Christian experience differs and tells us that the only ground on which we may have true peace in life is when God is present, not absent.

No God, no peace. The pursuit of peace outside God is practical atheism. Now, we want to understand this peace in relation to God in three ways.

[12 : 15] Peace as the work of God, as the gift of God, and the fruit of God. Peace, first of all, as the work of God. Peace as the work of God.

By nature, we are not at peace with God and therefore we are neither at peace with ourselves or with others. Our sinfulness is our declaration of war against the God who loved us and created us.

He created us to be creatures of personal wholeness and beneficial relationships but we chose rebellion against him instead. By our own choice, we have become strangers to him and are far from him.

In our heart of hearts, we know it to be true. The truth is that so great is our offense that nothing we can do is enough to make peace between us and God.

No religious devotion or moral effort on our part can make up for our sinfulness against the God who loved us and created us.

[13 : 26] But then we see Jesus, Jesus who was both God and man and we see him dying on the cross to take away our sin and to make peace with God.

God. We see him removing the offense we have caused God by baring himself the punishment we deserved. The apostle Paul says of him in Ephesians 2, he himself is our peace, Christ our Savior Lord who on the cross worked peace between us and God.

He died so that what sin destroyed grace may rebuild. Integrity of character, spiritual intelligence, godly realism, personal wholeness, beneficial relationship with God.

This is true peace. In the very place that Greek philosophy would deny its existence, on a Roman cross where the God-man is suffering the pains of hell on our account.

In the broken body of Jesus, in the work of God for us, we have peace with him. Though we have offended him, yet he himself removes the offense.

[14 : 57] It should therefore be clear that there is nothing more we can do to be at peace with God than what God has already worked for us. It is fruitless and empty to pursue peace with God by doing more and trying harder either in religious devotion or moral effort.

Can you, by doing more and trying harder, restore your relationship with God more effectively than what his own son has done on the cross? perhaps you are a Christian who over the years has begun to suck in the legalistic doctrine of try harder and do more so prevalent in the evangelical church.

The biblical doctrine of reconciliation, how Jesus died to make peace with God for us, calls upon us not to try harder and to do more to access genuine peace, but to believe and rest in all Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Not effort, but faith. Not sweat, but trust. Not busyness for him, but rest in him.

Peace is the work of God. Second, peace as the gift of God. Peace as the gift of God. Throughout the Bible, peace is presented not as something which comes from within ourselves, finding the real me, but something which comes from God and as a gift of his grace.

[16 : 42] For example, in his greeting to the church in Galatians 1-3, Paul says, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

that's where grace and peace come from. God. And if any of us should possess it, it is God's gift.

It does not come from ourselves by meditation or by going on a quietness pilgrimage. And that's why in the passage we chose to read together this evening, John 14-27, Jesus says to his disciples, peace I leave with you.

My peace I give you. The disciples were sad and confused about Jesus' prediction of his going away, but in their sadness Jesus left his peace and in their confusion he gave them his peace.

peace. The point is that to the world around us, we may attain peace by doing things, by being more religious, by going on a retreat, by engaging in meditation, yes, even by dying.

[18 : 00] But in the thought world of the Bible, peace does not come from within us, but from God. it is the gift of his grace. Peace isn't ours to earn, but God's to give.

And he gives it to us through faith in Jesus Christ. As we believe and trust in Jesus, the peace Jesus died to make with God becomes ours.

The most important of all human relationships, that for which we were created, that which we enjoy with our Father, is now restored. our personal wholeness follows, as through faith in Christ, God changes us more and more, giving us integrity of character, spiritual intelligence, godly realism.

Peace is not ours to earn, it's God's to give, and he gives it to us through faith in his Son. And so I want to go back to applying this truth about the peace of God as God's gift to those of us who have sucked in that false teaching, that for God to really be happy with you, you need to do more, you need to try harder.

Listen, if it was by faith we first received peace with God, then it is by faith our peace will grow, not by doing more and trying harder.

[19 : 31] it is as we repeatedly return to the cross where Jesus who is our peace made peace with God on our behalf, that personal experience of personal wholeness and beneficial relationships will grow.

You know, whether we're young or whether we're old, we never grow beyond the cross. We dare never, lest we lose any sense of peace we may ever have had in the gospel.

