

# The Fruit Of The Spirit: Peace

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Dwight Eisenhower, former U.S. president and supreme Allied commander in Europe during World War II, was quoted by Richard Nixon in *Six Crises* as saying, "In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable." He said this because during the heat of battle, whether political or military, events never seemed to unfold the way the plans anticipated. However, the planning itself stimulated thought so that leaders could make adjustments to meet fast-changing and challenging circumstances as the battles raged. In this way, events did not become completely out of control.

Life is difficult and at times seems unfair. Events almost never turn out exactly as planned, yet a major reason we plan is to avoid the disquieting stress of things beyond our control. It is certainly understandable why we all want tranquillity. But the reality of man's history is that that tranquillity is rare indeed, whether between nations, families, individuals and at times even within ourselves. We may be quite intent on planning and striving for security within the framework of our "world," but people and events beyond our control constantly intrude and sometimes seriously disrupt our desired order.

It is astounding to contemplate how many things that form and shape our "world" are truly completely beyond our control. It begins before we are born. We have no control over who our parents are or when or where we are born. Our parents pass on to us a set of genes that determines what we look like. Will we be male or female, tall or short? Will our skin and hair be that of the majority or that of a persecuted minority? Will we be born physically or mentally handicapped? Will we be born in a free land with many opportunities for education and wealth or will we have to endure a harsh, rock-scrabble existence? All of us are dealt a hand at birth, and God expects us to play that hand to the best of our ability.

Yet circumstances of birth and genetics are merely the beginning of things beyond our control. What kind of parents gave us the gift of life? Were they kind, generous and farsighted in preparing us to live in this world? Were they abusive or did they fill our lives with loving attention, disciplining us when needed to help form our character? Did they guide our education while gently prodding us to do our best? Did they instill strong moral values or did they just allow us to grow up like an unneeded appendage that disturbed their plans for life?

This sort of illustration could go on endlessly, but it is important to understand that a great deal of everybody's life is totally beyond his control. Even long after birth, we still have no control over major tranquillity destroyers. We have no control over whether our nation goes to war or the stock market crashes. What can anyone do about weather that produces a drought or a sudden flood? Can we halt a terrifying, life-changing earthquake that can shatter the lives of thousands of people without even a rumble of warning?

Even in the intimacy of personal relationships, our control over the attitudes and behavior of others is minimal. How many of us have actually been successful in getting someone to change or to quit an addiction? If an addict is in denial, despite impassioned appeals, they will rarely honestly face the truth of their addiction until they hit bottom and bounce around a few times.

Do we actually have control of ourselves? The apostle Paul writes in Romans 7:15-17:

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

It sounds as if Paul was at times under the control of his old nature, not in control of it.

This is important because distress and anxiety undergird much of the restlessness and disquietude that fills so many lives. They are produced by the fear, uncertainty and insecurity of seeming to be at the whim of circumstances and people beyond our control. Our minds become troubled because we fear what is happening or may happen to us or a loved one. We worry that the consequences will be difficult to overcome, embarrassing, physically painful, damaging to our reputation or that we will be overwhelmed and suffer great loss.

Genesis 41:8, 16 records:

Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh. . . . So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, ". . . God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

This is a typical reaction. Pharaoh's mind was disturbed, agitated, because he did not understand. His portentous dream left him anxious because, despite his power, he could not control what he did not even begin to understand.

## Definitions

Any good dictionary will define "peace" as freedom from war, harmony, concord, agreement, calm, tranquillity, serenity, quiet, undisturbed state of mind, absence of mental conflict, contentment, acceptance of one's state and the absence of anxiety. It will list its antonyms as war, anxiety, disorder, disturbance, disruption, conflict and commotion.

The New Testament Greek word most often translated as "peace" is *eirene*. It has the sense of "joining what had previously been separated or disturbed." Thus, it frequently is used to signify "setting at one; quietness; and rest." *The Daily Study Bible Commentary* by William Barclay says it "means not just freedom from trouble but everything that makes for a man's highest good."

The word did not begin that way. Its classical Greek usage was narrow, confined to mean the absence of conflict. The New Testament's writers, however, also familiar with the Hebrew *shalom*, used *eirene* as its synonym. Thus, *eirene* also came to indicate inner satisfaction, the contentment and serenity that derive from living a full life.

