

Sunday 10 March: FRUIT OF SPIRIT - PEACE (Gal 5)

Intro

We're continuing our series in Galatians and I'm focussing tonight on Peace – one of the nine fruits of the Spirit listed in Gal 5.

The Cambridge dictionary defines peace as: **Peace** /pi:s/

1. freedom from disturbance; tranquillity, inner calm and equilibrium. (the absence of worry)
2. a state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended.

This is not how the Bible would describe peace

Another perspective by Berit Kjos comes as a story:

A man searching for peace announced a contest to produce a picture of peace. Artists responded and paintings arrived from far and wide. Finally, the great day of judging all paintings came. The Judges uncovered one peaceful scene after another, while the viewers clapped and cheered. Only two pictures remained. The first of these brought forth a hush from the crowd and depicted a mirror-smooth lake reflecting lacy, green birches under the soft blush of an evening sky. Along the grassy shore, a flock of sheep grazed undisturbed. Surely this was the winner?

Then the last picture was opened causing the crowd to gasp in surprise. Could this be a picture of peace? (show pic) A tumultuous waterfall cascaded down a rocky precipice; Stormy-grey clouds threatened to explode with lightning, wind and rain. In the midst of the thundering noises and bitter snow chill, a spindly tree clung to the rocks at the edge of the falls. One of its branches reached out in front of the torrential waters as if foolishly seeking to experience its full power. A little bird had built a nest in the elbow of that branch. Content and undisturbed in her stormy surroundings, she rested on her eggs. With her eyes closed and her wings ready to cover her little ones, she manifested peace that transcends all earthly turmoil. The man declared this the winner because, 'peace does not mean being in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hardship. Peace means being in the midst of all these things and still carry calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.'

This is getting closer to the biblical definition!

The amazing thing is that the peace of God is NOT the absence of some anxious, fearful situations or thoughts - it's the presence of God Himself! As Bill Johnson says: 'peace is not the absence of something it's the presence of someone'.

So peace comes with the presence of God – However the Bible also recognises that there are times we can become overwhelmed and lose our sense of His presence and peace. This is what we are encouraged to do at these times:

Philippians 4 (one of my favourite passages) where Paul writes:

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, **pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.** **7** Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. **8** And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. **Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.** **9** Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:6-9 NLT)

God wants us to bring our **anxious thoughts and needs to Him. He tells us 'not to worry!' vs6.** If we don't do this anxiety and fear will run away with us, causing us to shrink and withdraw inside ourselves, stopping us receiving and giving love to others, and more importantly God.

When I'm anxious and fearful my heart is affected, and my world gets smaller and I see only myself and my lack. Rather than being the full expression of myself in God, I go into survival mode. Rather than operating from peace, health and creativity, I just try to get by. God is wanting our hearts full of love and passion for Him, yielded and free from anxiety and fear. When I find myself anxious and having lost my peace and perspective, it's often because I'm believing a lie. I'll be in fear of doing something wrong and failing; making a mistake and being punished, or I'll believe I'm not as good as others in a certain area. Now I know that God does not agree with this thinking and He wants me to know the truth that because of Jesus I'm fully acceptable and blameless in His sight and all my mistakes are covered by grace; that I'm unique and He doesn't want me to be the same as others. He wants me to be the best unique self He created me to be! So how is that possible?

Anxiety makes us look inward and lose our outer focus. One key to getting, and keeping out of this state is thankfulness - not only when we have the desired answer to our requests and prayers, but more especially when we are in difficult situations Phil 4:6, **'tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done'**. Remembering who God is and what He has done before in our lives through thankfulness empowers us again to look up and out and see the goodness and greatness of God. We can acknowledge our life is in His hands and thank Him for what He's going to do - because, Rom 8:28 God is working everything together for good in our life. He's going to weave it all together for good and for His glory.

This passage also instructs us to keep in His peace by 'fixing our thoughts on truth...

