

The Prince of Peace

Galatians 5:22

In terms of methodology, my sermons on these fruit of the Spirit are a bit different because I am not working my way through an entire text. Just one word. I'm not doing any real exposition of a passage of Scripture, but instead focusing upon a subject which is defined by a single word. And this afternoon, that is especially obvious because the subject is peace, and the exposition of my sermon is really focused on what you might call the doctrine of peace; or the theological subject of peace. I don't apologize for that method, since the study of a particular subject or doctrine, using the whole Bible as an possible text, isn't a bad idea at all. Ordinarily, I believe that verse by verse and chapter by chapter expositional preaching is the most beneficial for a congregation of God's people, but an occasional subject sermon is certainly appropriate and helpful.

So today the subject is peace, though the text is really the whole Bible. Obviously, I've chosen several specific references to look at, but my intention is to study the whole idea of peace as it revealed to us throughout the Scriptures. But what is peace? How do you define it? How do you experience it? How do you know when you have it, and how do you get it when you need it? There is no simple answer to those questions, but I believe I can help you understand peace if you think about in three different ways. They are all similar and related, but still distinct, because they have to do with three different relationships. Peace is an experience that comes to define a relationship, and those three relationship are with God, with one another, and within yourself. So we will look at peace with God, peace with one another, and peace with yourself—what I have labeled peace within your heart.

But first, remember, these are the fruit of the Spirit—the Holy

Spirit. These are the fruit of the work of God in you, accomplished by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit himself, the third person of the Trinity. These fruit are not anything that you can attribute to your own effort or your own achievement. They don't come to be yours as a result of your own accomplishment. They don't come naturally, to the fallen man. And, in fact, the desires of the flesh are in direct conflict with all of these fruit. As we read,

v.17

Still, you aren't passive. You don't sit around waiting for God to zap you with peace. Or love or joy or patience. These verse in Galatians 5 are in a broader context of application and exhortation. "Walk in the Spirit," we read in verse 16. You are to be led by the Spirit, verse 18; and live in the Spirit according to verse 25. So you and I as Christians are to pursue these fruit, by availing ourselves of the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

With that in mind, again our focus is upon peace with reference to God, to one another, and to your own heart. Beginning with,

I. PEACE WITH GOD.

Perhaps this is the easiest to define. Peace with God means that the alienation caused by our sin is removed. The enmity between God and man which began at the fall of Adam is ended. We who by nature were children of wrath become beloved sons and daughters through faith in Jesus Christ. That's peace! Peace with God. Such peace becomes virtually synonymous with salvation. In terms of our understanding of God's work of salvation, it is,

A. The peace of justification.

Rom. 5:1 "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This peace can be easily understood in the same way you would understand peace between two nations at war. Peace between the Palestinians and the nation of Israel would mean that the armies of those two countries would stop fighting one another. In its most simple terms, peace means an end to war. An end to hostility. The absence of a conflict. The resolution of a disagreement. Peace. A good single word for that would be reconciliation. Peace means that two groups are reconciled to one another. The enmity or alienation is brought to an end.

Rom. 5:9 “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

We have received reconciliation! “Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God.”

What does that mean? How is that accomplished? Again, that is easy to answer clearly. Reconciliation with God is accomplished when he forgives us our sins. And he forgives us our sins on the basis of what Jesus did, when he laid down his own life as the punishment for our sins. Jesus himself became the satisfaction of God’s justice and wrath, and so the ministry of the gospel is called the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Cor. 5:18 “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 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. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on

behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

That’s what it means to be justified. It means to be at peace with God. It means that you are reconciled to God, your sin is forgiven. And when God forgives you your sin and accepts you as righteous in his sight, you have peace with God.

How? By faith. By believing. Romans 5:1, “Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” So I urge you today, if you are not at peace with God, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in him for your salvation, so that by faith, you can be reconciled to God.

Surely that is the greatest of all blessings. It is a blessing of God, a gift God bestows upon his people.

B. The blessing of peace.

That’s why our worship services end with a benediction, a blessing. It is for your great encouragement and strength. The most familiar blessing I pronounce is,

Num. 6:24 “The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

Similarly,

Ps. 29:11 “May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!”

There is no greater blessing you could ever experience. There is no more important blessing that you could ever experience. The blessing of peace, with God, through faith in

Jesus Christ. The blessing of justification. And so I proclaim that peace to you. I proclaim that gospel to you, that gospel of peace. And I give you this encouragement as the foundation of your soul,

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

Secondly,

II. PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

The concept is exactly the same, just a different relationship. The fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of God’s people is the fruit of peace between Christians. And Scripture speaks of that peace in the context of the church, for the Bible knows nothing about a solitary Christian. The Bible knows nothing of an independent Christian. We are bound together with one another in a body. That body is the church, and it is called the body of Christ and the temple of God.

