

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS ... PEACE

Selected Scripture

Introduction:

The world today is caught up with the idea of peace. While conflict escalates on many fronts, people are working to produce agreements that they hope will result in peace. There seem to be many who are determined that they will be the one who will bring peace to the world.

Over the years we have seen movements to try to make the world a more peaceful place to live, by reducing nuclear weapons, by bringing nations together to sign arms reduction agreements, and protests against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Yet, the question we must consider is whether that is really what peace is about. Peace is usually seen as the absence of conflict. The dictionary gives many definitions for peace, but the main idea is freedom from war or public disturbance.

There are different levels on which this type of peace can take place. And there is no question that it is very important. There is a need for peace:

- Between people on an individual level
- Within families – there must be harmony to function well
- Within churches – again to function effectively there must be peace, harmony, an absence of conflict and dissension.
- Between nations – this is the area we hear so much about these days. There are endless efforts to bring about peace between warring nations. Trying to end war is a worldwide concern.

But beyond this business of peace on a social level, there is another area of peace that I believe is much more important and that is the personal inner peace that people are searching for all over our planet.

This is a peace that the dictionary defines as, “a state of mental or physical quiet or tranquility, calm; freedom from mental agitation or anxiety.” It is an inner calmness, the strength of character that can pro-

duce serenity in the midst of storms. And I believe that this is what people are really searching for in their lives.

But there is only one source for this kind of peace and that is God himself. Paul says in Gal. 5:22 that peace is a product of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the peace of God, described in Phil. 4:7 as a peace which surpassed all understanding.

However, before we talk about the peace of God we need to look for a few moments at the issue of being at peace with God. The latter is a prerequisite for the former. Until we are at peace with God we can never really experience the peace of God in our lives.

Peace with God (Rom. 5:1)

To begin the question of peace with God we need to go right back to the Garden of Eden.

Gen 3:8-10 - Adam, when he sinned, soon found out what it was like to be at enmity with God. (Describe his previous relationship with God) Now with sin came anxiety and fear, separation, conflict between man and God – there was no peace, only war and conflict.

As you follow throughout the OT you find that all through the centuries the people of God went through a ceremony of offering sacrifices to try to settle the difference, to satisfy God's righteous requirement, to make peace with God. But it was never enough.

But then ... Christ came. He came to bring peace - permanent peace. It is through Him that we can have peace with God and with ourselves.

“As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),” (Acts 10:36 ESV)

- peace through Jesus Christ.

Turn for a moment to Romans 3:21-26 – After having pointed out the sin and failure of every human being, Jew and Gentile alike, Paul describes how we can be justified or put right with God. *Read verses.*

We have to abandon our own efforts to be good enough and put our faith and trust in Christ alone. Then we have done that, we find that the wall is gone, the conflict is over and we have peace with God.

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1 ESV)

That's what salvation is all about. We quit fighting against God and we make our peace with Him.

Then when the sin question is settled and our relationship with God is taken care of and we are at peace with Him then we can begin to discover that inner peace - that calmness of soul that is produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The Peace of God (Phil. 4:6-9)

So now we must consider what it means to have the peace of God within us. In many of Paul's epistles he begins with a greeting in which he says, “Grace to you and peace from God the Father...”

Where does this peace come from? It comes from God. It is a product of the Spirit of God who dwells in us. As the Holy Spirit lives and works in our hearts He produces his fruit in our character, and part of the fruit is peace—a spirit of calmness and quiet assurance.

But I want to get a bit more specific. I find in the Scriptures a couple of important thoughts concerning the peace of God. There are two areas which influence the level of peace we enjoy as believers. One is the area of contentment, the other is the mind. Both of these are related to expectations. Let me explain:

A. Contentment

The Bible has a great deal to say about contentment. The Apostle Paul spoke often about the contentment he felt about his place in life.

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” (Philippians 4:11-12 ESV)

He has learned to be content with what he has, whether that be little or much.

“Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of

the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” (1 Timothy 6:6-8 ESV)

Again he points out the need to be content, then in the next couple of verses he points out the danger of not being content.

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1 Tim. 6:9-10 ESV)

The contentment he speaks of is closely connected to expectations and to inner peace. If I expect that God will give me every luxury that I want, and that I should have everything my neighbor has, then I will never be content because someone will always be ahead of me. And I will never have peace within myself because I cannot be content. The desire for more will only lead to anxiety, frustration, bitterness and ulcers. And that is definitely not peace. Paul says, “If we have something to eat and clothes to wear, let us be content.”

➔ Illust. – an old Quaker was watching a new neighbor move in next door. They carried in deluxe appliances and luxuries of every kind—all the latest electronics and gadgets. Finally, he went over and introduced himself to his new neighbor and said to him, “Friend, if you ever find there's something you don't have, let me know ... and I'll show you how to live without it.”

There is contentment, and there you will find a man who knows peace within.

B. The mind

What you think and the choices you make with your mind will ultimately determine the level of peace you will enjoy. Why? Because peace is the result of choosing to trust God—the result of applied faith.

“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” (Isaiah 26:3 ESV)

This was a song which was to be sung in the land of Judah and he writer had learned the importance of trusting God and keeping his mind on the things of God in order to enjoy the peace of God.

“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” (Romans 8:6 ESV)

To be spiritually minded means to have your mind on spiritual things—the things of God. As long as we fill our minds with the garbage of the world, and allow our minds to be convinced by the advertising of the world we will never know the peace of God.

Turn to Phil. 4:6-9 – These are the key verses we want to focus on here this morning. *Read these verses.* Paul is clear that the things we think about will determine the extent of our peace. As long as we have our minds on the things around us—things we want but can’t have, we will only have anxiety and frustration. But when we get our minds off of those things and begin to think about that which is true and noble, just and pure and lovely, then we will be satisfied and at peace.

God knew that we all have a tendency to focus on and think about the things that we have no control over. That is what we call worry and anxiety. And it destroys peace in our heart and mind.

But the antidote for that mental anguish and anxiety is to get our minds off ourselves and onto God. Faith in God and a trust in his will is the answer to enjoying the peace of God. Note the phrases in v. 7 – “...peace of God...” and in v. 9 – “...the God of peace...”

Conclusion

The peace of God – as we walk in the Spirit and he produces His fruit in us, as we keep our eyes and heart and mind focused on God, and trust in His goodness, then we can experience peace. We can know true peace in a world that does not know real peace even though it is desperately searching for peace.

But before any of this can take place—before we can ever know the peace of God—we must first make our peace with God. No one can ever know the true peace of God until they stop running from Him and find the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, who provided reconciliation through his sacrifice.