

Philippians 4.4-9

The Peace of God in the Midst of Chaos

Sermon #6 in a Series on Biblical Change and the Fruit of the Spirit

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on July 31, 2005.

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Main Idea: *Christ's people can have God's peace in a chaotic world.*

Scripture Introduction

Galatians 5 tells us that the fruit of the spirit is: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

In God's good timing, we have arrived at the third of the character traits of those in whom the Spirit of God is working: “peace.” So that we might have God's peace in our lives, let's meditate on **Philippians 4.4-9**. Pray.

Introduction

The letter read: “Dear Abby, I have found the secret to inner peace and I want to share it with all your readers. The secret is to *finish the things you start*. Today alone I finished two bags of potato chips, a chocolate pie, a bottle of wine and a box of candy. I feel better already.”

Is that the peace promised by God?

I really enjoy counseling. When I meet with folks, I usually ask: “What is it you really want for your marriage?” Many, many husbands and wives say, “I just want peace.”

Nor are our homes the only place lacking peace. Wars are being fought all over the globe. Here in the United States, more than 2,000,000 people are in prison, a murder occurs every 30 minutes, and a crime of some sort almost every second. We live in a violent world, with violent people, who commit violent crimes. We live in a place without peace.

How strange that the fruit of God's working in our lives includes peace. Can we have peace in the midst of chaos?

Jesus seemed to think we could. Near the end of His life, he promised His followers: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you....” (John 14.27 ESV). That's encouraging. Yet his words are not all upbeat, are they?

Matthew 10.34: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” And in **John 16**, Jesus specifically says that, “In the world you will have tribulation....” So which is it? Peace or not? And if we can have peace, how do we get it?

1. We Must Embrace the Biblical Definition of Peace

There are different kinds of peace. One is horizontal and outward—the societal peace equivalent to the absence of violence or conflict. Pursuit of this drives much American foreign policy. And God commends to all Christians prayer and labor for social peace, between governments and individuals.

Additionally, there is peace which is vertical, concerning our relationship with God. This has two parts: 1st, an objective aspect, which the Bible calls “peace *with* God,” (in which we are

declared to be no longer his enemies); and 2nd, a subjective aspect, the “peace *of* God” (when we know in our souls the presence and acceptance of God even in the midst of chaos). This subjective aspect of vertical peace is the word used in Philippians 4. Let me give you a definition, and then we will see if we can flesh it out: Peace (in our text) is: “*The confidence in your soul which results from faith that there is a sovereign and omnipotent (all powerful) God who is both good to you and present with you through all circumstances.*”

Three observations:

1.1. Biblical Peace Does Not Come by Changing Circumstances

Every day people seek peace by controlling chaos, by changing people and circumstances. The angry husband who yells, “I just want some peace and quiet”; the bitter wife who clams up when her feelings are hurt; and the hopeless couple who run away from their church when they are mistreated—these three all have something in common: they seek peace by a change in externals.

Their lives look like the church bulletin announcement which read: “The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to a conflict.” Rather than finding peace in God, they try to force a change in chaos. Biblical peace is **not** the result of avoiding conflict or changing circumstances.

1.2. Biblical Peace Is Not Real Without Reconciliation with God

The “peace *of* God” mentioned by Paul requires “peace *with* God.” It may be helpful here to be sure you know who is your great enemy before you become a “born again” Christian.

Do you know that your enemy is God? And what an enemy! Though we fight against Him at every turn, He woos us, calls us, works for our conversion, and loves us while we curse and despise Him. Do you not wish all your enemies fought this way?

Be sure of this: though you may desire the peace *of* God, such is impossible until you make peace *with* God! Have you done so? Have you come to the place in your life where you have admitted that you made yourself God’s enemy? Have you laid down your weapons at the cross and accepted Jesus’ peace treaty in your behalf? Are you confident that *He knows you personally* and that nothing can separate you from His loving presence? Do you believe that all His power and mercy is converging to ensure all your chaos is ordered for your good?

