



3 Peaces

The Fruit of the Spirit

July 12, 2020

Ephesians 2:11-22

Peace is such a sweeping biblical concept that it can stand for the entirety of God's redemptive work on our behalf. He is the God of Peace, after all. And his Son is the Prince of Peace. And his Kingdom is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

Peace with God is the "center-peace" of it all. God has brought us near through the blood of Christ, for Jesus himself is our peace. Or as Romans 5:1 puts it: Now that we've been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This comes by sheer grace and is received by simple faith. We make *no effort* in this. We do not meet God halfway. The 10 verbs in Ephesians 2:14-17 are all Christ's actions for us. He did it all!

And now we bring all our anxieties to him (Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:7). We don't like people casting their cares on us, but God does! He takes even our "dumb" cares—the unfounded fears and self-imposed stresses of our lives. He says, "If it matters to you, it matters to me. Bring it here and *relax in Me*."

Peace in God is what we have as a community. That's the whole purpose of our salvation. God wants to create One New Man; he wants everyone to be reconciled in One Body. This means overcoming all the insidious prejudices and divisive forces of our world. We make *every effort* to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

Peacekeeping—if we're to be a true community and not merely a pseudo-community—requires effort because true peace, *shalom*, is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of flourishing, wholeness, and community. So we have to actualize what we've been given. We must take on the hard issues through humble learning, generous listening, and persistent unity-building. As we "let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts with thanksgiving" (Col. 3:15) we'll find plenty of common ground.

Peace by God is our family business in the world. "He came and preached peace" (Eph. 2:17) and then gave that peace—and peace mission—to us: "As the Father sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21). This means that we're engaged in a *continual effort* empowered by grace. We're keen to identify the places of brokenness, injustice, and chaos, and bring all the resources of the gospel to bear.

Key to engagement is vision. Imagination. We have to believe in what the gospel of Christ can do, *through God's people*, in the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to immerse ourselves in new stories of peacemaking until God empowers us to write some new stories ourselves. It will be hard. We'll take hits. We'll suffer persecutions, insults, and accusations just as surely as "blessed are the peacemakers" is followed by "blessed are the persecuted" in the beatitudes (Matt. 5:9-12). But the upside is we'll be called "sons of God"—chips off the old block, faithful builders of the family business—and our reward will be great. It will be nothing less than the kingdom of heaven itself.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you like best about this teaching? Did it serve you like a good cup of coffee in the morning: comforting and energizing? Explain.
2. Was there anything that you found disturbing or bitter, like a bad cup of coffee?
3. When you think of peace beyond your own heart; peace in its relational and communal dimensions; what comes to mind? Do a free association with the word “peace.”
 - Which of those associations do you think align with biblical shalom?
 - Which ones are ideas that have been warped by the world?
 - How easily do you think our modern, western worldview jibes with biblical shalom? What radical reorientation might we Christians need to undertake in order to be true peacekeepers in the church and peacemakers in the world?
4. Walk through the “3 Peaces.” What insights did you glean? What questions were raised?
 - Peace with God (our core relationship with Christ)
 - Peace in God (our communal relationship through the gospel)
 - Peace by God (our calling and “family business” in the world)
5. Process this quote by the Bible scholar, Philip Kenneson:

“The greatest obstacle to living the Christian life in contemporary society is an impoverished imagination. How can we imagine a life different from the one we’re living if we do not immerse ourselves in a different set of narratives that display life and its purposes differently?”

- Where do you think your current cultural narrative suffers from a lack of imagination? (Don’t judge others; think about yours.)
- Where do you think you could go to find some better stories?
- What hopes do you have for our church as we’re always looking to adjust and reform (“semper reformanda”), and refine our ministry?
- Where do you sense God calling you to grow and reform?