And so the fruit of Spirit of peace describes,

A. The bond of peace within the church.

This is not a peace of subjective emotion, but the peace of objective reality. It is the peace that defines the absence of strife with one another. The absence of contention and jealousy. The absence of dissensions and factions and cliques and separations. The peace of Christ is to rule within us as a body. That body is described in,

Col. 3:12 “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of

Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” That’s doesn’t mean you individually. That doesn’t refer to something you experience privately, but to the church. “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.”

Eph. 4:1 “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

That is Paul’s first application of the Christian life. The first application of all the doctrinal descriptions of the great work of God in our salvation, found in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Now, therefore, he writes, be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

So the fruit of the Holy Spirit means that we live together in peace, in the bond of peace. Joined together without any strife or unresolved conflict. The unity of the Spirit. But that’s hard, isn’t it? Because we are all sinners! So to have this peace, we need to have humility, gentleness and patience, three other fruit of the Spirit which we’ll study in the weeks to come.

I want you to notice one more thing about this bond of peace within the church. It depends upon your willingness to submit to the Elders of the church in their leadership and oversight of the body.

1 Thes. 5:12 “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who

labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.”

You can't have one without the other. You can't have peace among yourselves without giving honor and esteem, in love, to those who are “over you in the Lord.” You can't live with a rebelliousness toward those whom the Holy Spirit has ordained to be Elders and expect to enjoy the fruit of peace with one another.

So again, let me urge you as a church, with the Apostle Paul, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” That, too, would be God's great blessing to his church. And to speak a bit more broadly, this peace would also refer to,

B. The bond of peace in personal relationships.

Rom. 12:16 “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. 20 To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

That's your calling as a Christian. “So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” Realistically, that is not always possible. But as far as it depends on you, do it. Live with the absence of conflict and strife. Live in peace. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work within the hearts of God's people.

Perhaps you need to repent, and confess your sins for those relationships where you are not at peace, where you bear responsibility for the conflict. Perhaps you are guilty of seeking vengeance, of repaying evil with evil. Perhaps you have been haughty or proud. If you would keep in step with the Spirit, then confess those sins and seek the forgiveness of God. “So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Finally, thirdly,

III. PEACE WITHIN YOUR HEART.

This is perhaps the hardest aspect of peace to define, because it is very subjective. This is something internal, within you, and not merely within your emotions. Like joy last week, this peace is something much deeper, much more stable than the surface level emotions with which we all live. This is in the realm of the affections, a matter of the soul.

Essentially, this peace is the definition of a soul at rest. A soul at peace, with the absence of strife and conflict that does, sometimes, affect people very deeply. The Hebrew term is shalom, a word that means wholeness or completeness, so this sense of peace is a description of a person whose soul is well. Complete. Whole. Settled and satisfied. No matter what might be happening outwardly, no matter what the circumstances of life might be. And that is often how this peace is defined, in relation to the troubles of this world. So it is,

A. The peace of those who live in the midst of difficulty.

John 14:27 “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.”

If you remember the context, it is Jesus talking to his disciples about his leaving them, and they were very troubled!

Similarly,

John 16:33 “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Again, I might ask, how is that possible? How can all of this be made practical for you and for me? How can you come to enjoy this peace within your own soul, no matter what might be swirling around in the circumstances of your life? How can you be free from the worry and anxiety that would be the very contradiction of this whole idea of peace?

The answer is a deeply spiritual answer. This peace comes to your soul only when you trust God. This peace is,

B. The peace of those who trust in God.

They rely upon God. They depend upon God, and not themselves. Not anyone else, either. Nor anything thing. If you want this sort of peace, then you must rely upon God in the very depth of your soul.

Is. 26:3 “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. 4 Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.”

God does it. God keeps us in perfect peace. God preserves that peace in your soul, when your mind is stayed upon him, fixed upon him, trusting and resting in him.

This peace really is the opposite of anxiety, and a study of peace can't be complete with looking at,

Phil. 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be

made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Beloved, trusting God means that you pray rather than worry. It means that you make your requests known to God rather than depending upon your own strength. It means that you rejoice in the Lord rather than being anxious. And when you do that, this fruit of the Spirit will abound! “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

There is still one more thing I need to say before we end, and one more verse. This peace is not an emotion. It is not a feeling. Rather, it is the work of the Holy Spirit within you, a work of God that you experience when you look to Jesus in every situation. And so I end and leave you with this thought, this reminder, that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. That is his name.

Is. 9:6 “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

So I proclaim peace to you, peace that is found only when you live by faith and trust in Jesus, for he is our peace. No greater blessing could you possibly enjoy than to have that peace with God that is found through saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Num. 6:24 “The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”