

The Fruit of the Spirit - Peace

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today we are going to continue our study on the fruit of the Spirit and we can turn back to Galatians chapter 5 and read verses 22 and 23.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. Today we are going to focus on the third item listed here. We're going to focus on peace. Now we've been saying throughout this study that the fruit of the Spirit is both the effect and the evidence of having God the Holy Spirit dwelling in your heart. It's the effect and the evidence of being a follower of Jesus.

And so that means that being a Christian brings the effect of an inner peace in your life. And that's the testimony of many, many people. And it also means that as a Christian that peace should be outwardly evident to others. Part of the effect and the evidence of being a Christian is that we have peace. And that makes perfect sense because God is a God of peace. Paul says in Philippians 4-9, what you've learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. And so it's all very logical. As a Christian or when you become a Christian, God himself comes and dwells in your heart by his spirit. And so the God of peace brings peace into your heart and into my heart. And this emphasis on peace is particularly relevant to the situation of the Galatian church. Paul is writing at a time when their peace is under threat. When we were reading chapter one, I asked you to think why is Paul writing this letter? And I hope that you came to the conclusion that something was wrong. And he was urgently trying to correct a mistake that had been made. And in particular, as we've been saying, false teachers were troubling the Galatian church. We read about that in chapter one, verse seven.

There are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. And Paul repeats the same thing in chapter three. O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? And as we've been saying, the basic problem was that Paul had planted the church in Galatia. He had then moved on, but other people had come and were teaching different things to what Paul had been saying.

And in particular, they were saying, if you want to be saved, you have got to keep the law of the Old Testament. And in particular, you have got to be circumcised. So these false teachers were putting the burden of the law onto the Galatian believers once again. And Paul is writing to correct that. And he's saying, no, you are free from the law. You have been set free by Jesus Christ.

[3 : 31] But all of this has put a huge strain on Paul. And the relationship between the Galatians and Paul has become strained. We read about that in Galatians four, verses 30 to 16. Paul sort of recounts what led to him coming. He says, you know, it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first. So Paul is basically saying, I was sick. That's what meant that I ended up in Galatia in the first place. And though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God as Christ Jesus. And so although Paul was sick and although he was a burden to them, they received him so warmly. But Paul says, what then has become of your blessedness? I testify to you that if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. Now, many people think that because he mentions eyes, they think that the bodily ailment was something wrong with his eyes. And I think that's quite, that's very, very probable. Paul had something wrong with his eyes. He had to stop at Galatia.

And he thinks that you would have even taken your own eyes out and given them to me if you could. Such was their care and their welcome towards them. But now everything has become strained.

And the peace that Paul enjoyed with this church has been lost. Look at what it says in verse 16. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? These false teachers have come in, they've questioned Paul, they've undermined Paul, and the relationship has become soured, and they're all suspicious. That's why in chapter one, Paul goes to such great lengths to emphasise the fact that he is preaching the true gospel and that he has been appointed by God. He's not making it up, he is giving them the truth. But all of us put a huge burden on Paul, on the Galatians.

Peace is gone. And even Paul's own sense of peace about these believers has gone. Chapter 4 verse 19, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone for I am perplexed about you.

It's a very interesting image that Paul uses there. He says, when I think about you, I am in the same kind of agony as a mother in labour. I am so worried about you, I am perplexed about you.

[6 : 14] And so the Galatians situation was one of trouble, one of tension, one of conflict. And Paul is so conscious of the fact they are in grave danger. And his great concern is that they are turning away from the truth. And he wants them and urges them to go back to the true message of the gospel.

And the reason for that is that Paul knows that if the Galatians turn away from God's word, then they are going to lose their peace. They had heard the gospel. They had put their faith in Jesus. They had known that joy and that peace. But now it's all under threat. False teachers are leading them astray. And this reminds us of a really, really important point to mention briefly.

Being at peace does not mean being complacent. It's easy to think that being at peace just means you think, oh, I don't care, I'm quite happy, everything's fine. Paul is saying being at peace is not being complacent. Being at peace is not about being casual about things. In fact, it's the opposite. Peace is found when we have an immensely firm grip on the things that really matter. And this especially applies to the false teaching of the source that was affecting the Galatians. False teaching is an enemy of our peace with God. False teaching will lead us astray and lead us into trouble. That's why peace requires vigilance, not complacency. And that makes perfect sense because if you think about it, if you imagine a place where a war has just come to an end, the people there are not casual at all. They will be very careful, very vigilant to ensure that peace was not compromised. And so it's a call to to to seriousness and vigilance. We must hold on to the truth of God's word. The Galatians were in grave, grave danger because they were at risk of turning away from God's word and as a result, losing their peace. So the idea of peace was very, very relevant to the situation in Galatia. But the vital truth we have to remember is that exactly the same warnings apply to us today. What Paul is saying is of absolute relevance to our situation today. And the reason for this is that if you stand back and look at the whole

