

## ***The Fruit of the Spirit: Peace***

Today we continue our series on the fruit of the Spirit. We've already considered love and joy; today we'll discuss peace.

The question we're asking in this series is, "What can we do to invite the Spirit to produce His fruit in our lives?" Today we'll consider how we can put ourselves in a position to invite the Spirit to produce peace in our lives individually and corporately. Before we turn to the Scriptures, what is your current experience with peace? Would you say that you are experiencing peace within your soul or that you're stirred up and agitated and anxious? Would you say that you are experiencing peace in your primary relationships (in the home, the church, the workplace, among friends)? Or are you experiencing strife and unresolved conflict? I'd encourage you to process your own experience through the grid of the Scriptures we discuss this morning.

The NT talks about peace in three primary contexts: peace with God, peace within your heart, and peace with other people. Let's consider each of these contexts.

**The Foundation of Peace: Peace with God.** (Romans 5:1–2) In Romans 4 Paul established that the only way a person is justified is "by faith." To be justified is to be "declared righteous." When you are justified, you have a right standing before God. You aren't on probation, you aren't a second-class citizen in the kingdom of heaven, you aren't half-accepted; if you are justified you have the same standing before God as Jesus Himself. You are given this standing when you place your faith in Jesus. When you trust that when Jesus died He died for your sins, you are declared righteous. In light of that amazing spiritual reality, Paul writes in Romans 5:1-2:

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

Because of our justification by faith, we now have peace with God. This peace is an objective fact, regardless of how we feel. The concept of peace includes the absence of warfare. When two countries sign a peace accord, they have ceased hostilities. When we have peace with God, our mutual hostilities have ended; we are no longer at war with God.

Whereas two countries can be at peace and still hate each other, when we are at peace with God we now have a whole and healthy relationship with Him. Objectively there is no underlying hatred or conflict that needs to be addressed. That's not because we're so wonderful; it's because the death and resurrection of Jesus are ***that effective***. His death and resurrection have established genuine, substantive peace with God. This reflects the Hebrew concept of *shalom*. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 2 describes how those who are in Christ now have full access to God. That only makes sense when you think about it . . . If Christ has full and free access to God

(which He surely does as God's beloved Son), and if we are "in Christ," then we too have full and free access to God. Having obtained this access/introduction by faith, we now stand "in grace." We enter into the presence of God by grace; we remain in the presence of God by grace; and we look to the future in hope of sharing God's glory because of grace. This grace in which we stand is more evidence that we really do have peace with God.

This peace with God is the foundation of our personal experience of peace and of our peace with each other. If all is well in ***the most important relationship*** in my life, I look at everything differently. I find that that objective peace can spill over into my heart and into my relationship with others. By contrast, when I forget that things really are good between me and God, I am easily agitated within, and this lack of internal peace spills over into my relationships with others (especially those closest to me).

**Our Experience of Peace: Entrusting ourselves to God.** (Philippians 4:6–7) The classic passage on experiencing peace is Philippians 4:6-7. Instead of viewing this as a formula, I think it's best to view this as a basic orientation of our lives. Paul writes:

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Being anxious is at odds with experiencing peace. When we're anxious, we are stirred up inside. Sometimes there's an obvious reason why we're anxious and sometimes there isn't. Sometimes I know with certainty why I'm anxious. I can think of times when I've read an email or had a conversation and immediately been filled with anxiety. I feed that anxiety by mulling over what has been said or done and mulling over all the horrible things that will probably happen in the future. Sometimes there's a very specific event that is making me anxious. But at other times I have no idea why I am anxious or agitated. Whatever the case, Paul suggests that we shouldn't just be passive and think we are helpless. He actually says, "Be anxious for nothing." If Paul stopped there, it wouldn't be very helpful, would it?

But Paul goes on to say, "Instead of feeding your anxiety, redirect your mind and heart toward God in prayer." He describes entrusting ourselves to God in a rather comprehensive way. And remember that we can entrust ourselves to God because we have been justified; we are just as righteous as Jesus Himself. When Paul tells us that we really don't have to be anxious, he's urging us to think like people who in Christ and like people who have a right-standing before the God of the universe. He is urging us to do what Hebrews 4:16 describes: "...let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

The alternative to being anxious is "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." We actually ask God to act on our behalf. Our requests are informed by everything we know about God, everything we know about our relationship with God, and everything we know about what God is doing in this world. For example, if you're experiencing some difficulty/trial in your life, it's fully appropriate for you to ask God to rescue you and deliver you from that difficulty.

But since we also know that God wants to refine us through trials (James 1), we should also pray that we wouldn't miss a thing He wants to teach us. If Scripture stresses anything about prayer it's that God loves it when we ask Him to do things that are in line with what He already wants (that's how I am as a dad too).

Instead of remaining trapped in anxiety and dwelling on all the horrible things that will probably happen to me, I am to entrust myself and my circumstances to God. I relate to God in light of who He really is (omni-everything) and in light of my relationship with Him (I'm His son who can have face-to-face conversations with Him).

