

Peace

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Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, **peace**, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

Peace is a word that depends upon a relationship. A rock is at peace until someone picks it up and throws it. We often speak of the dead being at “peace,” because their bodies are no longer racked with the pain of physical suffering. We speak of a peaceful society being one where we and our neighbors agree to abide by the rule of law. Those who are stopped from operating outside of that law are often said to be pacified. We also speak of peace in relationship to our own thoughts, emotions, and conscience—inner peace, it is called. Most importantly, there is peace with God and all that entails.

In the context of Galatians 5:22-23, the apostle Paul is comparing and contrasting the works of the flesh with the fruit of the spirit. Fleshly works are, by definition, carnal. They originate in and come out of physical/carnal desires. The root of all fleshly works is selfishness—the fundamental desire for carnally-minded self preservation and illicit self love (2 Timothy 3:2). When this desire is not kept under control by the spirit, it breaks out into the variety of sins that Paul discusses as the works of the flesh. All of the works of the flesh oppose peace because they destroy relationships with God and our fellow man.

Peace is a fruit of the spirit because the desire for peace does not originate within the flesh, but rather within the realm of spiritual things. If we look at the animal world around us, we do not find peace, but rather a constant struggle for survival. This same struggle would swallow us up were it not for a God-informed spirit's desire against it. God commanded the Israelites to offer peace offerings to show that peace does not come without sacrifice. True peace demands that we sacrifice something. Paul is calling Christians to sacrifice the flesh, die to self, and live for Christ (Galatians 2:20). In so doing, we may have true peace both with God and with our neighbor.

Peace begins with God's informing us that there is a problem between us and Him, and that we are not at peace (Isaiah 59:1-2). God then informs us that He has provided a plan whereby we may be at peace with Him through His Son's intermediary sacrifice (Romans 5:8). Because Jesus died on the cross for man's sins, God has given Him all authority to pronounce forgiveness of sins (Matthew 28:18-20), and Christ has determined that those who this message and obey it will be forgiven (Luke 24:47). In brief, when we hear the gospel, believe it, repent of our sins, confess Jesus as the Christ, and are baptized for the forgiveness of sins, we are reconciled to God through Christ and gain peace with Him and with one another (Ephesians 2:13-19). It is then our prerogative to pursue peace (1 Peter 3:11).

Pursuing peace is not an easy process. The fact that we must pursue it implies that there are existing enmities. Others are at enmity with God, at enmity with one another, and at enmity with self. The Christian's responsibility in pursuing peace is to aid with each of these circumstances and situations. We must first be at peace with God, then we may have peace with our fellow man based upon God's standards of right and wrong; subsequently, we will have peace with self. This is what Paul describes in Philippians 4:7 when he says, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Peace is worth pursuing and fighting for, but we must pursue it and fight for it in a godly way. Employing the works of the flesh in an effort to attain peace (as many seek to do today through ungodly practices and lifestyles) will not result in peace. True peace only comes through personal self-sacrifice, obedience to God, and in fulfilling man's purpose of loving both God and our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). Let us seek to employ the spirits that God gave us to exercise peace and so conquer the flesh!

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