Bible, which is something I think I often encourage you to do, it's such an important thing to do. Think of the whole Bible. Peace is a key theme running through the whole of scripture. If you think back all the way to the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and all the plants and animals and everything to fill it. And finally, at the end, he created humanity. He created all things with men and women in his image as the climax of creation. And what did God do when he finished? He rested. And so we see immediately that the climax of creation is set before us in terms of peace. God finished everything. He said, it's very good. And so now I can rest. I can be at peace. But as we know, Adam and Eve sinned against God. We call that the fall, the fall of mankind, because many ways it was a fall. And they disobeyed God and they broke that perfect peace that had been established. This happens in Genesis chapter three. And if you read

Genesis chapter three, and you can maybe do that this afternoon if you wish, you will see that there is a very clear and obvious loss of peace. And there's three areas in particular. First of all, man loses peace with himself. It says he realized he was naked. And he tried to cover himself, a loss of peace with himself. Adam and Eve lose peace with each other. They start blaming each other. And their relationship becomes one of hostility. And most significantly of all, mankind loses peace with God. Adam and Eve are banished from the garden and the covenant relationship has been broken. And so in these three areas, mankind has lost peace, lost peace with God, lost peace with one another, lost peace with himself. And the mistake we must avoid is thinking that that just applied to Adam and Eve. Because the truth is that this loss of peace has affected every single one of us. And it's very, very easy to prove that because it has manifested itself in every age of history. If you look at people, who likes people watching, you go to a shopping center on the mainland and you see people everywhere, you can just stand and you can watch people. It's very interesting to do people watching. And if you look, if you people watch at society as a whole, you see that people have no peace with themselves. And often that's expressed in the arts, in paintings, or in music. So often the celebrated works of art or music, the celebrated individuals are people whose lives are broken by a sense of torment with themselves. And you think of people, think of, think of Van Gogh, think of Picasso, think of John Lennon, think of Kurt

[13 : 08] Cobain, think of Amy Winehouse. Were any of these people at peace with themselves? Far from it. So people have no peace with themselves. Likewise, people have no peace with one another. And that manifests itself in so many ways in terms of war, in terms of conflict, in terms of rival groups, in terms of colleagues, even within families. I remember it so vividly from school. Start with primary school, when I went to school, you had two classes. So you had class A and class B.

So P1A, P1B. I was in P1B. And so you automatically think P1B is the good guys and P1A is the bad guys. Or when you're in first, when you're in second year in the Nicholson, second year is a great first year, it's not awful. Conflict always arises. It's so silly and so childish, but it's so true. People do not have peace with one another, whether it's in football, whether it's rival villages, Scotland against England. Actually, I shouldn't mention Scotland against England, but never mind. You know exactly what I mean. And most of all, people don't have peace with God.

Our sin has alienated us from God, and many, many people live, has open enemies of God. And I do not need to prove that to you. You all know it's true. As Paul writes in Philippians 3 18, for many of whom I've often told you and tell you now, even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Now all over the world, people crave peace, and they try to find it wherever they can.

And all of that is simply because the Bible is true. Humanity has lost its peace. And this is one of the many, many reasons why the gospel is such good, good news, because it's a message of restored peace. Remember what the angel said when Jesus was coming, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. Now that's telling us that at the coming of Jesus Christ, God is going to get glory, and we are going to get peace. And that's exactly what happens, because in all of the ways in which peace was lost at the fall, it's going to be restored in Jesus. First of all, at the fall of peace with God was lost. Jesus has come to restore this. And the reason that peace was lost was because of sin. And that's what makes sin so serious. It makes us enemies of God. Look at this verse in Isaiah. Behold, the Lord's hand is not chocked, that it cannot save, not his ear dull, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities, your sins, my sins, have made a separation between you and God. And your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he does not hear you. Sin is alienating us from God. Sin is saying to God, I don't need you.

I'll do my own thing. Sin is saying to God, I don't respect you. I'm quite willing to disobey you. Sin is saying to God, I don't want you. I want to go my own way. And sin is saying to God, I don't trust you because I think I know best. And so sin is so dangerous because it separates us from God. But the wonderful news of the Gospel is that Jesus has come to make peace by the blood of his cross. And peacemaking is at the heart of Jesus's mission. And the term that we use to describe that is reconciliation. And reconciliation lies at the heart of what Jesus has come to do. Now what does that mean? Well, it basically means that an exchange has taken place. The hostility and the enmity between us and God is taken away and it is replaced with friendship. And so the first step for finding peace in life is to trust in Jesus because through faith in Christ we have peace with

[18:04] God. And the reason that is possible is because Jesus has borne away everything that was spoiling our peace with God. Jesus is dealing with the problem of sin. Our sin has left us stained, but the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us. Our sin has left us constrained. We are prisoners, we are slaves, but Jesus has redeemed us. He has bought us out of slavery. He has come as a ransom. And our sin has left us estranged from God. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Jesus Christ. So we have this amazing transformation.