You probably noticed that Paul wrote that when we make requests to God, we should do so "with thanksgiving." We shouldn't forget that even when our circumstances produce anxiety, God has still showered us with grace in all sorts of wonderful ways. Thanksgiving acknowledges God's track record of meeting our needs and of blessing our lives. When we pray with thanksgiving, we pray in a different "tone of voice" (so to speak).

Paul isn't describing a technique for dealing with anxiety; he's describing a way of entrusting our lives to God through prayer. In verse 7 Paul says that the fruit of entrusting ourselves to God is peace:

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul is talking about an internal experience of well-being which transcends our understanding. When you look at your circumstances and then look at the peace in your soul, it doesn't necessarily make sense. But peace is the byproduct of entrusting yourself to God. And Paul says that this peace will "guard our hearts and minds" in Christ Jesus. We experience protection from all sorts of threats when this peace pervades our souls: protection from fears and anxieties that rob us of joy and future peace, from the attacks of the enemy, etc.

Please understand that we're not talking about trying to trick ourselves into thinking that things are okay when they're not. We're not talking about merely "staying positive." Paul is describing the fruit of the Spirit and how God Himself can give us a peace that surpasses our understanding. Even though anxiety is a very complex issue, I love Paul's simplicity here. He simply claims that God gives peace when we entrust ourselves to Him, giving thanks for what He's already done. In Isaiah 26:3, Isaiah says this to God:

3 "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace,  
Because he trusts in You.

In my experience this type of peace sometimes comes very quickly (almost immediately) when realize that I'm anxious and then pray to God in honesty and in faith. Other times I have to keep praying continually before there's any relief from the anxiety. I talked with someone this week who said that experiencing this type of peace has

gotten easier as she's gotten older because she's seen God's track record and how He has taken care of her in the past.

Finally, let's talk about:

**The Spread of Peace: Living as Peacemakers.** (Matthew 5:9, Hebrews 12:14, Colossians 3:15, Romans 12:18) If we are at peace with God and we are experiencing peace within ourselves, we will be poised to live as peacemakers. This is what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:9.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

A peacemaker is someone who says and does things that promote peace. The opposite of a peace-maker would be a trouble-maker. A troublemaker goes around causing division and strife between people. It's not so much that a peacemaker is a nice person and a troublemaker is a mean person; that may or may not be the case. It's that the peacemaker understands what is at stake in relationships, namely that relationships are the place where we demonstrate the very love that God has shown us. Over and over again the NT suggests that a person's relationship with others will tell you a lot about his/her relationship with God. John wrote in 1 John 4:7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." In essence, we are called to treat others the way God has treated us. And so our relationships with others speak volumes about our relationship with God.

A peacemaker understands all of this and is willing to do the hard work of establishing and maintaining healthy relationships (between themselves and others and between other people). As we'll see in a few minutes, peacemaking inherently has limits/boundaries. We don't sacrifice truth for peacemaking; we speak the truth in love. And we don't enable others' sin under the banner of peacemaking; true peacemaking encourages people to deal with their anger and unkindness and selfishness. A peacemaker is willing to do the hard work of helping people deal with their sinfulness for the sake of relationships. As I've mentioned numerous times, I am eternally grateful for those of you here today who are peacemakers. Your value to this church and to the body of Christ can hardly be overstated. Without peace/unity, not much else matters in a church (facilities, structures, budgets, etc.); everything is hollow w/o peace.

Jesus said that peacemakers are blessed: the favor of God rests upon them. The main blessing Jesus had in mind was that peacemakers "will be called sons of God." Everybody who is clued in to the deep spiritual realities of the universe will look at peacemakers and say, "Do you see those people . . . those peacemakers? Their father is God Himself. You can tell because they exhibit the family resemblance. They exhibit their Father's commitment to establishing and maintaining peace on this earth."

We see this endorsement of peacemaking throughout the NT. Let's consider briefly several passages. Paul wrote this in Romans 14:19:

19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Hebrews 12:14 reads:

14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

Colossians 3:15 is interesting because it suggests a link between the peace that we experience individually and the peace we experience as a church (body of Christ).

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

As the peace of Christ rules in our hearts, we experience health in the body of Christ. Your experience of peace obviously affects the quality of your own life, but it also affects the quality of our fellowship. In Romans 12:18 Paul qualifies peacemaking in a significant way.

18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Paul acknowledges here that it's not always possible to "be at peace" with some people. Some people continually run over others with their unkind words and actions; some people have no interest in pursuing reconciliation when there's been a conflict; some people think they have a right to stir up conflict and controversy. In other words, you cannot be at peace with some people because they simply won't or can't have a healthy relationship with you. I take comfort in the fact that Paul acknowledges this. But for my part, I need to make sure that I'm not the source of strife or conflict. If I am, I simply need to humble myself and admit it and do whatever I can to pursue reconciliation.

I want to close by bringing us back to peace as a fruit of the Spirit. When we're told that "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience. . ." we know that peace is something that the Holy Spirit wants to produce within us individually and in our fellowship. My encouragement for us all is to participate with the Spirit as He produces peace. We do that by turning from our anxiety and entrust ourselves to God and when we live as peacemakers.