

## **FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT- PEACE**

Text: John 14:15-27; Ephesians 2:11-22; Philipians 4:2-9 Galatians 5:22&23

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It is interesting to note the various ways people in different cultures greet each other. In Australia we tend to say, "Hello, how are you?" (Or owregoinmateorright?) So we are asking about another's welfare. I read of a Christian conference where the speaker told the group that Christians in the first centuries greeted each other by saying 'Maranatha' which means, 'The Lord is coming!' Apparently they were awaiting the return of Jesus so eagerly they used 'Maranatha' as their greeting and hope. The speaker suggested they do that at the conference. In the morning two old ladies approached the speaker and said eagerly 'Marijuana, brother, marijuana!' In the Middle East folk say 'shalom' (Jewish) or 'salaam'(Arabic). Both words mean 'peace.' There is a sad irony in that greeting given the tension between Jews and Palestinians. Now it needs to be pointed out that the Hebrew word 'shalom' means something much broader to our idea of 'peace'. We usually define 'peace' in negative terms, such as 'an absence of tension' or 'cessation of hostilities.' If there are no wars, we say 'the world is at peace'. Which in fact is rare. Research has shown less than 8 percent of the time, since the beginning of recorded history, has the world been entirely at peace. In a total of 3530 years, 286 have been warless. Eight thousand treaties have been signed, and broken, in that period.

But the Biblical word 'shalom' has a more positive meaning. It contains the ideas of 'order' and 'well-being'. A Bible concordance says it means 'completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquillity, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony.' In modern Hebrew 'shulam' means 'to be fully paid'. The Reformed theologian Neil Plantinga says shalom is 'the webbing together of God, humans and all creation in justice, fulfilment and delight...It means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight, a rich state of affairs ...that inspires joyful wonder as our Creator and Saviour opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words,

is the way things ought to be.' The fourth century bishop Augustine defined peace as the 'tranquillity of order'. He means there is peace when everything is in order. All things, all relationships are in their proper place as established by God. When our relationships are in order, when all things and creatures are treated or used as God intended then there is tranquillity. In the Old Testament when David brought home Uriah the Hittite from the battlefield David asked him *"Is all well with Joab, the soldiers and the war?"* A direct translation of the Hebrew is *"How is the shalom of Joab? And the shalom of the soldiers and the shalom of the wars?"* Clearly if shalom only meant an absence of war, David was asking a nonsense question. David was asking about the wellbeing of his soldiers. In Judges 6 we see Gideon approached by God to remove the Midianites. Gideon asked God for a sign to confirm that God would be with him in the war. Verse 24 tells us that in response Gideon built an altar and called it *"Yahweh Shalom"*, *"The Lord is peace."* Now he could say that not because he was heading for a non fighting experience. Rather he was going to war with the assurance that the God had everything in order and would grant him victory. Therefore Gideon could be at peace. He could enjoy the 'tranquillity of order.'

In Isaiah 48:17-18 we read: *"I am the Lord your God, who teaches what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you paid attention to my commands, your peace would be like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the seas."* 'Peace like a river' as we sing in that hymn, enables us to know 'it is well with my soul'. This sense of wellbeing comes from knowing everything is under control. Everything is under God who *"teaches you what is best,"* and *"directs you in the way you should go."* Now, of course, God's teaching and directing require we do what he says. It is made very clear in verse 22 that *"there is no peace... for the wicked."* Those who reject God and what he says will know nothing of the peace God promises. The 'tranquillity of order' is only for those who carefully order their lives according to the principles of God.

The Greek word for peace, *'eirene'*, means 'inner wellbeing'. It literally means to bind or weave together. It means that one person is joined together with another or more importantly joined with God. Peace can be defined as 'inner calm, even in the midst of turmoil.' We see this sort of thing in John 14. We see Jesus telling his disciples he must soon go to the cross. Then he says *"Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* So on the one hand the disciples were presented with the disturbing reality

that they would face trouble. But on the other hand Jesus assures them they can be at peace. Their challenge was to discover how to balance living in the world and living with Jesus. That is till our biggest issue. We live in a society that has in many ways rejected Jesus. If we go along with society we will find ourselves tainted by its wrong ideas. If we stick with Jesus' ways, we will find trouble with the world. We will find ourselves out of step with our culture. But if we want inner peace, we will observe the teachings of Jesus. We will follow the leading of the Spirit he has left us.

Now, having understood something of what peace is, we will look a little further into how we experience peace as a fruit of the Spirit. There are three different applications of the experience of peace: 'peace with God', the 'peace of God', and 'peace with one another'. To think through 'peace with God', we begin with that sense of 'order, or harmony'. When we look at the creation we see there is order. Sunrise and sunset are entirely predictable. So are the tides. The more we look into the intricacies of ecology and the complexities of biology, the more we become aware of the amazing sense of design and order in God's creation. But we are also very aware of the tragedy that is occurring ecologically. The reason for it is our human interference. There is terrible disorder, and a destruction of the harmony in creation because of human disobedience. All of creation is cursed because of our sin. The result is that we all know things are not right. Even those who have no concept of God are aware that there is something terribly wrong. The world has lost its sense of harmony and wellbeing because we have not followed God who *"teaches what is best, and directs you in the way you should go."* We have broken our relationship with God and we are in tension with him. But there is a way out of the terrible disaster on the whole creation. The way is found in Jesus. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:13-14 *"But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."* Paul makes clear, that our sin took us far away from God. He was at war with us. His justice demanded that our sin be dealt with. We had no promise for a future. No hope. But now in Jesus there is hope. He himself is our peace. Jesus paid the price for our disobedience. On the cross he suffered for our wrong. And now God says there is forgiveness for those who repent and come in trust and obedience. Paul writes in Romans 5: 1 *"Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* Have you seen the sticker that reads 'No Jesus, No peace'. Underneath it are the words 'Know Jesus, Know peace.' I love the

