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Presentation Transcript
Fruits of the Spirit – Part 4 – Peace
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Well, here we are again, working on our fourth part of this series called *The Fruits of the Spirit*. The topic today is *Peace*. So, let's get started with it.

Paul said that peace is the result of God the Father and Jesus Christ living in a person. It's one of the kinds of fruit that the indwelling Spirit of God produces in the life of a Spirit-led person. So, how do we know this? Well, there's a story about how that happens.

First of all, in the Bible, there are two kinds of peace mentioned. Let's look in John 14:27 – Jesus is saying this the night before He was crucified:

John 14:27 – *Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.* Now, that word *let* there – “let not your heart be troubled...” – that's a very polite term of “Just do it!” That's what it means. It's something we just *can* do and *ought* to do. So, it doesn't feel that way, does it? We have a hard time with it.

So, first of all, what's the difference between God's kind of peace and the world's kind. Well, somewhat of a clue about the world's kind is in the same chapter where he mentions the fruit of the Spirit – in Galatians 5. And in verse 24, Paul said:

Galatians 5:24 – *And those belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

So, if we think about what the opposite of that is, we come to the belief that peace comes from having we want when we want it and having our own way all the time. That's what we think causes us to have peace in the world. So, if we could just get a person, or group of persons, to see things our way, to vote our way, then we'd be at peace. All those Republicans, or all those Democrats, or all those liberals, or all those conservatives, or all those nationalists, or all those globalists, or all those capitalists, or all those socialists. If we could just get them to do it the way

we want, then things would settle out and our nation would be going the way we think it should, and we would then be at peace. Or, if I could just get that one special person to love me. Or, if I could only have just a small fortune, I'd be at peace. Or, if I could get the IRS to stop hounding me, then I could relax and be at peace. And on and on it goes.

God's peace is *not* about that at all. God's kind of peace comes not from a short view of what we want *now*, but from a long view through the telescope of God's plan. That's where the peace comes from.

Let's go back to John 14, where we started. It says:

John 14:1 – *Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in Me.*

So, He's telling us how to have Godly peace right there. The way you do that is to believe in God and believe in Christ. So, if our hearts' are not troubled, then we're at peace. Right? So, that's what He's talking about.

Now, I know people are going to say, "Well, I believe in God, but I'm still troubled." Well, the problem there is to understand what *believe in* means in the Bible. To believe, as Jesus used it here, means, according to the Louw & Nida *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Based on Semantic Domains* (what a name!), the word means not just to believe that God exists, but here's the quote: "To believe to the extent of complete trust, reliance; to believe in, to have confidence in, to have faith in, to trust." Anybody can believe God exists, but *to have trust* in Him is what Jesus is talking about there. That's what the word meant.

I'm always reminded of the man who brought his son to Jesus to be healed, and Jesus said, "All you have to do is believe." The kind of belief He talks about here is the same kind we already saw – where you trust that He's going to do what He says – not just believe that He exists. And this man, in great distress and also complete honesty, said, "I believe. Help my unbelief." So, that's the way it is for us, isn't it? We know what we should believe – and sometimes we do, but sometimes not. But that's okay, because God knows it's hard for us to trust God, because we live in a physical world and we're physical beings, and He's not bounded by any of that. He can do whatever He wants.

I've often said that creating Adam was easy. All God had to do was breathe into him. So that stuff that we find impossible and hard to believe is as easy as breathing for God. And there are all kinds of clichés about this. "Let go and let God." "Get used to different." "Don't sweat the small stuff." Right? Easier said than done. Right? So, clichés aside, trusting God can be hard. But, to the extent that we *can* trust Him, we will be at peace, because that's where it comes from – trusting Him, not from somebody winning an election, or us getting our new Tesla, or something like that. His peace He has left for us. And it's up to us how much we will trust. That's our choice. That's what *we* get to do.

So, next I want to look at the two ways to look at this issue. Both ways that I'm going to mention are biblical.

Through the lens of anxiety is the first. When we're not at peace because we're anxious about something. You might say, "Well, anxiety is a mental disorder." And it is something psychological that happens in the mind, at least in part, but look at this in Matthew 6:25 – Jesus said:

Matthew 6:25 – *Therefore I tell you, "Do not be anxious about your life – what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body – what you will put on. Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing?"*

While anxiety is psychological – or of the mind – Jesus is asking us to take the long view and to believe in God. It's okay to talk about anxiety in a biblically-based presentation, because Jesus does.

So, let's ask what anxiety is. Anxiety, actually, is a healthy condition that occurs in the body and the mind. And it occurs when we anticipate something bad is going to happen in the future. You know, "I see a man with a knife down the street under the street light, and he looks unstable, and now he's heading my way." Okay? So, when this information comes up the spinal column into our brains, it goes into the amygdala, and there meaning is assigned to it. "I'm in trouble," for example. And we start to hyperventilate, getting ready to either run or fight. Our focus narrows on the threat. Our hearts start to beat faster in preparation for fighting or running. All that is well and good, especially if there is a guy a knife coming our way. God built that into us to keep us safe. We're physical beings.

