

Galatians 5:16-26

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Date: 20 February 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, it's very good to be with you this evening, and I bring you greetings from Trinity West! Church. They will be gathering about now and praying for us here, praying for you. So it's great to be able to express our partnership in the gospel in this way.

We're going to be in Galatians 5, the passage that was read earlier, and I think, I don't think it's controversial to say that we desperately, desperately need to hear the message of the passage this evening. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, peace.

Well, in the developed world, we've never had so much at our disposal, and yet we've never been so restless. We're anxious. Many of the traditional causes of anxiety, it's true to say, are in decline. Poverty, poor health, those kinds of things. But there are new triggers of fear and frustration all over the place.

Our culture's obsession with particular kind of success has created real problems. I read about a medical study recently. It was published in the 1990s, and it said that it found that people who, quote, pursued money, looks, and status were more likely to be anxious and depressed.

The pursuit of money, looks, and status are the reasons that people in London get up in the morning. And these things lead to anxiety. And they lead to anxiety because they're so fragile.

[1 : 43] We get some and we're anxious for more. We lose some and we start to wobble. We place our hopes in those things. Those things come and they go. And so, well, that leads to skyrocketing of anti-anxiety medication, that kind of thing.

Over the last 30 years, it's gone through the roof, and the age that people are being medicated has gone down and down and down. We're anxious. We're also angry. We've seen this on a large scale, haven't we, over the last while with the amount of protesting that there's been.

It seems that there's a protest in central London all the time. And the news people are down there, and they say, why are you protesting? And they say, injustice. Leadership that's really bad.

Where is this? Everywhere. Why are you protesting? I don't know. I'm just really angry. The general language in the media feels like it's desperately trying to stir up more conflict, doesn't it?

Politics has never been known for its kindness. But the current tone, I think, in lots of places seems to have more spite now than ever before. And then, of course, social media.

[3 : 02] Well, social media doesn't just enable that spiteful and angry communication to be more widespread more quickly, but there's something also about the format that seems to encourage it.

Maybe it's easier to say things on a keyboard that you wouldn't say to somebody face to face. Look at chapter 5, verse 20. Galatians 5, verse 20.

I think Twitter's tagline. Twitter's tagline. You know, if it happens, it happens on Twitter. Something like that. That was their tagline certainly a while ago.

But you could say, enmity, strife, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions. When it happens, it happens on Twitter. Of course, we see it on the small scale as well, don't we?

On the roads, in our homes, in our relationships. Tempers are short. Offense is taken easily. Lots of us, it seems, are living life on the edge a lot of the time.

[3 : 57] Then, just for good measure, throw in a pandemic. And I think it seems things have gone to a completely new level. We're anxious about our health, and we're angry with people who don't wear masks.

We're anxious about our freedom, and we're angry with people who do wear masks. We're anxious about the future, angry about the government's handling of everything, anxious about everything, angry with everyone.

Anxiety and anger, they've just gone to a new level, haven't they, over the last couple of years in our culture. If ever there was a time that we needed the peace that the Spirit gives, inner

contentment and rest, it's now.

And here it is. A bit of context. Remember, John chapter 15, Jesus calls His disciples to go and bear fruit.

He wants them to live lives that are fruitful. And the call for fruitfulness comes just after He has promised to send the Holy Spirit. So this frames what He means. The sending of the Spirit is the means by which they will be enabled to live fruitful lives.

[5 : 08] So Jesus is going to go to the cross. He's going to die for the sin of the world. Three days later, He's going to rise again to vindicate Himself as God's Son. Death could not hold the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so as He is put to death, He then defeats death, puts death to death. And then having completed His work, He says He's going to go back to the Father. He's going to go back to heaven. But when He does that, He doesn't just leave His people to fend for themselves. We're not down here fending for ourselves. He sends a Spirit who will live in us and enable us to be fruitful as He's called us to be.

The fruitful life flows from the work of His Spirit in us. And in Galatians chapter 5, the Apostle Paul outlines what it looks like. The fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

It is a beautiful list of qualities. Whatever you believe about the world, whether you're a Christian or whether you're not, these are qualities that you admire.

[6 : 12] They're qualities that you admire in others, and they are qualities that you wish you had more of in your own life. I don't care what you say. We, all of us, whatever we believe, wish that we embody these things more than we do.

And they're available to us in Christ. And as we think about peace this evening, I chose that because I just think it's particularly relevant.

Of course, they're all relevant, these elements, these aspects of the one fruit of the Spirit's work in our lives, but is it not true that peace is just particularly pressing on us?

