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Life in the Spirit Series (Lesson 11) Fruit of the Spirit – Peace (Part 2)

Our connect group lessons this year will focus primarily on Galatians 5.

In our previous lesson, we learnt about 2nd Fruit of the Spirit – Joy, and that Joy is having faith. In this lesson, we begin our study on the 3rd Fruit of the Spirit – Peace.

Read: Galatians 5:16-25

In the last lesson, we learnt about **peace with God** (through the Cross of Christ), and the **peace of God** (in our mind and heart). But there is a **3rd kind of peace** that must be produced in us when we live a life led by the Spirit – that is **peace with others**. And you will see that the Word of God puts a lot of focus on this.

Since God has made peace between himself and us at his own great cost through the death of Jesus on the cross, He now calls us to live in peace with one another as a way of “living out” the transforming power of the cross in our own practical lives.

But that does not come naturally to us in our fallen sinfulness and dividedness. It is something that has to be cultivated like fruit — **within us** and **between us**. That’s why Paul describes it as **fruit** and also tells us to “**make every effort**” to live in that way.

One of the best places to think through what this means would be to refer to what Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Rome. There were 2 groups of people who became Christians from different cultural and religious backgrounds, and there were enormous differences between these groups, even though they were all now believers in Jesus and together in the church.

The main difference was over the meat they could eat. One group – from the Gentile background – thought they could eat any meat from the butcher’s shop, as they had always done, while another group – from the Jewish background – were horrified because they thought that kind of meat was unclean and idolatrous. The Jews wanted to observe the Sabbath day as they had always done, but the Gentiles did not care what day it was as they had to work every day anyway (especially if they were slaves), so what difference would a Sabbath make?

One group thought of themselves as being “stronger” in faith, and they called the other group “weak” as they felt food and faith did not affect their salvation and relationship with God. The other group on the other hand accused the other as being too free and easy – lacking conviction and stand. Both sides were essentially doubting each other’s qualifications and faith as true Christians. Does this sound familiar to us Christians?

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We might think, “What’s the fuss about meat or vegetables! Why did it matter?”

But it did matter a lot to them—both sides had equally strong convictions and stands. These differences in cultural and religious backgrounds were causing a lot of disagreement and dispute – theologically and practically among them. And Paul had to spend a lot of time urging both sides to “accept one another” and to avoid quarrelling over “disputable matters.”

Paul knew there are always going to be “**disputable matters**” in any group of people, even among Christians. We will NOT always agree about everything. Such is the reality of life and how God created us to be. God did not create us to be robots. He could have if he wanted to, but he chose not to. Therefore, we will always have differences in opinions, convictions and stands due to our different backgrounds and the way we look at things, and very often both sides have equally valid and strong basis for their convictions.

But the **key thing** is not that we should agree with each other all the time, but that we should accept one another—even those who see things very differently as we know that the other person is a believer and loves the Lord Jesus Christ as we do.

This is what Paul says: Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them (Romans 14:1-3).

Paul is telling them explicitly and directly that they must avoid attitudes that can easily divide people and lead to quarrels and conflicts. He tells the Gentile Christians in verse 3 – “Don’t treat with contempt!” – meaning they must not mock Jewish believers for their rules and customs. And he tells the Jewish believers – “Don’t condemn!” – meaning the Jewish believers must not denounce the Gentiles for what they think to be too much freedom and easy behaviour.

Paul is telling them and telling us not to attack each other even though we have different opinions and convictions. I’m sure he would tell us today, as he did to the Galatians, “**If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other**”

Rather, Paul commands them to “make every effort to do what leads to peace” (Romans 14:19). Why?

- 1) Because we have been accepted by the same Lord (Romans 14:3; 15:7). Whatever our opinions on various matters – we have been accepted by God, in Christ. In fact, the very heart of the gospel is that God has not only accepted both Jews and Gentiles in Christ, but he has made them into one new humanity. We share the same gospel, and that gospel has made us one. If I reject or denounce another person who is a believer in Jesus, then effectively I am saying to that person, “Well, God may have accepted you,

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but I do not. Christ has welcomed you, but I do not.” That is a serious sin against the gospel itself.

- 2) We are all servants of the same Master, so we have no right to judge one another (Romans 14:4). Only God (our Master) has the right to judge each of us—and he will. So do not assume a posture of judgment that belongs only to God.
- 3) We are ultimately all accountable to God alone as Judge (Romans 14:10-12). On the day of judgement, some of the differences that we have here and now will really not be that significant. Unless God explicitly says “NO” on certain things, some things (the non-essentials) are open to different interpretation and perspectives. Therefore, we should not let those things divide us into warring camps. Let God be the judge.

Paul goes on to remind us again and again that seeking peace and living at peace is a very important part of living together as Christians. Just look at how many other times he says this:

- If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18).
- God has called us to live in peace (1 Corinthians 7:15).
- God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33).
- Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11).
- Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace” (Colossians 3:15).

But what does it mean to practice peace like that? At the very least it should mean that we do the following:

- In areas we cannot agree, we should have more grace in the **non-essentials**, more humility and dialogue, more tolerance and openness towards each another
- We should seek to address and resolve conflicts among ourselves, rather than adding to them, or causing them in the first place.
- We should be careful to avoid the kind of words and attitudes that easily create misunderstanding and division.
- We should be quick to apologize and say sorry, even if we were not the ones in the wrong! “Sorry” may be the hardest word, but it is often the first one that leads back to peace.
- We should not jump to defend ourselves when things are said or done against us but allow God to vindicate the truth in his own time. Paul said it is better to suffer wrong than to take other Christians to court.
- We need to carefully follow the instructions of Jesus on how we should deal with grievances against one another, rather than just going public on social media to rant about other people.
- Above all, we should avoid all kinds of gossip about others, and learn the strict discipline of keeping confidences.

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Seeking peace with one another does not mean we are weak, or compromise our faith, principles and convictions. It takes great strength, character and maturity to live at peace with those you disagree with, to try understanding and accept the other person's viewpoint without compromising your own. This will actually make us, our relationships, our companies and churches stronger.

In a world that is increasingly polarized and torn apart by differences, to seek peace means working hard to live at peace with others, even when we disagree. It means that we have the **mind of Christ**. And it means **we will bring glory to God**.

On the other hand, when we fight and condemn, denounce and divide from one another, fostering all kinds of divisions, then we do not have the mind of Christ, and we make a **mockery of God** and **deprive God of his glory**.

Reflection/discussion:

Are there conflicts and divisions at present within your workplace, organization, church, among colleagues, friends, family members? How can you actively and intentionally work toward building peace and reconciliation in those areas?