

Peace

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Date: 21 October 2012

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[0 : 00] For those of you who are visiting this morning, we are going through a series in Galatians at the fruit of the Spirit and we come to the third one, the smirking battle of peace.

And we're going to read from Galatians 5, we're going to read from verses 16 to 26. Galatians 5, verses 16 to 26.

So I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. The sinful nature desires is what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit is what is contrary to the sinful nature.

They are in conflict with each other, so they do not do what they want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of sinful nature are obvious, sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery.

A daughter in witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy.

[1 : 24] Drunkenness, orges and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. Both who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become constituted, provoking and envying each other.

Amen. We are going to pause just for a few moments as we come and bring our prayers of intercession to pray for our world, to pray for our city and to pray for those within our own fellowship, for those that we know who need our prayers at this time.

[2 : 34] Let us come to God in prayer. Let us pray.

Father, we live in a very busy world. Many of us have very busy lives. And we find it difficult to stop and be still in your presence.

We want to do that right now. We want to pause and be still and know that you are God. And we want to pause in your presence and ask that you would speak to us today.

Speak to us through your word. Speak to us through our fellow Christians. Speak to us so that we can hear your small voice speaking into our lives.

Father, we pause because we need your direction and we need your guidance to live our lives by. Often through the week we are bombarded by so many different views and opinions and we lose our direction and we lose our focus on Christ.

[4 : 04] And so we come again this morning and ask that you would fix our eyes upon Jesus. That he would guide us not only in the big decisions, but in the day to day decisions of work and family and home and studies.

We pray that he would guide us to know how to pray according to your will. Father, we confess that sometimes our prayers are selfless and self-centered.

Help us to lift our eyes up and to pray according to your will and purpose. We pray for our congregation here. We thank you for all that belongs to it and our part of it.

We thank you that we can share life together in the good and in the bad. And we pray that we will be a congregation that loves each other as you have loved us.

But you will be helpers to be a congregation that shares and gives. We pray again for our minister, we thank you for him and we pray that he would have had a refreshing time away.

[5 : 35] We thank you for all our elders and deacons, for the time that they give, for the leadership they give. And we pray that you would bless them and guide them.

We pray for those in our congregation who are struggling, some in a public way, often in a private way. For the bereaved, for the lonely, for those whose dreams have been shattered in different ways.

Would you bring comfort? Would you help us to be your hands and your feet to those individuals? We pray that you would be with those who are rejoicing. May we rejoice with them. We pray for next Sunday for the service of baptism.

That would be an opportunity for us to give thanks collectively together. Father, we pray for our city, we thank you for it.

[6 : 47] We thank you for the many privileges that we have by living here in Edinburgh. But we remember those who are overworked or underworked.

We pray for those who are struggling with different forms of addiction. We pray for those who are lonely.

May we as your church reach out in love to those in our society who are on the margins.

Father, we pray again for our nation. We thank you again for the way that you have acted towards us. We thank you for the blessings you have given us, but we do not want to rely on past blessings. We pray again, humbly asking that you would pour your spirit out upon your church so that we can reach this nation for Christ.

[7 : 54] Father, we pray for your church, both here in this nation and a further field. Father, we pray for our brothers and sisters who face very real physical persecution today.

Father, we pray and stand beside them. We pray for cheerfinding that thank you for what they have done over so many years. We pray that you would bless their work to the most vulnerable in our world.

Father, thank you again for that hymn that we have sung that reminds us that one day you will come for your church. One day we will go to be with you, which is far better.

Help us to live in that reality, in that hope. But until then, help us to remain faithful to you, because we ask this in Christ's name.

Amen. Before we turn back to that passage in Galatians, we are going to sing again Psalm 85 verses 8 to 13.

[9 : 11] Psalm that reminds us of the need to be righteous, to be right before God and other people. Let's stand and sing Psalm 85 verses 8 to 13.

I will hear what God the Lord says to His saints, He offers peace, but His people must not wander, and we turn to foolishness.

Surely for all those who fear Him, His salvation is at hand.

So that once again His glory may be seen within our land.

Love and truth have met together, righteousness and peace embrace.

[10 : 37] Righteousness lurks, turn from heaven, from the earth springs faithfulness.

What is good the Lord will give us, and the land its fruit will bear.

Righteousness will go before Him, and His royal way prepare.

There was a great fire in Chicago.

It killed over 300 people and left 100,000 people without homes to live in. Tragedies such as these always bring up heroes, and in this case one of the great heroes of Chicago was a chap called Horatio Gates Spatford.