However, when we start anticipating danger when there is none, then it becomes a big problem for us. Wasn't that what Jesus said? "Don't worry about all that stuff. God clothes all the birds of the field and all of that, so why worry?" There's no reason to be worried about that. When that starts to happen and there's no real threat, that starts to interfere with our productivity, our relationships, our relationship even with God. So, Jesus takes us to task for getting anxious about things that don't matter that much. And He tells us that it can sometimes be appropriate to be anxious about salvation – "Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." So, He's telling us it's appropriate to be anxious about losing eternal salvation, because you've not done what you should. There are all kinds of warnings about that in the Bible. Paul talks about growing weary with well-doing. We can think about being careless like the five foolish virgins that weren't prepared to be in God's Kingdom. Or, another Paul statement: Neglecting so great salvation. That's the stuff we ought to worry about.

Who's the guy – I forget his name now – he wrote a Bible handbook, and he was pretty famous, I think, back in the 30s. Somebody asked him, "Do you worry about the things that you don't yet know in the Bible?" And he said, "No, I worry about the things I *do* know." So, don't fear those who kill the body, but can't kill the soul.

We're just kind of the opposite of that. We worry about who could kill us – the guy with the knife – but we neglect so great salvation, or don't really worry about the things that we *should* be worried about. So, it's with the inappropriate anxiety that the psychological field deals with. You'll never find a counselor that tells you it's not appropriate to be anxious about something that's a real threat to your physical safety. They just won't do it. They know that that's a reaction that's part of being a human and that keeps you safe. But it's when we're anxious for no good reason that it's a problem.

I had a fourteen-year-old girl in my office years ago and she'd been cutting herself pretty severely. She had rituals she performed multiple times a day, like arranging the desk in her room three times every night before she could sleep. She also told me that when she was in my office, she would sit and, with her eyes, trace the pattern in my carpet over and over and over again. That's called obsessive/compulsive behavior and that's related to anxiety. It's the anticipation of something bad happening, like "I'm going to have to talk about stuff I'm ashamed of," or "It's too ugly for me to think about." So, she's distracting herself by that. So, it was anxiety that was interfering with her therapy. Also, we talk a lot about OCD, and the idea there is, "If all the ducks are lined up well enough, I won't get in trouble," or "I'll be safe." Or, focusing on the carpet – distancing.

I found out that, as I got to know her, that her mother and father were divorced, and her mother had remarried a really nice man – the girl liked him – and her father had remarried as well to a woman that had three kids. When this girl would go to her father's – because of the custody thing – it seemed to her that all his focus and attention was on the other children, and he had neglected her emotionally and physically. So, her hard-wiring to be loved by her father was not being attended to, and she was anxious about her relationship with him. There were other things too, but that seemed to me to be the main thing.

Also, that's a little more abstract, but I was in a restaurant in a restroom in Socorro, New Mexico, one day, and there was a man beside me – relax, we were washing our hands – and he had laid out four of these hotel-sized bars of soap in their wrappers on the hand basin. And one by one, he was washing and drying his hands repeatedly, each time with a new bar of soap. As long as he did that, his anxiety about germs would be reduced enough that he could think about something else. People think, "Oh, he's got OCD." The D stands for *disorder*. And what we really should be thinking about is what happened to him. *Why* is it hard for him not to worry about germs?" Well, all big pharma would like you to think about is that it's genetically caused and there's no solution for it, except the drugs they happen to sell. Right? So, they don't ask, "What happened to him?" And the chances are, he wouldn't know either, if I asked him that question.

So, there are ways to help these people. I have seen OCD disappear from the lives of clients I've had, just because of the treatment. And that's usually caused in early childhood. If you've ever seen the movie, *As Good As It Gets*, there's a brilliant man, played by Jack Nicholson, who has a raging case of OCD. During the movie, you get a clue as to how it happened with him. He's talking with some of the other characters in the movie, and he mentioned that when he was young, he was learning to play the piano – by the way, he was very good at the piano – and every time he was playing the piano and doing his lessons, every time he made a mistake, his father would rap him on the hands. So, of course we understand in context, that was just the tip of the iceberg, and it was quite likely that his father was highly anxious too. He couldn't allow his son to make a mistake, so that was an obsession and then a compulsion with his dad. So, it wasn't that he said, "Dad, I want to be just like you," and started washing his hands six times. It was that the way his obsessive/compulsive father treated him that made him anxious. And he chose to work it out that way.

So, that's a little bit about anxiety – where it comes from and how it robs us of peace. But let's talk about peace now. Peace is simple to explain. It's the absence of anxiety. When you're not worried about anything, you're at peace, right? Part of that has to do with believing God in the way God wants us to think about it. He tells us to trust Him to take care of these small things that aren't any big deal – in fact, even the big ones. We need to take a *long* view of God's plan. If He'll forgive us of all our sins, and provide a way into His presence now and forever, of course, He will not let us starve and freeze. It just makes sense.