The Hebrew predominantly uses three words, but one we will not consider because it refers to the peace offering. The second is *charash*. It means to hold one's peace, quiet, silent, rest, and a host of nuances both positive and negative depending on the context.

The third is the very familiar greeting, *shalom*. Though it is also generally translated as a single word like peace, rest, favor, safe, health, welfare and prosperity, it has, as the *International Standard Bible*

*Encyclopedia* states, "a basic meaning of totality or completeness including fulfillment, maturity, soundness, and wholeness."

Thus, like *eirene*, it also implies that which makes for man's highest good. Unfortunately, this sense does not carry through into the English translations. We miss out on the sense that *shalom*, whether used as a greeting or benediction, carries the desire for the recipient's well-being in the widest sense. When applied to the tranquillity of a person's mind even in the midst of trouble, it suggests that the person is being blessed with fullness or that his character is maturing into the image of God, who is perfect.

### **Other Biblical Uses of Peace**

In both Old and New Testaments, the usage of "peace" is consistent with how we use it within our cultures today. It is often understood as the opposite of war and social unrest, as in Ecclesiastes 3:8: "A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace."

At other times it is linked with the absence of war. Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." Jeremiah 12:12 adds:

The plunderers have come on all the desolate heights in the wilderness, for the sword of the Lord shall devour from one end of the land to the other end of the land; no flesh shall have peace.

God shows such conditions to be desirable in a variety of contexts involving tribes, cities and nations. Perhaps these two contrasting references will illustrate:

And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands. So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. (II Chronicles 15:5-6)

For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the River from Tiphsah even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. (I Kings 4:24-25)

The Bible shows that such peace can result from military victory. In Jeremiah 43:11-12, the prophet voices a prophecy God gave him about Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt:

When he comes, he shall strike the land of Egypt and deliver to death those appointed for death, and to captivity those appointed for captivity, and to the sword those appointed for the sword. I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt, and he shall burn them and carry them away captive. And he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd puts on his garment, and he shall go out from there in peace.

In the Bible the king's coming in peace means his coming in victory, his purpose accomplished. Surrender, therefore, is shown as an element in the resulting peace. II Samuel 10:19 records such an occurrence:

And when all the kings who were servants of Hadadezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them. So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon anymore.

However, the Bible also shows that diplomacy can produce peace:

Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth. . . . For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his kindred. (Esther 9:29-30; 10:3)

David also sought peace through diplomacy as I Samuel 25:5-6 shows:

David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. And thus you shall say to him who lives in prosperity: 'Peace be to you, peace on your house, and peace to all that you have!'"

The ratification of treaties was intended to produce peace, even as we have the same expectation today. Genesis 26:28-31 is a clear example:

But they said, "We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.'" So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

Generally, peace in the Old Testament is the state that occurs when conflicts are resolved, while in the New Testament that application is greatly diminished. There, peace is more an inner quality of those having been blessed through reconciliation with God, knowing His purpose and trusting in His sovereignty over the affairs of mankind and their lives.

### **Jesus Speaks on Peace**

In the gospels Jesus did not make many direct statements about peace, but one given on the eve of His crucifixion is very revealing:

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

His use of "heart" reveals that the peace in which He is involved while we are in this world is a state of mind. John 16:33 confirms this:

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

How glorious it would be to be free of the burdens of living in this dangerous, unstable, violent world, but as sons of God such is not our lot in life. God has called us to a life that runs counter to much of this world's practices and attitudes. As such, we are caught not only in general events and circumstances generated in the world, but also when we directly irritate and anger those close to us by determinedly following God's way.

Jesus states in His prayer to the Father in John 17:11, "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world." So we become caught in and must endure this world's wars, economic swings, prejudices, social unrest, natural disasters, and accidents. We are exposed to the same diseases as everybody else. All these can and do strike us with fear and trouble our hearts, destroying peace. In this world it is very easy to anticipate that a disaster can occur at any moment.

In John 17:14, Jesus addresses the source of the more personal persecutions that threaten our peace: "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." The carnal mind is enmity against God (Romans 8:7), and we can feel this hatred to a potentially terrifying degree when it is aimed directly at us. Throughout history, this sort of peace-shattering disturbance has produced job losses, divided families, uprooted lives in fleeing, imprisonment for those caught (Acts 9:1-2; 12:3-4) and for some martyrdom (Acts 7:54-60; 12:1-2).