[11 : 57] Spatford was a lawyer who lost all his house in the fire. To make things worse, his son was also killed in the fire as well.

But even out of his great personal loss, Spatford went about helping the homeless, the Grease stricken, because he knew of the love of Christ.

He was a devout Christian and a great supporter of D'Almoudi. In 1873, two years after the fire, he was going to take his four daughters and wife on a trip to Europe, so that we could hear D'Almoudi preach in England and in fact also here in Edinburgh.

And so he decided to leave by boat, just as the boat was leaving, he was called back on business, so sent his wife and daughters on and said he would catch up with him in a couple of weeks time.

Tragedy was to strike again. Just off Newfoundland, the ship collided with another vessel, and within 20 minutes it had sunk.

[13 : 16] Anne Spatford was one of the 47 passengers who survived. Tragically 226 people died that night, including all four daughters of Horatio Spatford.

When Anne arrived on land, all she could eat text or all she could do by telegram was saved alone. The grieving father immediately got on board a boat to England to be with his wife. And as he was passing about the location where the ships had collided and his four daughters had died, he wrote this hymn.

When peace like a river, a tender of my way, when sorrows like sea-brothers roar, whatever my lot thou has taught me to know, it is well, it is well with my soul.

While Satan should buff it, while trials should come, let this blessed assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and have shed his own blood for my soul.

[14 : 36] It is well, it is well with my soul. But those of us who haven't had our faith tested like that can only imagine what it would be like to write these words having lost all your children.

That is peace, to be able to write a hymn like that after experiencing tragedy like that. And this morning in the third sermon in the series of The Fruits of the Spirit, I want us to look at the subject of peace.

It's a topic that our society, our world desperately needs to be addressed. We live in a war-torn world.

We live in our society that has been torn apart. And many of us live with families and personal situations that are at war with each other.

And so as we start this, I want to begin by considering, behind the most basic question, can we define peace? What is peace?

[16 : 00] Well, here are a few definitions I came across. Peace is the brief, glorious moment in history when everybody stands around reloading.

Peace is the absence of conflict. Or peace is knowing that we may get to the point where we can do nothing else, but that of our all-powerful God has no such limits.

I'll come back to that third definition in a moment, because I think it probably sums it up best. We know that Jesus' description of peace didn't mean the absence of interpersonal conflict.

Quite the reverse. If you look at Matthew 10, 34, Jesus said that he had come not to bring peace but a sword.

The third definition, quoted a moment ago, is adapted from the definition of Dr. John MacArthur, the American pastor. He gives it fully this way. Peace is knowing that we may get to the point where we can do nothing else, but that our all-powerful God has no such limits.

[17 : 24] Or as the author Helen Kelly puts it, I do not want the peace which passes understanding. I want the understanding which brings peace.

The reality is that peace which passes understanding can only come from understanding the truth about God.

Peace is a major theme within the New Testament. It appears 80 times. It appears once in every book of the New Testament.

You see, we need that peace which comes from God, because at some point, perhaps not yet, but at some point in our life, we will face an issue that will disturb us and will rock our certainty.

For some of us, it has been or will be the death of a loved one, a child, a parent or spouse. For others, it will be medical, a heart attack, cancer or another life-threatening disease.

[18 : 41] For still others, it will be divorce or financial ruin or the loss of a significant dream. But sometimes, the tragedies don't need to be so personal.

We all lived through 9-11. We all lived sadly through just a few weeks ago the murder of April Jones.

The tragedy comes into every life at some point. The details will vary, but the experience does not. And so that perhaps brings us to the crunch question this morning. Is it possible to have peace this side of heaven?

Many people would say it's not, but as we look, I think, at God's word, and as we understand how that peace is not only possible, but in fact should be normative for those of us who are believers, because it is a gift of God.

[19 : 53] So where did that source of true peace come from? To properly understand peace, we need to understand where that true peace comes from.

Because it is quite, for many people in our world, unexpected. That peace is described in Galatians 5 as a fruit of the Spirit.

It thus means that ultimately comes from God, not from us. As many of you will know, the word peace is shalom, which is much more positive than we have within the English language. It speaks of wholeness, of wellbeing. It includes our relationship with God, but also includes living in harmony with others.

We're going to look at a number of biblical verses. If you've got time, flick with me, but we're going to move quite quickly, so if you don't, just listen. Romans 5.1.