And when we think about it, we know that we can't create it in our own strength. The sales of Valium show that. But Paul tells us, he says that when the Spirit of God is at work in your life, peace is something you should expect to see.

So how is it possible? Well, let's begin. It starts by him creating peace with God. Point number one, peace with God.

[7 : 17] The human heart is naturally at war with God. Now, you might say to yourself, that sounds a bit extreme. Don't be daft. I'm not at war with God. I just don't bother with Him that much.

Maybe you're not a Christian, and you say to yourself, all right, I'm looking into this Christian thing, but I'm not at war with God. I just don't have time for Him in my life. He doesn't fit there.

But it doesn't work like that. It doesn't work like that because of who God is. The God of the Bible is Lord. He is King of the cosmos. He holds the whole world in His hands. He controls it, and He owns all of us, and He owns the right to our devotion and worship.

And so it is right that we acknowledge Him as that. As those He has made, He owns us. So when we don't acknowledge Him, when we don't give Him the devotion that He deserves, however politely we refuse to do that, however passive our rejection of Him is, we put ourselves at odds with Him.

This is how we're born. We don't need to choose to do it. We do it by birth. And so the Bible uses words to describe the relationship that we have with God by definition of being born or our relationship to Him.

[8 : 29] It's not a relationship we have. Our relationship to Him, words like alienation, words like hostility. And all of our problems start here. It's like the builder getting the foundation wrong on the structure that he's building, even slightly off.

The problem is at the source. And when the problem is at the source, it means that the whole thing then that is built on that is out of kilter. That's us when it comes to living lives marked by peace.

Discord at source means discord in other areas of life is inevitable. One ancient theologian says this, we are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves.

And we are not at peace with ourselves because we're not at peace with God. So we need to get the foundation right. How do you get the foundation right?

Well, it only comes about through faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 5 verse 1, therefore, since you have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 35] When we put our faith in Jesus, when we hand over the control of our lives to Him, all of the hostility between us and our Maker ceases. It works like this.

All of the anger God feels, quite rightly, at the way that we have lived in His world on our terms. And all of the penalty that our sin requires, that anger and the penalty, it all falls on Jesus at the cross.

When we see Him being nailed up in our place for us, even though He had done nothing wrong, we see a man going there, as I say, for us.

He's doing that for us. And when He does that, justice is done. All of God's anger that needed to be poured out on sin because God is perfectly holy, it needed to go somewhere and it went on Him in our place.

So justice is done and God's anger is turned away. You put your faith in Jesus Christ. What that means is that your punishment was taken in Him.

[10 : 44] Your penalty was paid in Him. And so hostilities between you and God cease. The cup of God's anger that we rightly deserved was drained to the dregs by Jesus.

And so there is now none left for us. It is the wonder of the gospel. We are reconciled and we have peace. Peace with God.

What that means, instead of Him being opposed to us, He is now for us. It's not just that in creating that peace that there's this sort of neutral situation. He's just no longer annoyed with us.

It's not like that at all. It's not just that. It's that He is for us. He is positively toward us in Christ.

Instead of Him leaving us to make the best of life that we can, His Spirit now lives in us and helps us.

And so we're not doing it on our own. Instead of seeing the struggles of this life as meaningless, He is working even those for our good. And instead of uncertainty about the future, God is keeping us for glory.

[11 : 58] You can see why peace with God is the foundation from which all other peace will flow.

When you know that the King of the cosmos is on your side, whatever is going on in your life, knowing that He's on your side, it changes how you view your circumstances.

You no longer receive the struggles of life as the outcome of some faceless force that's just working its situation out in life.

The world is just sort of spinning away and it's all a bit meaningless. You no longer see it like that. You see it as the God of all the earth working out His purposes even when you can't see what's going on, but you know that He's for you.

You know that ultimately He is for you. And so those circumstances take on a new situation when the King of kings calls you His friend. And He does that for all of us in Christ.

Changes how you experience absolutely everything. The Holy Spirit brings Christ to us and He gives us peace with God.

[13 : 09] That's the point, the first point. But from here, He then creates what we might call the peace of God. Having given us peace with God, He gives us peace of God.

You see, before He returned to the Father, Jesus promised to send His Spirit. And in that section in John 14, He says this to His disciples. He says, Peace I give you. My peace I leave with you.

So the same peace that characterized Jesus' earthly life is what the Spirit gives to those who trust Him. Just as Jesus' inner life was one of contentment and confidence in His Father, you can't read the Gospels but not be drawn to the fact that Jesus seems to meet all of the adversity of His life with an acceptance and a peace.