That is hard, is it not? My sin nature hates to be humbled like that. We think far too well of ourselves to dare confess that we rebelled and fought against the God who is known by his love, compassion, mercy and grace. Yet until we own our enmity and receive Christ’s peace with God for us, we can have no experience of the peace of God in this life.

1.3. Biblical Peace May Not Result in a Reduction of the Chaos

Think about this: before you come to Christ, you really only have one great enemy: God, and your enemy loves you. But when you become a Christian, you suddenly have lots of enemies who hate you and seek to make your life and circumstances miserable.

This means that a Christian may appear to have *less peace even while she knows the peace of God in her life*. Biblical peace is *not* the absence of conflict; it is the presence of God in the midst of your chaos. Accept the Biblical definition of peace.

2. We Must Deny Ourselves the Opposite of Peace: Anxiety (Worry)

Please look at verse 6: “Be anxious for nothing....” Jesus said the same in Matthew chapter 6: “Do not worry about what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear....”

Yet **John Piper**, in an article on “eating the bread of anxiety,” admitted that he wakes almost every day anxious about many things. Anxiety (or worry) is a heart sin which everyone of us knows personally and intimately. So how do we find victory? Here are four truths which we must recognize in order to prepare our hearts to bear the fruit of peace.

2.1. Recognize the Battle Against Anxiety

When God tell us in Galatians 5 that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is peace, that sentence occurs in a paragraph describing the battle between our old, sinful desires and the gracious, merciful Spirit of God. The point of knowing the context is simple, yet terribly profound: *the struggle for peace is a spiritual battle*. You cannot win this on your own and you cannot lose if you appeal to Jesus for help. God’s peace is graciously promised to all who believe that God rewards those who seek peace in Him. Will you?

2.2. Recognize the Allure of Anxiety

That sounds silly, does it not? Why would I want to be anxious? Does not everyone want peace? Let’s think about it. Are there benefits to the flesh (sinful nature) from worry? I think so!

Choosing to be anxious gives a feeling of control. To pray and receive the Spirit’s peace is to give up power and authority to another. The flesh does not like that.

Choosing to be anxious can be used to manipulate. If I am afraid to tell my teenager, “You may not go to that party,” I may instead try to guilt them into skipping it or coming home early by reminding them how much their mother will worry.

Choosing to be anxious can make us feel that we care more than we really do or salve a guilty conscious for not doing enough. If I should have prevented my friend from driving drunk, I may give myself over to worry for her because I feel guilty that I did not stop her.

The flesh can delight itself in anxiety.

2.3. Recognize the Anxieties

About what are you anxious? Will you take time to name them? Illness? (Cancer? Alzheimer’s?) Guilt? (Someone may find out about the sin?) Divorce? Never getting married? Your children? Money? War? Family member who is not converted?

Instead of allowing our minds to churn over unspecified anxieties, naming them begins applying God’s forgiveness and peace. You will notice that there are a finite number. There are some things about I am anxious, but it is not everything, is it? There is a limit, and it helps to know that.

2.4. Recognize the Reasons for Anxiety

When you make your list, you will no doubt notice that you have good reason to be anxious. There are some serious concerns on the list, are there not?

Do you know that the Bible never trivializes our troubles? Instead the Bible says, “You have every reason to worry; but you have even better reasons not to worry.”

We are fallen people living in a fallen world. Peace is not the product of pretending that it is not so; peace results from knowing the God of peace who has broken into the chaos.

3. We Must Be Cautious of the Counterfeit of Peace: Cowardice or “Pacifism”

Sometimes we long for peace so much that we do unbiblical things, especially when faithfulness would make more conflict. Note well, Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10.34). God’s peace is not found in running from conflict, but in trusting him to walk with us through it.