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, **pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.** **7** Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. **And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.** **9** Keep putting into practice all you learned

and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.’ Phil 4:8-9

We are told to focus on whatever is true, honourable and right.

I remember as a child getting v worried last thing at night and having trouble sleeping, my Mum had shown me this scripture and she gave me a book with beautiful pictures in it – I would look at these and think about them. She would tell me to ‘fill my mind with the lovely’ and it worked. Now, when I find myself battling worry, often at the start of the day, I put worship music on and start singing.

We are not told to try to fix ourselves (which we can attempt to do by distraction, or reaction, often leading to sin and making us feel worse than ever) But to fix our thoughts on what is true - this is Jesus and what He says!

There is personal responsibility in this – no child of God is a victim (even if they were once) so to stay in peace in difficult circumstances we must take responsibility for any negative thoughts and anxieties we have, take them to God and find the truth in what God says in response.

We can think it’s our circumstances, other people, or the enemy that determine our mood and fears; but it’s our false self-beliefs being triggered that cause our pain and dis-peace. Nobody has control over our minds (including, by choice, God!) apart from us and we must choose to seek healing and freedom from the One who is Truth.

Example: taking responsibility Pool of Bethesda (John 5) **Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been *in that condition* a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” ⁷The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.” ⁸Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.” ⁹And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.**

There will always be a battle for our minds – but here is the means of victory and maintaining peace because God acts for us when we take responsibility and take things to Him:

⁶Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all He has done. ⁷Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7 NLT)

Verse 7 His peace will guard our hearts and minds – making it like a fortress against anything that tries to invade our peace. ‘To Guard’ is a military term. When we think of being guarded we imagine an army trained to protect against invading enemies and surrounding us. That is what God offers us when we go to Him and put our focus on what He says and does.

New Age thinking/mindfulness/well-being focusses on trying to imagine and remove all negative thinking about situations. But God knows this is not reality so He offers the truth of His presence and supernatural protective peace within the negative situations of life, walking us through them while holding us within them.

Personal eg: I was involved in a terrible car crash which ended up being a 5 car pile up on the M27, there was a car stopped in the fast lane and I didn't see it and stop in time so went in the back of it, a Granada went in the back of me (5 cars in total). I was trapped in my car and couldn't feel my legs but I remember feeling peaceful and thinking it would be ok. It was a miracle I walked away from that accident with only bruises (no one else was hurt either) as I heard the firemen cutting me out of my car saying it looked like a fatal accident. I was quick to put them right. There's no other way to explain the peace I felt in that moment which was I believe supernatural as I felt a deep sense of being protected by God.

Let's take a moment of quiet now to consider a situation causing us anxiety, stress, dis-peace It may be a relationship, financial difficulty, an illness, a situation at work, home, university....Let's take it to God and ask Him for what we needLet's thank Him that He loves and cares for us and knows what we need.....Let's take what it's making us believe to Him and ask for His truth; ask what He wants you to know about your situation.....Now let's rest in the knowledge that He will act and put a guard of peace around our hearts and minds.

Pray a seal on the guard over us.

Jesus is called the Prince of Peace Isaiah 9:6 **For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** NLT
and if you don't yet know Him, He wants to begin a relationship with you tonight if you want that. He will bring that peace into your heart and mind – forever!

CG Questions:

1. Read Phil 4:6-9: **'6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.'** Phil 4:8-9
2. Discuss how we deal with worry and anxiety and how does the passage impact that?
3. Discuss how to maintain God's peace and apply 'telling God, thankfulness, and fixing thoughts to our situations'

4. Carry out the exercise together: Take a moment of quiet now to consider a situation causing us anxiety, stress, dis-peace It may be a relationship, financial difficulty, an illness, a situation at work, home, university. ..Take it to God and ask Him for what we needThank Him that He loves and cares for us and knows what we need.....Take what it's making us believe to Him and ask for His truth; ask what He wants you to know about your situation.....Now let's rest in the knowledge that He will act and put a guard of peace around our hearts and minds..

5. Feed back what God says in response and pray for each other.