Even the hardest experience in the garden, He can submit Himself to the Father's will. Just as He only brought conflict with others when it was right and good to do so.

And He managed to do that without sin in dependence on the Spirit. So this peace, that composure, that poise is what the Spirit creates in the life of the believer.

[14 : 24] Can you believe this? Does this describe your experience? In the last few days, does that describe your life in the last few days?

If you're anything like me, it doesn't. We struggle with inner conflict and turmoil. And when those things take hold of us, when the inner conflict and turmoil take hold, it always overflows into our relationships with others and creates turmoil and conflict there.

So we need to pursue what makes for peace. So how do we do that? Let's start within ourselves. Well, when we get this peace that the Spirit gives, we need to remind ourselves of what God has done for us.

And we need to pray and trust ourselves to His fatherly care. There you go. Easy, right? Say your prayers. Trust God.

Do that, you just glide through life unmoved. Easy peasy. Trust God. You never miss a beat. No, that's not how it works, is it? It's never that simple.

[15 : 38] Life is hard. The battle to trust God in that hard life is real. It's interesting. When I think about this, I'm always surprised by how things often go down.

You see, when a big crisis hits, and the big things come, that's actually when I expect people to get scared and kind of fall apart a little bit. But actually, that's often when they turn to the Lord and they find and experience His grace and their lives are marked by peace.

It's very often the case in the big crises that people's lives tend to display a peace that you think, my goodness, how can that work with such hardship going on and yet your life is much more together? Because it's actually the fairly trivial or the mundane things that seem to unsettle us, like the never-ending to-do list or something that someone said or did that we chew over in our mind that gets under our skin and into our hearts and unsettles us and robs us of peace.

The big things come, and it's as if we think, I can't do anything else but turn to the Lord and depend on Him and He brings this peace that He promises. It's when that little thing just gets in and niggles us.

[16 : 59] Most likely, it's in that situation that we get upset and our peace vanishes. Maybe someone has wronged you and you allow resentment to fester. Or maybe they haven't wronged you but you just think that they're getting a better deal in life and so you're envious.

You just can't seem to let that grudge with that person go. Say, it's the principle. This is a matter of right and wrong. And all of that anger, there's just no peace.

Peace evaporates. Might be true that it's a principle. Might be true that it's an issue of right and wrong. Not suggesting that we overlook injustice. I'm not suggesting that for a moment.

But when we think like that, it steals our peace. We're restless, anxious, or angry because we don't believe that our Heavenly Father cares for us and we don't trust that He can take care of things.

See, we can affirm the right theology. Yes, God loves me. Jesus died to reconcile me to Him. The Spirit lives in me. He is working all of the circumstances of life together for good.

[18 : 08] I am secure in His hand and I'm absolutely rock-solid certain that He will get me safely to glory. I will sign up to that statement of faith in blood.

But, and it's that but, that's where our unbelief slips in and creates the discord. The same God who knows the number of hairs on your head, who holds the whole world in His hands, knows what He's doing in your life.

And it's when you trust Him, and I mean trust Him with your life and your struggles, your temptations, your doubts and fears, your sin, when you thank Him for your blessings and His kindness in your life.

and you trust Him. So, you trust Him with the reality of your experience, not just bringing some bland and generic prayers that you think in the moment sound Christian.

Oh, Father God, thank You for everything that I have and all of life and all that stuff, etc. Amen. No, going over all of the reality of your experience with Him, it is when you do that, when you submit those things to Him, that your heart and your mind will experience the peace that the Spirit brings.

[19 : 43] That's what the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 4, isn't it? Rejoice in the Lord always. He's in prison. Rejoice. I say it again, rejoice.

People are making his life miserable down the road. People who are supposed to be his brothers in the Lord, fellow gospel partners, they're stirring up difficulty for him. And I say it again, rejoice. Let your reason must be known to everyone.

The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, 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.

Your life is a real struggle, really difficult, and yet there is this peace, this settled inner contentment that God is on his throne and he knows what he's doing.

That surpasses understanding. You can't work that out according to the flesh. You can't explain that in human terms. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

[20 : 48] Do you notice Paul doesn't say, go and be at peace? Peace is the fruit of other things. So he says, pursue joy, trust the Lord, bring everything, everything to Him in prayer, and thankful, be thankful.

So there you go. Pursue joy, trust the Lord, bring everything to Him in prayer, and be thankful, and peace will follow. Jerry Bridges, in his little book, *The Fruitful Life*, says this, the great antidote to anxiety is to come to God in prayer.