There was an example in Lincoln in the late 1990s. Westminster Presbyterian Church refused to discipline one of their elders who was performing abortions. By avoiding the conflict and suffering that surely would have happened in the church if the pastors and other elders had stood on God’s side, the church had a type of “peace.” They have an absence of conflict. But it was counterfeit of peace. True peace could only have been had by escalating the conflict to all out war to bring the sinner to repentance and reconciliation with God.

It is a counterfeit of peace to cowardly avoid real issues.

4. We Must Actively Cultivate True Peace

Six commands in our text which are the means of peace.

4.1. Rejoice (Philippians 4.4)

And again I will say, You have many reasons to worry; you have many greater reasons to rejoice.

Let’s take as an example the anxiety we might have over losing your job.

- Rejoice you will get to depend on Him more
- Rejoice that you will draw closer to your spouse
- Rejoice that this will make you pray more
- Rejoice that you will get a better job because your Father in heaven loves you more than you do yourself
- Rejoice that you live in a country where jobs are plentiful
- Rejoice that your God is sovereign over job loss and loves you whether you have a job or not
- Rejoice at the empathy which you will learn for others who have lost a job

Is there anything the flesh resists more than rejoicing when it so wants to be anxious? Let us not be controlled by our emotions and evil thoughts; but let us rejoice in the truth that all things work together for good for those who love God.

4.2. Lean (Philippians 4.5)

When we are full of anxiety, there appears to be no god in the universe with any oomph. It is just you and your problems, **alone** and without help. But that is not true, is it?

A Baby Blues cartoon where Daryl wakes up in the morning and picks up his pillow and out of the case falls Zoe. He says, “Did we have a thunder storm last night?”

When my kids are frightened, they want to cling and hang close. Not because they really believe I can change the course of the world. Why then? Because they want someone to hold them during the storm. God promises to be near.

4.3. Pray and Supplicate with Thanksgiving (Philippians 4.6)

You may have supposed that peace will feel very much like being under the influence of drugs or walking around nearly dead. Not so.

When godly men and women are in the midst of chaos, they cry out to God with pleading and moaning. This text insists that peace come from the Spirit when we plead passionately with God for help in times of trouble.

We can expend energy worrying, winding our stomachs into knots, fretting and figuring ways of escape from our chaos—and we end up full of anxiety. Or we can take the same energy and beg God to be with us and deliver us—and end up with the peace of the presence of the Spirit.

I need to be careful not to be formulaic here, but it is likely that silent prayers formed only in our minds will not suffice. Anxiety is fought with loud prayers and pleadings! That is exactly how Jesus was filled with peace: **Hebrews 5.7**: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears....”

4.4. Desire (Philippians 4.7)

Most people want God to reorder their chaos and they are uninterested in a God who refuses to do so. I do not blame them; I want the same. As a result we seek to manipulate peaceful, easy surroundings. Though I may succeed for a season, such cannot last forever.

One day your circumstances will come crashing down on you, despite your best efforts. Then what will we do? God offers his peace in the midst of chaos. Do you desire that or will you reject him because he fails to meet your demands?

4.5. Think Differently (Philippians 4.8)

Each of those is several sermons. All we have time for is to remind you that Satan is a liar; peace comes when we meditate on the truth of God’s word. It has been said that worry is a river which cuts deep channels for all good thoughts to drain out of your mind. Boarding up those channels so that we think differently is critical to overcoming anxiety.

4.6. Believe (Philippians 4.9)

If we do what God says, He will be with us and his peace will be ours. Will you believe his promise of his victory over your every anxiety and in your every chaos, and will you act as a believer?

5. Conclusion

The story is told of a time when Death was walking toward a city when a man stopped Death and asked, “What are you going to do?” Death said, “I am going to that city to kill 10,000 people.” The man said, “That is horrible!” Death responded: “That’s the way it is; that is what I do.”

So the man ran all over the city, warning everyone of Death’s plan. At the end of the day he again met Death and complained to him: “You said you were going to kill 10,000 people, and yet 70,000 died.” Death said, “*I* killed only ten thousand. Worry and fear killed the others.”

You think about that.