play on words. It's not only clear, it's biblically accurate. Jesus is our peace. Through him everything is good between God and us. He is our Father and we are his loved children. We can be at peace about that. The sense of foreboding and hopeless gloom is gone. Nothing can change that, for our peace is not in us and in what we do. It is in Jesus. He is our peace. With the Spirit of God there is the start of obedience again, doing things as God knows best.

This leads to the second experience of peace, the 'peace of God'. When you trust Jesus to have dealt with all your disobedience and sin, you are forgiven. So you stand before God without any blemish, free from accusation, as perfect as God. Many people are not at peace with themselves. They struggle with guilt and low self worth. The reason is that they do not know their position in Christ. The story is told of a 24year old Canadian who went to jail for robbing a bank. His gun went to a museum. He robbed the bank of \$6000 but the gun he used was an antique which was worth \$100,000. If the man had known what he carried in his hand he wouldn't have robbed the bank. He already had what he needed. So many Christians do a similar thing, searching for peace, not knowing they already have what they need. Too many still live with the shame of past sins. They still believe the lies they heard growing up. 'Nobody loves you, you are not good enough'. But God has forgiven it all completely. He says 'I love you dearly, as you are. Be at peace'. Even if we are content with ourselves, the stresses of life in our modern world are producing all sorts of problems: tension headaches, high blood pressure, ulcers, coronaries, and chronic anxiety. All these problems make us realise that all of us must come to terms with death. Despite our modern science we cannot avoid our demise on this earth. For many this is terribly disturbing. But it does not have to be so. Yahweh Shalom, the God of Peace, is the one who is committed to our good. Romans 8:28 *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* This surely brings tranquillity and peace to us. If God, who has control of everything, who has all things in order, does all things for our good, surely we can trust him in that. Paul promised in Philippians 4:7 *"...the peace of God, which transcends our understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."* We can best explain this with an illustration. The great hymn of faith, 'When peace like a river', was written by a successful lawyer in Chicago in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The father of five was very active in the Presbyterian Church. His successful life suddenly turned to disaster. Without warning his only son died. Then he lost all his real estate investments through fire. He

decided to take his family to Europe to lift their spirits and to assist the evangelist Dwight Moody. He sent his wife and four daughters ahead by ship. But halfway across the Atlantic their ship was struck by an English ship and sank. The four daughters drowned, while the mother was miraculously saved. When Horatio Spafford went to join his wife in Wales, his ship passed the place where his daughters had drowned. Overwhelmed with grief he took out a legal pad and wrote the words of the hymn 'When peace like a river, flows all through my life, when sorrows like sea billows roll: whatever my lot, you have taught me to say: it is well, it is well with my soul.' That is a peace within, a peace that passes all reasonable attempts to understand it. A peace that guards and protects our hearts. Only God, only his Spirit, can give that peace to us, to keep us, to have hope and serenity, in the middle of the storm.

The third aspect of this fruit of peace is 'peace with one another'. Paul writes in Ephesians 2 that Jesus has removed the "*dividing wall of hostility*." The Jews and Gentiles hated each other with a vengeance. But in Christ, both groups could know the love of God. And as they were drawn to Jesus so they were drawn together. Through Jesus, every one who comes to him, no matter what nation or skin colour or background, we are all the one people of God. If there is one thing that can win others to Christ it is our unity, our being at peace with one another. If there is one thing that keeps them away it is when we are bickering and fighting. That's why Paul writes in Philippians 4:2 "*I plead with Eudia and I plead with Synteché to agree with each other*." If we have the peace of God within, a calm and serenity that comes about because we know God's grace, then we will express that peace in how we live with each other. Paul writes in Romans 12:18 "*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*." Live at peace at home, at work, at church. If a husband and wife stop their shouting matches and settle for an icy stalemate, is that peace? It is an absence of conflict but not shalom. Things are not what they should be. To have wholeness and harmony, tranquillity, all things as they should be, we need to follow God's ways. The better we get to know Yahweh Shalom (God of Peace), and follow his order for our lives, the more the peace of his presence will fill our lives. As the Spirit fills us with his peace, the more we enjoy peace with others and peace within. And we can be at peace knowing God has all things in order. One day Jesus, Prince Shalom, will return and bring peace to all the creation. Then there will be true justice and freedom for all. There will be no more sickness or pain. No more disasters or war or

death. No more crying or tears. For then all things will be whole, in harmony. Then everything will be as it should be. There is your hope. Be at peace.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- What is 'peace' as it is described in the Bible? Explain the word 'shalom'. How is peace expressed as a fruit of the Spirit?
- Explain how we get to have peace *with* God and so we can have the peace *of* God. Do you have that in your life, peace with God and the peace of God? How is it expressed/felt with you?
- How do you develop peace in your life? What areas do you want to work on?