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Title: Fruit of the Spirit Series – 4. Peace: The Path To Peace

Text: Romans 14:19

I'm told that three words are found on tombstones more than any other words. This common phrase reflects a family's sincere desire for their departed loved one and is something for which everyone searches their entire lives. On small tombstones, only the letters "R.I.P." are used. What do those letters stand for? Rest in Peace. Everyone searches for peace because our lives are filled with the stress of pressures, problems and pain. Stress gets us down; that's why one of the most prescribed prescriptions is anti-depressants. One source stated that 1 in 6 Americans take some kind of psychiatric drug – most of which are anti-depressants. Stress tends to rob us of our peace.

The fruit of the Spirit is developed by walking in the Spirit day after day, and it is developed by the INTENTIONAL CULTIVATION of each quality. Just as yielding high-quality fruit in a garden requires attention, nurturing, and care, so it is in the Christian life. Today we'll look at the QUALITY OF PEACE. If ANY quality is needed in the lives of people today – in our families, in our culture, in our church community and throughout the entire planet – it is PEACE. Of the 195 countries of this world, it is reported that at best – 10 are at peace. I read this week that war is defined as "an active conflict that has claimed more than 1,000 lives." Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them or 8% of recorded history. Since 1776, the U.S. has only been at peace for less than 20 years total since its birth. Our headlines reek of wars and rumors of wars – the ABSENCE of peace. HOWEVER, Paul said in no uncertain terms, when you're walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, your life is to be DEFINED BY PEACE.

When we talk about peace, we need to understand what kind of peace we're talking about. First of all, there is peace WITH God. You don't have peace until you become a child of God – till you're saved. Romans 5:1, *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace WITH God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* That means the war's over, the hostilities have ceased, Jesus has conquered, we have surrendered, and there's peace WITH God. I hope you have that, but that's NOT the peace Galatians 5:22 is talking about. Galatians 5 is talking about the peace OF God. There are some people that have peace WITH God but don't have the peace OF God. Colossians 3:15 says, *"And let the peace OF God rule in your hearts."* Philippians 4:7 says, *"And the peace OF God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* When Jesus Christ was facing the cross, He made out His last will & testament. And He mentioned YOU in His will. Did you know that? He willed His body to Joseph of Arimathea for a while. He willed His mother to John the Apostle, but do you know what He left you? He left you His peace. John 14:27 – *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you"* and then He said – *"not as the world giveth, give I unto you."* It's not the kind of peace that the world gives. And as we sang earlier, *"The world didn't give it to me, so the world can't take it away."* It's a supernatural peace. It is the peace OF God that passes all understanding. It is the peace OF God that is to rule in your heart. It is NOT the absence of problems. You will never have the absence of problems as long as you are on this earth. Job 14:1 says, *"Man that is born of woman is full of trouble."* It is the addition of power – it is peace in the MIDST of the storm.

Two things I want you to know about peace. First, it is **God's PROMISE**. He wants to fill your life with peace. Time does not permit me to mention every place in the Bible where we are promised God's peace, but you can sum it up with Jesus' statement in the gospel of John – *"These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace..."* (16:33). It's a promise you can claim. Second, it is **God's COMMAND**. *"As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"* (Romans 12:18). Those who take this verse of scripture seriously tend to experience a more peaceful existence. If you'll take your own contentiousness off the menu, you will be amazed at how much easier it is to get along with others. Now, I realize there are a few cantankerous souls out there who can't get along with anyone, and there's not much you can do about them, but thankfully they're few and far between. However, if you will do what YOU can do to get along with others, a significant percentage of the population will likely comply.

There are three steps you need to take every day in the direction of peace:

1. Peace is something you need to PUT ON. I'm saying that to experience the feeling – the emotional state – of inner peace, you need to do your part. Experiencing the peace of God is NOT a passive process. You don't just wait for it to wash over you and take control of your life. You need to, in the words of Peter, *"seek peace and pursue it"* (1 Peter 3:11). In the book of Colossians, Paul said, *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness humility, gentleness and patience"* (3:12). The same could be said for peace. It's something you put

on. We have peace with God not because of anything we have ever done in our own strength, but because of what His Son, Jesus Christ, has done for us. We have all found ourselves in the same predicament. We feel separated from God and at war with ourselves because of our sinful behavior. And to resolve this dilemma, the Bible says that *“while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). Jesus bridged the gap that exists between you and God, and He brought peace into the relationship. We are no longer at odds with God. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ. He has done all that He can do; it is up to you and me – to receive this peace, to act upon it, to live in it, to clothe ourselves with it. In Romans 5:1, Paul said, *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* This phrase *“we have peace with God”* can also be translated *“LET US have peace with God.”* In other words: accept it, receive it, don’t resist it, put it on, CLOTHE YOURSELF IN THE PEACE God is offering you. How do you clothe yourself? There’s a verse in the Old Testament book of Isaiah that every believer would do well to memorize - *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee”* (26:3). When you fix your thoughts on God, and His presence in your life, and His goodness and His mercy and His love...His peace comes your way. Paul said basically the same thing in Romans 8:6, *“The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”* When I say that the first step toward peace is to put it on, I’m saying that if you want to experience the peace of the Holy Spirit, put your mind on God. Think about Him, with intention. Spend time in His Word. Listen to music that lifts Him up. Talk to Him. Talk to Him. Talk to Him. By putting on the peace of Christ, you experience the peace of Christ, and you cultivate its growth in your daily life. This is where it begins. I mentioned that there are three steps we need to take in the direction of peace, but until we’ve taken this first step, we’re not fully able to take the other two. So you begin by saying, *“I need to experience the peace of God within, so I WILL MAKE HIM THE CENTER OF MY THOUGHTS ALL DAY LONG.”*

2. Peace is something you SHARE WITH OTHERS. It’s impossible to share with others what you have not experienced yourself. You can’t share peace when you yourself are in turmoil all the time. That’s why step one is step one. As you go through the day with your mind stayed on Jesus Christ, you learn to share His peace with others. In the verse I quoted earlier, Paul said ... *“As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”* (Romans 8:12). This is why I said that peace is not merely a promise, it’s a COMMAND. It’s a requirement. Nearly every family, every workplace, every church has one or two who live to keep things stirred up. In many a family, there’s at least one who loves to instigate. They will say something that they know you disagree with, just to get you to respond OR they will remind you of mistakes you’ve made in the past – ANYTHING to keep conflict alive. And the temptation, of course, is to respond in the same way. The Apostle Peter said, *“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing”* (1 Peter 3:9). It doesn’t take an advanced degree in sociology to recognize that the ideological climate in our country has become increasingly intolerant of anyone whose opinions veer from what one group or the other deems acceptable. The battle lines have been drawn, and for some, it seems there is no middle ground. With very little effort at all, you can spend your entire day in conflict with others OR you can CHOOSE to take the path of peace. This attitude of sharing peace with others is about more than political discussions. It’s about everything. It’s about choosing the path of peace at every turn. It’s about overlooking the instigator’s instigations, and it’s about refusing to instigate back. Again, Paul said, *“Let us therefore MAKE EVERY EFFORT to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”* Sometimes it means HOLDING YOUR TONGUE. Sometimes it means CHANGING THE SUBJECT. Sometimes it means SPEAKING A BLESSING even when you’ve got a snappy comeback ready.

3. Peace is something you CREATE WHEN POSSIBLE. Jesus said, *“Blessed are the PEACEMAKERS, for they shall be called the sons of God”* (Matthew 5:9). More than merely doing your best to get along with others, there will be times when you have the opportunity to bring two sides together. Our goal in our relationships is NOT to put people in their place, and it’s NOT to knock them down a peg or two. Our goal is to help them move up a peg or two, in the direction of God’s grace, so that they can experience a closer walk with Christ. There’s a verse in Isaiah that says ... *“...and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in”* (58:12). That’s what we want to be! Rather than being the instigator of conflict, rather than being the destroyer of those with whom you disagree, we are called to repair that which is broken. Solomon said, *“There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but JOY FOR THOSE WHO PROMOTE PEACE”* (Proverbs 12:20).

Conclusion: Paul said, *“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”* Why is that? That’s because God has called us to live in peace. It’s BOTH a PROMISE, and a COMMAND. You will ONLY experience His peace when you PUT HIM FRONT & CENTER IN YOUR THOUGHTS. Then you have the opportunity to PASS HIS PEACE ALONG TO OTHERS.