## **Peace and Prosperity**

Jesus says we can have peace through these kinds of experiences because He can give it to us. When He said this, He was not introducing a new idea. In the "blessings and curses chapter," Leviticus 26:6 shows that God is the ultimate source of peace and He will give it upon our meeting the condition of obeying His commandments:

I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land.

Here, peace is a quality of life He can give even as he gives rain in due season. Leviticus 26 emphasizes material prosperity as God's blessing to Israel. Peace is necessary for the material prosperity of a nation. War may be the ultimate distraction from accomplishing anything positive; it is catastrophically debilitating to every area of life. Not only can it break a nation economically, but also warp its people psychologically and destroy its social structure, infrastructure and spirit.

Should we think that peace is no less necessary to spiritual prosperity? Is it possible for us to grow into the image of God when distracted by conflict and the anxieties and troubles it produces? Even if the conflict is not directly ours, it adversely affects our ability to live God's way of life. This is why the apostle Paul counsels us as he does in I Timothy 2:1-2:

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

Conflict promotes self-centeredness, virtually forcing us to flee, defend ourselves or attack the other to maintain or establish a measure of control. It can also cause us to detour permanently from what we were trying to accomplish.

James 3:17-18 gives more direct and specific reasons why peace is such a great benefit toward spiritual prosperity:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

"Wisdom" indicates influence of heavenly origin, that is, from God. Its effect on the mind is to make it pure and chaste, not more imaginative or intelligent. Its purpose is to make the person upright, inoffensive and good, then peaceable, etc. It disposes a person to live at peace with others. By itself, it corroborates Jesus' statement that He is willing and able to give a peace unlike the world's, a state of being not native to man.

If a person is of a pure spirit, then peace tends to follow. First, this occurs because a pure-hearted person is at peace within himself. He is therefore not self-righteously, self-centeredly and discontentedly seeking to impose his will and way on others to control their lives. Such a person will not induce conflict.

Second, they will follow Paul's advice, which he gave in two places. Romans 14:19 says, "Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another." Hebrews 12:14 adds, "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." It is very difficult for people to have conflict with others who will not fight! This does not mean that we should make peace at any cost by denying truth. We can remain faithful to truth without going to war, though it might appear costly at the moment. Jesus—and many others—did it.

James goes on to say that this approach to life's relationships produces the fruit of righteousness. This phrase could mean that what is produced as a fruit is righteousness, but it can also mean the fruit that righteousness produces. The latter is preferable. The fruit of the Spirit is the fruit the Spirit produces. The fruit of repentance is the change repentance produces in one's manner of living and attitude. Some of the fruit of righteousness are the qualities James mentions in James 3:17. Righteousness is therefore the seed from which these things grow.

But a seed needs the proper conditions to germinate, grow and produce fruit. Regardless of how good a seed is, if the conditions are not right, this process will be hindered, and it will bear poorly. The Parable of the Sower and Seed in Matthew 13 shows this clearly. Peace is the proper condition for the fruit of righteousness, and peacemakers are the green-thumbed gardeners. Growing a good crop demands the right conditions for good seed.

So important is peace to the Christian's spiritual prosperity that God will permit a marriage to be broken by divorce where there cannot be peace. I Corinthians 7:15 says:

But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

Divorce is usually preceded by a fairly long period of contention. It is warfare on a small scale. Living in an environment of warfare right in the home contributes little to growing in the image of

the loving God of peace. It forces one to focus on himself, and at worst, it is entirely possible God will lose the person involved in such a contentious circumstance. At the very least, growth will be slow and minimal.

### **Different From the World's Peace**

We have already seen that the peace of which Jesus speaks has a different source than the world's. But there is another element that is vastly different. The world's peace is caused by created things and the manipulations of carnal beings. History proves that the restless strivings of men for the peaceful promise of power, wealth and fame instead leaves them with care, anxiety and remorse. God has not given created things the power to give peace. The result is that once someone attains these things, the endless cycle to achieve their desired peace will only begin again.

False religions, philosophies of men and even close friendships cannot assuage this hunger. These can do nothing to alter the cause of the anxious restlessness born of a guilty conscience or enmity between them and God. These can claim to give peace, but what can they do about the problem of sin and a relationship with God? Can any of these reconcile a person to God and give him a new nature?

