

Series: "The Fruit of the Spirit"
"Peace"

Where do you go to find your place of peace and quiet? A place where you can kind of get away from it all, chill out, and find some peaceful moments? Maybe curling up with a good book; watching a movie; knitting or making your crafts; listening to soft music. For some, their peaceful paradise is fishing by a quiet stream, hunting in the mountains, relaxing at the beach, or daydreaming they're on a secluded tropical island with no cars, no cares, no phones, no kids! That's a type of "peace", but not the kind of peace we're going to talking about today.

We're continuing this series of messages on the fruit of the Spirit. What are people like when the Holy Spirit controls their life? We've looked at love – the first fruit of the Spirit listed. Last week we looked at joy. Today we'll look at *peace*: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, *peace*..." (Galatians 5:22). But this is not a kind of peace you have if your life is going great, and you have no worries or cares. It's not the absence of trouble. It's a different kind of peace.

This is kingdom peace. Peace that's related to God, and God's kingdom. The Bible says a lot about peace, and one of the great teachings of both the Old and New Testaments is that when God the King rules, when His kingdom comes, there will be peace and tranquility and harmony in all of creation. The prophet Isaiah gives us a glimpse of this peaceful kingdom in this beautiful passage: "The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze. Their young will lie down together" (Isaiah 11:6-7). People will live peaceably together. People will be right with their God. Even wild animals that stalk and kill each other will cozy up to one another!

We looked at Romans 14:17 last week in connection with joy. Listen again: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and *peace* and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

God's kingdom (when God rules) is a kingdom of peace, and Jesus' coming marked the breaking in of God's kingdom in this world. That's why the theme of peace is part of the Christmas story. When Jesus is born the angels sing, "Peace on earth, good will towards all" (Luke 2:14). The New Testament calls the gospel "the gospel of peace". Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the estrangement and separation from God is overcome. God has made peace with humanity through the blood of Jesus' cross (Colossians 1:20).

But that kingdom of peace hasn't come yet, has it? No way! These days, especially – all the violence and animosity in the world, war and turmoil in human relationships, people far from God. *But in spite of this, we can already have a piece of this kingdom peace – in Christ!* Even though the world seems to be going crazy, and there are so many things in our personal and family lives that can cause us to worry or fret or fear, we can have a deep and abiding peace inside of us.

It's a fruit of the Spirit. It's a result of our having the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, inside of us and controlling our life. Jesus said this to His disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I

give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27). Jesus wants to give us *His* peace. (I'd point out that Jesus spoke these words when He knew that He would soon be crucified on a cross!). His peace is not like the world gives. It's not dependent on things going well and things working out. It's an "in-spite-of" peace, even in the midst of difficulty and adversity. The peace that Jesus gives is a little foretaste, a preview, of the peace that we're going to experience in God's kingdom if we're a disciple of Jesus.

So how can we have this peace? It's a fruit of the Spirit – but how can we access it? ***The starting point is when we're reconciled with God.*** The Bible says we are all sinners, and our sin separates us from God. We need to be brought back into a relationship with our Maker. That happens when we put our faith in Christ and trust Him as our Savior. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith we have *peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ."

We are "justified" or "made right" with God through what Christ did for us on the cross. He took our sin and the consequences of our sin upon Himself that we might be forgiven and have fellowship with God once again. Billy Graham wrote a book that was widely read. The book's title was *Peace With God*.

The "peace" we're talking about today is a peace that is rooted in God, and our having a relationship with God. The world can offer all sorts of things to reduce stress in our lives. Or make suggestions on how to attain inward serenity. These can be helpful, but they don't go far enough or deep enough! The peace that God gives outshines anything humans offer!

So the starting point in finding the peace Jesus offers is to come to Him, trust in Him to forgive and save us, and be brought back into fellowship with God.