We are to pray about everything. Nothing is too big for Him to handle and nothing is too small to escape His attention. So you only say that if you know the God who holds your life in His hands. Because if you know Him, you know that nothing is too big for Him to handle and you know that nothing is too small to escape His attention. He is the God of the big things and He is the God of the intimately personal things.

The thing that is promised when we trust ourselves to God in prayer, especially in times of trouble, isn't an end to those trials, but peace in the midst. You say, oh, it sounds great.

[22 : 13] Easy for you to say. It's not like that for me. I have actually been praying about X situation for years and I'm still agitated, I'm still anxious and I'm still angry.

Well, remember that we're talking about the fruit of the Spirit. He's the one who works it in our lives. So ask Him directly, Lord, please, give me this peace.

Please. Please. Make it possible for me to get through the day today without worrying or getting angry or whatever the situation is that you're worried about and push on in prayer until He answers.

Well, that's peace with ourselves. How does this work out in our relationships with others?

Secondly, we have strife in our relationships for all the same reasons. When we don't get what we want, whether that's respect or love or appreciation, when other people don't treat us the way that we want to be treated, we get anxious or angry, we just get bent out of shape in some way and peace seems to evaporate.

But if you know that that person, that relational difficulty that you have and the way that person is treating you and making you feel, if you know that whatever they think of you, God loves you, that the Lord of all the earth is for you, that He has shown this by sending His precious Son to die for you, what does the opinion of someone else matter?

[23 : 52] If that person is treating you badly, if that person is making your life difficult, when you know that God has given you His Spirit to help you endure and He is working this suffering for some good end, you can trust Him.

You can. I think sometimes we think, oh no, I can't do that and you're right, you can't do it in your own strength. But in the power of the Spirit, you can trust Him.

Even when that person has sinned against you in some way, in the gospel, you have the resources to forgive and not retaliate. and to rest in the goodness of God.

Because that is what Jesus did when He was so badly treated. Remember, Jesus is the man of the Spirit, the same Spirit who is at work in you. Jesus loved His enemies, prayed for His persecutors and do you remember, quoted from John 14 earlier, He says, Peace I give you, my peace I leave with you.

So even in conflict, even in struggles, even in relational tension, you can know the peace of Christ. Of course, we should see this play out in, well, most of all in the context of the church.

[25 : 14] Churches can get into conflict. This happens anywhere where sinners are brought together. That's why Paul says in Romans 12, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 14, he says, make every effort to do what leads to peace.

And the reason that he can say this is because of the Spirit's work. When you appreciate that in Christ you have been adopted into the same family, share the same Heavenly Father, and participate in the same Spirit, you can be wronged.

You can forgive because love covers a multitude of sins. And you can even admit that you were wrong. The church of Jesus Christ is the one place on earth where discord can be meaningfully dealt with and where relational peace can be a real thing.

So, don't withdraw. Peace isn't the same thing as indifference or coolness or distance. Those things are often a cover. Our hearts are churned up, full of resentment, but we can put on a front of

coolness or detachment.

judgment. Peace is what follows forgiveness and reconciliation. So, the fruit of the Spirit in your life will be seen when you pursue peace in relationships with others.

[26 : 31] If there is discord between you and someone else, especially in the church, take the initiative to put things right. Whether you have been the one who is wronged or the one who was wronging the other person, it doesn't matter.

Pursue peace. Unresolved conflict is toxic. It's like cancer and just like cancer, the longer it is left untreated, the worse it gets. The best time to pursue peace with others is now.

Friends, our world is anxious and angry and we often follow their lead if we're honest. What Galatians 5 tells us is that we don't need to.

A while ago down in Shepherd's Bush, I was walking along Uxbridge Road down there and there was a gentleman coming the other way wearing a t-shirt that said on it, no Jesus, no peace.

peace. K-N-O-W. You know Jesus, you'll know peace. That's the message this evening. If you know Jesus, His Spirit brings us peace with God and He gives us the peace of God.

[27 : 41] But the genius, the absolute genius who designed this garment had more to say. In a simple but very clever move, the designer of this t-shirt, he doubled his message.

You see, the N-O in both words, K-N-O-W. The N-O in both words was a different color. Clever boy. What that meant was that at the same time as holding out the hope of peace in Christ, if you know Christ, you know peace, he held out the warning. Know Christ, know peace.

Absolute genius. Jesus really is the answer. The Spirit at work in our lives offers you peace.

He gives it to you as a gift in Christ. He really is the answer. Let's pray. Let's pray.