[21 : 04] Paul spoke of both peace with God, because we are justified by faith, and the peace of God, which goes beyond human understanding.

In fact, in today's world of stress, frequent misunderstanding, and pain, you're not going to find peace that easily, except from God.

The only place I would suggest that you will experience the true peace we long for is in the Father himself. To put it another way, in the world that we live in, if peace depended on you and me, there would be no peace.

If it's not clear enough from Galatians 5 that peace we long for comes from God, if we look at John 14.27, Jesus says it very clearly.

Talking to his disciples, to his followers, Jesus says, Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give you, you as the world gives, do not let your heart be troubled, and do not be afraid.

[22 : 24] It doesn't take much of any academic scholar, or any much of exegesis, to see that the peace was important to Jesus. However, upon closer examination, the source that peace Jesus was speaking about comes from the Father himself.

Let me show what I mean by sharing two very significant observations about what Jesus says in John 14.27.

You see, Jesus is saying that he is dependent upon him having that peace. That peace came at the midst of the most difficult time in his life.

He was just about to face the cross. He was just about to face the ultimate touching of pain that anyone in the world has experienced.

And yet, at that very moment, he challenged his disciples to have peace. He wanted them to understand that at the most difficult point in their lives, they could experience that peace.

[23 : 44] But of course, Jesus was the prime example, but not the only example of those who have experienced peace at the most difficult times.

We know the story of Daniel, said that Meseik and Abednego, who boldly told King Nebuchadnezzar that they should throw him in the furnace, that they weren't going to bow down to his first God.

They believed that God was strong enough to take care of him, but they informed the king that even if that was not the case, they would not bow down to his idol.

And as they went into the furnace, they found peace. Or if you move to the New Testament and consider Peter in the book of Acts, King Herod, reading Acts that had already killed James, he'd become the first Christian martyr.

Peter was in prison. Next day, he was scheduled to die. He was between two Roman gods, one on his right, one on his left.

[24 : 54] And what's interesting is what does it say about Peter at that darkest time in his life? He was asleep.

Now, you can't sleep if you don't have peace. It's guess to say, it's fair to say, that Peter knew where he was going.

So what is the secret of true peace? I believe that true peace is both more complicated and more simple at the same time.

It involves more than most people think, as well as less than we think. Now, perhaps that sounds, I was going to say, a bit Irish, but I don't want to offend any of my Irish brothers and sisters here.

So let me just say it sounds a bit confusing. So let me try to explain a bit further. When something is confusing, the best way to deal with it is to break it down.

[25 : 53] Or so my maths teacher used to tell me at school. To put it into separate parts, to examine each part and then deal with it as a whole at the end.

So let's begin with a complicated part of peace. I'm indebted, I'm indebted, I'm indebted, I'm thankful anyway, to one commentator for pointing out that peace and righteousness are often connected in scripture.

See, perhaps we haven't thought about it this way, but righteousness and peace are two sides of the same coin.

When you think about it and look at various scriptures, the connection is made very quickly. If you have a Bible, turn quickly to Isaiah 60 verse 17.

As Isaiah says, I will make peace your governance and righteousness your ruler. For there to be true peace, righteousness needs to be in charge.

[27 : 05] So if you go back to Psalm 85, the one that we just sung a few moments ago, verse 8 and 10 speaks of a connection between righteousness and peace.

Notice particularly verse 10, loving kindness and truth have met together and righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

I want to explain those a bit more in a few moments. But let's have a negative perspective, which I think makes it very clear. Isaiah 48 verse 22 says, there is no peace for the wicked.

So obviously the simple question is, why is it that the wicked person never have peace? It's because he or she is constantly getting into trouble.

They're always having to deal with the message that the ungodly behave. The reason that the connection between righteousness and peace is there is that what you do affects who you are.

[28 : 20] If you do something negative, it will have an impact upon your life. That is why sin is so corrosive.

It's why it erodes at our life because it pulls us away from doing good and takes us to doing bad. See it makes sense. In reality it's not really terribly complicated and yet it's the connection that often we never make.

Let's go in the other direction for a few moments. I say that peace is also more simple than we often think it is. Let me say one of the most basic principles of scripture.

We will never experience outer peace until we have inner peace. There's no point looking at the external until we look at the internal.

[29 : 29] You will not be at peace with your workmate or your spouse or your world until you are at peace internally with yourself and most importantly with God.

Apostle James puts it this way in chapter 4 verse 1. What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you?

You want what you do not have so you scheme to kill and get it. You are jealous for what others have and you can't possess it.