So, Paul said, in Philippians 4:6:

Philippians 4:6-7 – *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.* So, don't just gripe about what you don't have, thank Him for what you *do* have as well, while you're asking Him to give you the things you need. And he said, "If you do that, then the *peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* It goes back to that word *believe* again, doesn't it?

Here's what we do then: Instead of being anxious, we *let* our requests be known to God, and *then* the peace of God will come to us. If we believe – if you see the long-range view of salvation, instead of the short-range view of what I want – then the peace of God will be ours. Do you believe that He *will* do that? Well, all we have to do is try it and see. Will He take care of us or not? When Jesus said, "Don't be anxious about what you will wear or eat or where you will live," He says, "Such concerns are for non-believers. Only the Gentiles do that." Well, back then, that meant, to Jews, non-believers.

Now, we've been watching this series called *The Chosen*. They sell T-shirts and other things to support their publicly funded effort. They're right now closing in on 300,000,000 views on that

program that they've done so far. One of the T-shirts they sell has *Come and See* on it. Come and see. That comes from when Philip told Nathaniel that he'd found that he had found the Messiah and that He was from Nazareth. Nathaniel is quoted as saying, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" And Philip said, "Come and see."

So, when God tells us He will take care of us regarding food, clothing and shelter, if we *believe*, that's an invitation to come and see if He'll do it. And, if we do, He promises we're not going to get hung out to dry, but that He *will* because He cares for us. So, will He, or won't He? Come and see. That's the thing – the long view.

So, the peace of God is about viewing through the *long* view. It's about difficult times as well as God lovingly caring for us. When Jesus said, "My peace I leave with you," we can't forget that in just a few hours after He said that, He was sweating blood because of His own crucifixion that was about to occur. The *only* way He could get through that was to believe in God's plan. He had come out of love to save all of us. You'll remember that in the beginning part of this series, we said that love was the *first* fruit of the Spirit, and really, everything else is an offshoot – a byproduct – of that love. Believing in God's plan, and that God loves us, and loving God back, all that goes for us too. God's kind of peace is not about the short-term things that we want. It's about the long-term things we're going to get from God when we're in His Kingdom. It's about how our suffering today – the short-term stuff – has purpose. It's all going to work out for the best for us.

What are we going to receive if we believe – besides food, shelter and clothing? Salvation. What is that about? Well, in 1 Corinthians 3:21 through 23 – I'm going to quote you one of my very favorite scriptures:

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 – *So let no one boast in men, for all things are yours, whether of Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas* – see, that's what they were arguing with there in Corinth. "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos." They were choosing up sides – who was their favorite. He said: *...whether of Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future, all are yours and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*

So, everything is going to be given to us. There is really no way to explain what that means right now, except *EVERYTHING* in all caps. Think about what it would be like to have everything you could ever want – well, it's *way* better than that. There's stuff there that's going to be so good we can't even conceive it right now. To use one of my clichés, "Don't sweat the small stuff."

Okay, that's one way to think about it – that's biblical, I think. Here's another way: All of the thoughts that can cause doubt are lies, and all the thoughts that can cause faith are truth. We covered this in a series, *Waging Spiritual Warfare*, and also at a Feast site – the Common Faith Network Feast site – last year – last year being 2020. So, we're not going to do the whole thing all over again here, but what does "believing truth or lies" mean?

In John 8:31, it says:

John 8:31-32 – *Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

Free from what? That’s what the Jews asked Him. They thought they were already free. He clarified that for them. He said, “Free from sin – if you believe the truth.” Sin is caused by believing the lies of the devil, like “God won’t take care of you,” or “God won’t take care of you because He doesn’t love you,” or “God won’t take care of you because He doesn’t love you because you have sinned,” or whatever – whatever we think about ourselves. “You are worthless.” When we believe those lies, he owns us. And God even says that Jesus said that – that he’s our father. “You are of your father, the devil,” He said.

So, all his lies produce anxiety and rob us of peace. The whole world, we are told, comes under his control because they believe his lies. So, if we’ll start believing what God tells us is true – like “Don’t worry about what you’re going to eat, or what you’re going to wear, or where you’re going to keep warm in the winter” – He’s going to take care of that for us because He loves us – then we’ll be believing the truth and we’ll be anxiety free. But, if we believe all the lies we’re told about ourselves and about society, then we’re not going to be at peace.

Now, I know from working with many people, some of us have a harder time with this than others – mostly because of what has happened to us. And none of us has asked for any of that. It’s been put on us. And I know that some of us can find relief if we process the things that have happened, so that they no longer make us anxious, but that said, if a person relies on God to take care of them – struggle or not – they can be free.

I’m going to read this scripture to you over again.

Philippians 4:6-7 – *Do not be anxious about anything – this is Philippians 4:6 – but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Even that promise is a challenge, isn’t it? Try it and see. Right? It’s a challenge to be at peace, instead of being anxious. The peace is there for us, but will we go for it, or won’t we? Well, it’s our choice. And if we go for it, God says He will come in behind our commitment with all kinds of support. Do you believe that? Try it and see.

Don’t forget to check out our Website, liferesource.org.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for Life Resource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.