Peace is the gift of God, and then thirdly here, in peace in God, peace is the fruit of the Spirit. Peace is the fruit of the Spirit. From the very beginning of our studies in the fruit of the Spirit, we have understood that these virtues are the expression of the Holy Spirit's presence within us.

I know someone who has the most ridiculous laugh you've ever heard in your life. When she swears, when she laughs, I swear that there is a hyena somewhere in the African savannah who has bitten his tongue.

And we say of this person, you heed her before you see her. You can hear her laughing a mile away, and even though you can't see her, you know she's there.

[20 : 56] Now, even though you cannot see the Holy Spirit, you know he's at work in a person when she is loving and joyful and peaceful.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of peace, and for each presence there is personal wholeness and beneficial relationships. Let's turn back in your Bibles to Galatians 3 in verses 2 and 3, where Paul asks these three searching questions.

Galatians 3, 2 and 3. Did you receive the spirit by observing the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

And I guess you can see I'm hitting again and again at this legalistic evangelical mentality of doing more, trying harder.

Was the peace we had when we first believed earned by our good works, or was it given to us by God through the spirit?

[22 : 12] Do you genuinely think we shall only experience more personal wholeness, more beneficial relationships, by trying harder or doing more? No.

We shall only experience the peace of the spirit by believing the gospel more firmly. What then are we saying? No God, no peace.

No cross, no peace. No gospel, no peace. No faith, no peace. No spirit, no peace. peace. That is how we may rest in peace before we ever get near a graveyard.

By resting in Jesus and in his gospel for our salvation. By believing that he and not we is our peace.

Well, thirdly, and lastly, we've seen peace in me, peace in God. Lastly, peace and others. Peace and others. In the first letter of John, the apostle makes a fascinating connection.

[23 : 21] He says in 1 John 1 verse 3, he says, we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, that is the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

And our fellowship is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. In other words, John tells us that by experiencing peace with God, we may now share that peace with others.

That reconciliation with God leads to reconciliation with others. Before the demon-possessed man called Legion met with Jesus, he was a rather vicious sort of fellow.

He was cutting himself, self-harming we would say nowadays. He was cursing others. He was being a danger to everyone and especially to himself.

But when Jesus healed him, he was seated and civilized. He was a danger to no one at all. When we are at peace with God, we will become people of peace.

[24 : 33] From our own personal wholeness, we will strive to form beneficial relationships. It will not always be easy because we're all rough diamonds with sharp edges, but it shall be natural for us, shall we say, to want to pursue the path of peace and not of conflict.

We shall not rub our hands and glee at the prospect of a fight with another person. Rather, we shall rub our eyes to rid them of the tears of grief. There is no peace between us.

As David Parker taught us a few weeks ago, Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers. Here's the mark of discipleship. That we do not break peace, but we make it.

That we do not cause disunity, but promote harmony. We're at peace with God. What need have we then to be at war with others?

What more do we have to prove or earn if Christ has already earned peace for us? The restless man knows no peace, tries to find it anyway, and in the process he damages himself and others.

[25 : 54] The peace-loving man knows inner wholeness, and from that sense of gospel stability and robustness, he reaches out to others and forms beneficial relationships with them.

Whenever I have damaged others, it has been a sign that I myself am not at peace. And when they have damaged me, it's also a sign that they have not been at peace.

Are our lives characterized by a series of broken, damaged relationships, some of which are our fault, some of which the fault of others. Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers.

In the personal wholeness that comes from the cross, there's still time for us to make peace with those who have hurt us or we have hurt. There is forgiveness for us and for them at the cross.

There is reconciliation in the spirit. peace. That's the kind of peace which characterized the psalmist and Jesus himself.

[27 : 12] A peace we describe as personal wholeness and beneficial relationships. A peace which can coexist with the pains of the body and the troubles of the mind because it's not found inside us.

It's found outside Jerusalem where the son of God loved me and gave himself for me. Someone says to you, where's your peace today?

And you say it's on a cross. Do you want to rest in peace without ever going near a graveyard? Yes, sure you do.

Well, here it is in the fruit of the spirit. through faith as we trust in Jesus, he says to us, my peace I leave with you, my peace I give you.

Now, all that's left for us is to cancel our enrollment in the meditation class and our subscription to the pilgrimage magazine and instead believe, believe in the gospel.