So you fight and quarrel, take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it.

Peace on the inside comes from peace with God and knowing that he is in control. When we have that kind of peace we are much more likely to be able to deal with what's going on externally around us.

[30 : 44] Let me try to explain it with a story again not of mine but from Catherine Marshall in one of her books. She tells about her friend Marge who was going on a flight to Cleveland in the United States.

As she got down on her seat she looked out one side of the airplane and there was a sunset filled with beauty and she just couldn't take her eyes off it for a few moments.

She then looked round the other side of the plane outside the other windows and on the other side was a dark threatening sky with no sunset but rain coming.

And as the plane's engines began to roar a gentle voice spoke to her. Have you noticed the windows? Your life will contain happy beautiful times but it will also contain dark difficult times.

You see it doesn't matter which window you look through. This plane is still going to Cleveland and so it is with your life.

[31 : 57] You can focus on the bad things or you can focus on the bright things but I am in charge. Either way your final destination isn't determined by what you see or feel along the way.

You see when we truly can understand and truly accept that God is in control of our lives then we can experience a peace that is simply not possible without Him.

True peace is never possible until we realise that God is in control of our lives. And if God is in control of our lives it means the Holy Spirit needs to work in our lives.

We need to experience a peace not in some human way but as a gift given to us by God. It means we can experience God's peace in our church.

It means we can experience God's peace in our homes. It means we can experience God's peace in our workplace or in our studies. And ultimately it means we can experience God's peace in our hearts.

[33 : 19] Let me be very clear. It doesn't mean that tomorrow morning when you go back to work or in a couple of days when you go back to school or when you go back to university or you go back to your flat or wherever it doesn't mean that that place is going to be perfect.

Because it's not going to be. It doesn't mean that the conflict that you are facing because of lack of work or too much work or because of financial pressures is suddenly going to be mystically removed and life is going to be a bed of roses.

But it means in spite of the fact that those places aren't perfect we can have peace there because true peace ultimately comes from within us because it is God's gift to us.

God is established peace by reconciling us back to God and surely it is for us as Christians to go and demonstrate that peace to the world.

Paul summarizes if you like the sermon on the mount when he writes this Blessed are those who persecute you, bless and do not curse.

[34 : 40] Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind towards one another. Do not be high in mind but associate with the lonely.

Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

If possible so far as it depends on you be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge beloved but leave room for the wrath of God.

It is written vengeance is mine I will repay says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry feed him if he is thirsty give him a drink.

For in doing so you will heat burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

[35 : 39] You see Paul and Christ urge us that we must do whatever we can to get along with everyone for the glory of God.

We can only play our part if others float back in our faces that is their issue. But we need to make sure what we are doing fulfills God's requirements.

To love God and to love other people. That's why I think it makes sense when Jesus says in the sermon on the mount blessed are the peacemakers.

You see we are called to be peacemakers because we have experienced ultimate peace with God. We have ultimate peace because the Holy Spirit is working within us and wants us to have that peace.

But it's not enough simply just to say well I'm alright I'm that peace with God but we need to share it with other people.

[36 : 46] As we come to a conclusion let me ask you this morning are you at peace with God? Do you know that peace of your sins forgiven of the Holy Spirit working and living inside you?

Do you accept Christ this morning as your Saviour and Lord? For those of us who are Christians do we have peace?

Peace with God but also peace with other people? I wonder if we come in to this church service this morning at conflict?

Not on a national or international scale but within our household or within our workplace, within our flat or wherever.

I'm a small and for us to find true peace do we need to go and apologise to say sorry to someone even if we do not accept our apology.

[37 : 59] We still need to do it. Because to experience true peace we need to be in a right relationship with not only God and ourselves but with others.

Back in 1985, goes back a while, 1985 there was a person who was in our Crusader class here in Edinburgh.

He had a terminal disease. He was 14 years old and he died. I remember attending his funeral as a young man myself and we sang that hymn that I quoted at the start and we're going to sing in a moment.

When peace like a river attended my soul. A few years later his mother wrote a book about him, said Good Night James.

Within that book he describes how he struggled for all his life with pain. He was academically brilliant, he was a superb musician and yet he was taken.

[39 : 16] Just the night before he died he was speaking to his mum and he said you know mum, I'm at peace because I know where I'm going.

I wonder, do we know that? Do we know that peace because ultimately we know who we belong to and we know where we're going.

And as we sing this hymn, is it our personal testimony? Can we claim it as our own, as we worship God?