

The Believer and the Holy Spirit

XII. - The Fruit of Peace

“Now the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect [mend, restore you] in every good thing, so that you may do His will, working in you [energizing you] that which is well pleasing before Him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20,21).

“Be not anxious in any way, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all thought, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6,7).

The peace of God is not something believers hope for or receive as the prize of perfection. It is the right and possession of all who have received the Spirit of Christ in salvation. As a fruit of the Spirit, it is in our spirits as surely as Christ is in our spirits. Paul assures the Ephesians that *“He is our peace”* (2:14). And to the Romans he said, *“Having been justified therefore by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1).

So then where is the peace? It seems always to elude us in our constant struggles; and it certainly does not seem much in evidence in the world today.

The answer lies in our perception of peace. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit and not the flesh. It is essential to make this distinction. We have peace in our spirits, as surely as the Holy Spirit resides there. But peace in the flesh is a different matter. Peace in the flesh is available to us, as Paul tells the Philippians, but that depends on many factors that have to do with our life in the flesh.

In this regard it is crucial to make a distinction between the flesh and the spirit. As we have pointed out a great many times in the past, Paul saw his flesh as having many problems, but his spirit as “blameless.” He was faultless, but not flawless. To the Romans, he spoke very graphically of the failures of his flesh (Romans 7). Some say that Paul is describing a condition prior to his salvation, but why then would he have struggled so intensely? Nor did he ever hint in any way that this was prior to his salvation. Nor did he make a point of indicating that there was some more dynamic experience that he was lacking. It is also important to note that in his Epistle to the Philippians—toward the end of his life—he confessed that he had no confidence in the flesh (3:3). In that chapter, he also saw the functions of his flesh, however righteous, to be as refuse when compared to the righteousness of Christ which came in the indwelling presence of Christ in his spirit. In fact, in a very crucial passage to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of delivering an unrepentant sinner to Satan for the destruction of his body *“that his spirit may be saved”* (I Corinthians 5:5).

So what then is the difference? What does the flesh entail?

The flesh is the sum total of the physical and mental processes of the human person. It includes the brain and nervous system with all of its personality traits and dispositions as well as the bodily functions. As such, it is always identified with “the old man.” The spirit is the habitation of Christ for those

who are filled with His Spirit. In the original creation, God breathed into the material substance of man *“the breath of life”* and man became a living soul. This *“breath of life”* was something of God and was expressed by the Hebrew word *nishmah* which was something more than mere human breath. It was what gave eternal life—God’s life—to the human that God had created. In the Fall this special Spirit-life was lost, along with its immortality, and the human became mortal—subject to death.

The word “soul” in Hebrew—*nephesh*—refers simply to a level of life beyond the animals. There has long been a debate among theologians as to what constitutes the difference between soul and spirit. But Paul says to the Thessalonians—*“I pray God your whole body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord”* (I Thessalonians 5:23). If we see the soul as something of the human psyche, it explains why believers are often plagued by human personality traits and attitudes that are not automatically corrected by the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is also true that whereas Satan can affect our minds in terms of temptation, and attitudes, and yet does not have access to our spirits, where Christ dwells. In this respect, believers are not demon possessed, but rather demon distressed. That is, Satan causes problems in our thinking and attitudes, but cannot force Christ out of our spirits. It is thus that Jesus on the cross could cry out, *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46). And yet later say, *“Into thy hands I commend my Spirit.”* As God, Jesus could never have been separated from God in His Spirit, and yet in His mind could feel forsaken. It is for that reason that believers can feel forsaken in their flesh and yet never really be forsaken in their spirits. If our human thinking could control the presence of Christ within us, we would always be in a state of flux and uncertainty. And then He could not say, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5).

And this is how we can understand the peace of Christ in our spirits, and yet have turbulence in our flesh. Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you”* (John 14:27). His is a peace of the Spirit possessed by all who are His children, but not necessarily included in the flesh, where human problems and errors and misconceptions can leave us with the pressures that Jesus speaks of in John 16:33—*“These things have I spoken unto you that in me you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation [pressures] but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.”*

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