Can these give a person the security that comes with knowing his life is in the hands of the Almighty Sovereign Creator of all things, whose attentiveness is so great that He notices a sparrow's falling? Can they give a full vision of the great and glorious purpose God is working out? Can they give lasting and complete healing of a person's bent and twisted mind or diseased body?

The Christian can have the peace that "surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:6-7) because God does all these things and much, much more. We have only scratched the surface of the understanding that undergirds the way a Christian perceives this troubled world and his life in it.

### **Justification and Peace**

Paul writes:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)

These verses follow a long section on justification by faith. Paul concludes chapter 4 with the fact that Christ's resurrection was God's evidence that Christ's work was accepted and thus ensures our justification.

The word "therefore" at the beginning of chapter 5 shows that the immediate benefit of justification is that we have peace with God. This is justification by faith's practical influence on the lives of those justified. Paul says in Romans 8:6-7:

For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.  
Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God,  
nor indeed can be.

This plainly states that the sinner is the enemy of God, and the state of a sinner's mind is far from peace. It is at war, and his sinning proves the warfare, the rebellion in his mind. He is often agitated,

alarmed and trembling and feels alienated from God. God is not in all his thoughts (Psalm 10:4, KJV). Isaiah 57:20-21 explains:

But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

The sinner trembles when he thinks of God's law. He fears His judgments and is alarmed when he considers hell. But as God moves a person toward conversion, He reveals His willingness to be reconciled through His Son's sacrifice. Through faith and repentance, the obstacles arising from God's justice and law disappear, and He is willing to pardon and be at peace. When the sinner embraces it, this process produces peace of mind, a peace the world cannot give or take away because the world is powerless over sin. This peace is a work, a product, of the Spirit of God by which the sinner has been called and led to this point.

### **Access to God**

The second benefit arising from justification by faith is access to God. This plays a large part in sustaining the peace begun at reconciliation. Reconciliation implies a relationship established with God to continue peaceful fellowship. Without access to Him, we can have no fellowship and relationship. The peace will quickly dissolve because we will become estranged, not knowing one another. Through access to Him, we can draw strength from Him to face the trials of life.

Our relationship is one of personal trust that in one sense leaves justification behind to move onward to sanctification and finally glorification in the Kingdom of God. The path we follow is not always easy. Luke writes in Acts 14:22 that the apostles went about, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'"

"Tribulations" brings thoughts of trouble, anxiety, fear and doubt. However, Paul writes in Romans 5: 3-5 that those who have peace with God and access to Him

. . . glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us.

This peace is not a kind of secular contentment that men can find by lowering their standards and expectations. It is both a gift from God to those reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ and a product of the Holy Spirit in us as we grow in a continuing, trustful relationship through the daily affairs of our life.

The Christian's outlook on life can be entirely different from those in the world, untroubled by the calamity they see all around them. This does not mean that the Christian's peace is a sort of magic or that he ignores the seriousness of the situation. Nor does it mean that the Christian achieves this wonderful quality instantly or that it is always constant. However, it is always available through faith because he has access to the Sovereign, Almighty God. He always has everything under control and is filled with love and wisdom that He is willing to use for our benefit.

### **Rejoicing in Hope**



A third effect of God's revelation of Himself that brings and sustains peace is that we can "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). Simply said, a Christian understands the purpose of life and eagerly yearns to be changed and inherit the Kingdom of God. The question, "Why were you born?" is answered, and he can turn his focus in life to yielding to God, secure in the knowledge that God will be working in his behalf to form His image in him.

Paul exclaims in Romans 8:31-32, 35, 37-39:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The fruit of peace, like love and joy before it, is demonstrated again by Scripture to be the work of God's Holy Spirit in us. All of mankind's history gives evidence of almost continuous warfare motivated by the qualities of character natural to man. "Peace, peace!" men cry, "when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). This is a hollow, impossible cry in this world because Scripture also truthfully testifies, "The way of peace they have not known" (Romans 3:17).

The peace that Jesus offers comes only as the result of God's calling by His Spirit through which He works in and through us to bring us into loving submission to the way of peace. That is the way of daily talking and walking with God, coming to know intimately His faithful, loving use of His wisdom and power to complete His glorious purpose in our lives. It produces a peace that passes all understanding because then everything is under perfect control (Romans 8:28-30).