Those who wear enemies of God are now his friends. In fact, we are now his family. And it's summed up beautifully in Colossians 1. You who were once alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you wholly and blameless and above reproach before him. It's all about making peace between us and God. But I want you to notice a vital point that this verse reveals. Let's ask the question, who is making peace between us and God? Who is it who makes peace? Now it's very easy to think, of course it would be us.

We are the ones who have done wrong. Therefore, we want to go back to God and make peace. We've offended him. So we are the ones who should initiate and make peace. But that's not what this verse is saying. And it's not what the New Testament emphasizes. Because in terms of reconciliation, the overwhelming emphasis of the New Testament is that it is not that we make peace with God.

It is that God makes peace with us. Look at 2 Corinthians 5.18. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. It is God who reconciles us to himself. In other words, it's God who solves the problem. And this is an absolutely astounding truth, because we sinned, we offended God, we caused the alienation, we let him down, but he puts it right.

And that's why salvation is all because of the grace and love of God. Remember what the angel said, God gets glory because he's the one who's done it. We get peace.

[21 : 51] And this is why the peace that you can have with God is a perfect peace. Because imagine we were the ones who were primarily securing this reconciliation. Imagine the main peacemakers were us. If that was true, then we would always have the question, have I done enough?

Now there are millions of people who have a belief system that is hanging on that question. Have I done enough? Every Muslim in the world is living with that question daily. Have I done enough?

I think many, many people in the Roman Catholic Church have that same question. Have I done enough? And with that question hanging over you, you cannot have peace, can you?

If reconciliation depends on us, we can never be sure that we've done enough, therefore we can never have a perfect peace. But the fact that our peace with God, the fact that our reconciliation depends on him and is initiated by him and accomplished by him means that our peace is not dependent on you or me, it's dependent on God.

And that is why the Christian can rest in the arms of Jesus. And why the Christian can have perfect harmony, perfect comfort, perfect peace, because God has made you his child.

[23 : 49] God has done everything. There's nothing that he hasn't taken care of. There's nothing that he hasn't secured for you. And that is perfect peace. And so that's why if you want to make peace with God, you don't come to him and say, God, I've done this, I've done that. You come to God and you say, in the name of Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me. In Christ, we have peace with God. You can have peace with God. Secondly, and more briefly, the Gospel also brings peace with one another.

The death of Jesus on the cross doesn't just restore our peace with God, it restores harmony in our relationship with one another. And this reminds us of the vital truth that our personal salvation is never, ever divorced from our relationship with other people. Remember Jesus said, the two most important commands, love God, love your neighbour. And that is why our peace with God should always bring peace with one another as well. Now this is teaching us a lesson in ecclesiology in the doctrines of the doctrine of the church. As I always say, the church is not about a denomination. It's not about a building. It's not about a certain way of doing things. The church is the people of God who are by definition at peace with God. And they are at peace with one another. And this should have a real effect on every part of life. That's why the New Testament talks about husbands who love their wives with every ounce of their being. That's why the New

Testament speaks of children who honour and obey their parents. It speaks of parents who are patient and godly and wise. It speaks of employees who are faithful and hardworking. And it speaks of bosses who are fair and gentle and kind. As Christians, our relationship with others should always, always, always be characterised by peace. That's one of the things Paul is emphasising at the end of Galatians 3 when he says, there is neither Greek nor Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Now we have to make sure that we take this very seriously because Paul takes it incredibly seriously. If you look at Galatians or indeed at any of his letters, he is uncompromising in his rebuke of those who are hostile to one another.

Look at Galatians 5.15. He says, if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. He is rebuking them for their hostility one to one another. And as Hebrews 12, 14 reminds us, we are to strive for peace with everyone and for holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Peace with one another is at the heart of living the Christian life. Indeed, if you look at the list that Paul gives of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5, remember in Galatians 5, you've got Paul, he gives a list of the works of the flesh which stand in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit. If we look at that list, so many of them are in direct contrast to peace.

Paul says, the works of the flesh are evident, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, socially, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissension, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these. If you look at that list and if you take all the items from enmity through to envy, all of these things are in many ways the opposite of peace.

[28 : 06] What's the opposite of enmity? Peace. What's the opposite of strife? Peace. What's the opposite of jealousy? Peace. What's the opposite of fits of anger? Peace and so on and so on. Peace should be at the heart of our lives. Our peace with God must always lead to an outward, visible peace with others. Now here is where we come to a really, really important point.