The peace Jesus gives is also nurtured when we obey God and do what's right. Just as willful sin and unconfessed sin robs us of joy (we talked about that last week), it also eats away at our inner peace. Isaiah 48:22 says, "There is no peace", says the Lord, "for the wicked." Now I suppose people who have no conscience or no sense of morals can do all kinds of bad things and not be bothered by it – but for most people, and especially followers of Jesus, it's hard to have an inner peace and a sense of well being when we know we're doing wrong, or in some way violating God's will and commands. The Apostle Paul echoed this in Romans 8, where he contrasts living by the flesh (our sinful human nature) or by the Spirit: "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and *peace*" (Romans 8:6).

A Christian leader told of the peace he found once he committed his personal finances more to the Lord. He had gotten into debt, credit card bills piling up because he spent what he couldn't afford. But when he got out of that he found a new peace of mind. *The peace of God in us is strengthened when we do what's right and obey God.*

Having God's peace is also nurtured through prayer and the devotional life. It's so easy to get so immersed in the world – what's happening in the news, the annoying things we encounter, the

worries that weigh us down – that we rob ourselves of the peace God wants to give us. Taking time to pray and meditate, to focus on the greatness and power and faithfulness of God, to read God's Word – can renew God's peace within us. Isaiah 26:3 says, "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." (i.e. Keep our mind focused on God).

Philippians 4:6-7 instructs us: "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the *peace of God* which surpasses all understanding, will *guard* your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Don't worry. Pray. Tell God what you need, and God's peace will "guard" your inner life. The word "guard" describes a soldier on guard duty! Think of it as having an armed soldier standing guard over your inner life: Protecting you from worrying too much about the future; getting too depressed over the disappointment you just experienced; obsessing too much over all the troubles and hardships you're facing.

Notice, this passage in Philippians says we can have the peace of God that *surpasses all understanding*! How many times as a pastor I've had people relate to me how when they were dealing with a crisis, or they had to do a difficult thing, they felt an inner peace that surprised them. And they knew it was this peace that came from God.

But maybe you're wondering, is there ever a time when not having a sense of inner peace can be a good thing? Yes. Absolutely!

For one thing, it can be a warning sign, a wake up call, that our relationship with God is not what it ought to be. Perhaps you've been thinking, "I don't really have this peace you're describing." Maybe it means we're not really a Christian, even though we profess to be, and we go to church. We haven't found that peace with God that comes from putting our faith in Christ and being made right with God through faith in Christ.

Not having this inner peace we've been looking at could indicate that the Holy Spirit is not very much in control of our life. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit. Maybe there's a sin in our life that needs to be confessed and forgiven. Maybe it's a sign that our prayer life is lacking, our devotional life is pretty much non-existent. Maybe we've drifted far from God.

So, if we don't sense this peace inside, this might be God's wake up call, His way of saying, "Hey, there's a spiritual problem here you need to address."

On a more positive note, lacking this sense of peace could be God's way of trying to get our attention, that there's something God wants us to do. For instance, we're bothered when we hear about some kind of human need, someone who needs help, some place where there's suffering, and God gives us a sense of unrest about it. It might be God's way of saying, "I want you to do something to help." Many important ministries and social reforms have begun when someone felt a great amount of inner turmoil and lack of peace about a situation where people were hurting or suffering.

*Going through a time when we just feel a lack of sense of peace about a situation can also be God's way of priming us for some kind of change in our life. I've found different times when I've felt a restlessness and lack of peace about ministry in a particular church that it's been God's way of preparing me to move on. (Now, we should be careful here. Just because we feel a lack of peace about something doesn't necessarily mean we should quit or leave. For instance, you feel restless and lacking a sense of peace about your job. It could mean God wants you to get a new job, but it could also mean God wants you to stay and *change your attitude* about that job). But, yes, not having peace about a situation could be a sign that you need a change.*

Summing it up, when we go through times when we feel inward turmoil and a lack of inner peace it can be God's way of trying to get our attention – a symptom that something in our life and our relationship with God needs to be examined.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, *peace*..." (Galatians 5:22). When the Spirit is in control, we will have an abiding peace inside of us! It's the peace Jesus gives His followers, a preview of the peace that marks God's kingdom.

Hear again these wonderful words of Jesus: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27). He also said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have *peace*. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Jesus wants to give us His peace – peace in the midst of the storms of life – a peace that the world can't give and a peace that the world can't take away.

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
June 26, 2022*

