

“PEACE”

The Third Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

Chuck Northrop

As we study "the fruit of the Spirit," we need to be constantly reminded that it is a singular fruit with many characteristics. "The fruit of the Spirit" is described by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 which says: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." In this study, we are concerned with "peace," the third characteristic of "the fruit of the Spirit."

From the very beginning of the Lord's ministry, we learn about peace. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). This statement would have been shocking to the Jews of Jesus' day because they were looking for a Messiah who would marshal a great army and lead them to world domination. However, they (like the premillennialist of our day) misunderstood the very nature of the Messiah and His kingdom.

Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would be "the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7). In an earlier prophecy, Isaiah described the peaceable nature of the Messianic kingdom in that citizens of that kingdom will turn instruments of war into instruments of peace. Isaiah wrote, "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4). Further, Isaiah described the peaceful nature of the recipients of the gospel – the citizens of the Messianic kingdom, the church. He wrote, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den" (Isaiah 11:6-8). In each example of Isaiah's description, the animals are natural enemies, and, yet, they live in harmony. There are no signs of hostility nor enmity. Such peace can be found in the kingdom of God.

During Jesus' ministry, he called twelve men to be His apostles. Within this group, there were those who would be enemies had they not been followers of Jesus. Matthew was a "publican" or tax collector for the Roman empire (Matthew

10:3). Simon was a Zealot, and a Zealot was opposed to paying taxes to the pagan emperor of Rome. Yet, despite their political differences, they were united soldiers and disciples of "the Prince of Peace." This, then, stands as a wonderful example of this peaceable nature of citizens of the kingdom as prophesied by Isaiah.

Another example is found in Romans 14. In context, Paul is dealing with eating meats, that is meats which were clean or unclean according to Old Testament law. The church in Rome was composed of both Jews and Gentiles. According to the law, the Jews could only eat meats which were clean. However, the Gentiles could eat any meat, clean or unclean. It made no difference to them. Of course, the old law was taken "out of the way" and nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14; see also Romans 7:1-4), but because of conscience, many Jews could not eat unclean meat. Apparently, some Gentiles insisted on eating such meat even though it violated their brothers' consciences. To solve the problem, Paul charges them to "follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Romans 14:19). Why? Because "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). Rather than offending a fellow Christian, Christians ought to seek for peace in matters of conscience.

A casual glance into the New Testament reveals that peace is promised to the followers of God. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). To some, however, this brings up a contradiction for Jesus also said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). So, what does Jesus mean?

Within the pages of scripture, there are three types of peace. First, there is the absence of hostility or having no enmity. Generally, when people call for peace, this is what they mean. They are looking for a time when there will be no wars or no fighting, The second type of peace is tranquility which is freedom from disturbance or a calm feeling. The final peace is reconciliation. When two persons who have been at odds with one another are brought together, they have peace or reconciliation.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Notice in this statement, Jesus refers to two types of peace – the peace the world gives and the peace that He gives. The world seeks for peace, but what is meant is they seek for the absence of hostility, no enmity. The peace that Jesus promises is not necessarily the absence of hostility, it is as Paul describes, "the

peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:9). The Christians in Philippi very much understood this peace because they saw it demonstrated in Paul and Silas when the gospel was first preached in the city of Philippi. Paul and Silas were beaten and cast into prison. Did they enjoy the world's peace, the absence of hostility? Of course not, they had been beaten. Did they enjoy the peace of Christ? Yes, and that peace was demonstrated in their praying and singing praises unto God (Acts 16:22-25).

Christ's peace is tranquility of mind, but it is more than just that. It is having peace with God. By "peace with God," we mean harmony or reconciliation with God. In fact, the second type of peace, tranquility of mind, stems from the third type of peace, reconciliation, that is, being reconciled unto God. The demonstration of such reconciliation is what "passeth understanding." When a person obtains reconciliation or peace with God, he or she will have peace or tranquility of mind – the peace that passes understanding.

From an earthly standpoint, what Paul and Silas did while in the Philippian jail rises above our thoughts. It does not make earthly sense to rejoice in suffering, but this is what Paul and Silas did, and this is what Peter exhorts us to do. "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:13).

How can I have the peace Jesus promised? The short answer is by being reconciled unto God. We are reconciled by or through the blood of the cross of Jesus (Colossians 1:20-22; Ephesians 2:13-16). We come into contact with the cleansing blood of Christ when we are obedient to the gospel plan of salvation by believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 8:24), confessing that faith (Romans 10:9-10), repenting of our sins (Luke 13:3,5), and being baptized into His death (Romans 6:3-5). Reconciliation, however, is more than just obedience to the gospel. We must emulate the God of Peace and the Prince of Peace. Paul wrote, "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11). We must also follow the gospel of peace (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15) and live in the peaceable kingdom of the Lord.

Let us, therefore, "seek peace, and ensue it" (1 Peter 3:11) so "the God of peace" will be with us (Romans 15:33).