As Christians, we are in a battle for peace and that means we have to fight for peace.

Now that probably sounds like a contradiction. Fighting and peace surely don't go in the same sentence but it's the truth. We must fight for peace because our natural disposition as sinners is towards things that take away peace with one another. You see that even with children, they can be so horrible to each other for no reason at all. Our natural disposition is towards that sort of thing which is away from peace. Therefore we must fight and battle to make peace. Paul makes this abundantly clear when he talks about the war that goes on between the flesh and the spirit. He says, walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

The desires of the flesh are against the spirit. The desires of the spirit are against the flesh for these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do. You see what Paul is saying, to live according to the fruits of the spirit is a fight. That means to live in peace with one another is something that we must fight for. It's something that we must strive for and that has immense practical implications for our daily lives.

As Christians, we should bring peace to every situation that we are involved in. So the next committee meeting that you go to or that I go to, we need to strive for peace.

[30 : 31] At work tomorrow, strive for peace. If you're at the football, if you're at the sheep, if you're on the croft, if you're with the community, strive for peace. Now that doesn't mean compromising and if Galatians is about anything, it's about not compromising. But it means that we must avoid enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions and envy.

None of these things should be in my life and none of them should be in yours. As Christians, our peace must be outwardly visible. And this especially applies when people fall out.

So often, we hold grudges, don't we? People have a fallout and they draw a line and they say, I'm never going back over that line. And you can have families or communities or individuals who have not spoken in decades because they're holding a grudge. And that grudge is preventing reconciliation and it is preventing peace. And as Christians, if we find ourselves tempted to hold a grudge, then we have got to remind ourselves of the theological truths that lie behind the doctrine of reconciliation. We've just been talking about reconciliation and in that doctrine, who initiates peace? God does. In other words, it's not the one who is guilty, it's the one who was wronged.

And that's the pattern we must follow. And so, I would be very disappointed to hear of any Christians say, I'm never going to forgive that person. I'm never going to make peace with that person until they make the first move. God made the first move with us. And we must, must be willing to do the same. So peace is something that should characterise our relationship with one another. Finally, and very briefly, the gospel also brings us peace with ourselves.

Now, this is probably the most relevant of all, because very often our peace is taken away, not because of what other people are, not because of what other people have done, but because we look at ourselves. And for so many reasons, our peace can be taken away. It can be because of our own sin, the mistakes that we've made, it can be because of our weaknesses, the fact that we struggle with things that we feel guilty about. It's because maybe we've made poor decisions in our lives.

[34 : 03] It can be because of our own sense of insecurity, and we are all insecure about certain things. And all of these things can rob us of our peace. We look at ourselves and our peace disappear.

And the whole world today is utterly dominated by people who are trying to address this problem. People are craving peace with themselves. This is what lies at the heart of the moral and ethical changes that we are seeing happening so rapidly in our society. Because at the heart of all of these changes that are taking place is the fact that people are trying to pursue you, self-expression. They're saying, this is who I am. This is who I need to be. It's all about me.

And people are trying to look into themselves, and the world is saying, look into your heart and be who you are, and you will find peace. But if our hearts are broken, if our hearts are sinful, then following self is only going to lead us to despair. And that's why people are still looking.

That message, look into your heart and be yourself, has been promulgated for decades, and yet people are still looking, and they're looking for the next thing, and the next thing, and the next thing, and the next thing, because the answer is not to look to ourselves.

And this is why the Gospel is so gloriously different from anything else that the world will tell you. Because the Gospel doesn't say, look into your heart and be who you are, and you will find peace.

[35 : 47] The Gospel does not say that. The Gospel says something far better. The Gospel says, God himself will come into your heart, and he will make you everything that you are all always intended to be, and he will give you peace. And that's why the key to finding peace is not in terms of a worldly pursuit of self gratification or of fulfillment. The key to finding peace is in good, solid, Bible based theology. Because theology tells you that if you trust in Jesus, God has made you his friend. Theology tells you that you are precious, so precious that God would want to die for you, to die for you. Theology tells you that you are loved by God, that you are a precious, precious child in his family. Theology tells you that you are safe forever, forever and ever. Nothing, no one can take away your peace or can threaten your security. Theology tells you that God himself, that God the Holy Spirit, is dwelling in your heart as a Christian.

That is where you will find peace, and that is why the fruit of that indwelling spirit is peace. And I wish I could describe it, but Paul is right. It is a peace that surpasses all understanding. And this is what God wants for you. God says, I want you to be at peace with yourself, to be at peace with one another, and to be at peace with me. All of that peace will be yours if your faith and trust is in Jesus Christ. Amen. Let us pray.