

# FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: PEACE

Galatians 5:22-23

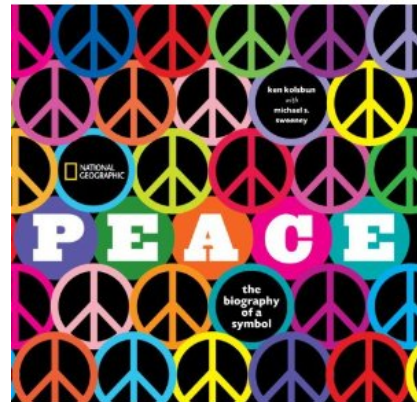
22 May 2011

*Ev'rybody's talkin' 'bout Bagism, Shagism,  
Dragism, Madism, Ragism, Tagism  
This-ism, that-ism, ism ism ism.  
All we are saying is give peace a chance.<sup>1</sup>*

Peace is a much desired condition. Politicians always say that they are for it. The Pentagon reminds us that we have to be prepared to use war to defend it. Cynics make fun of it and children have no idea why peace is not the normal condition for everyone the world over.

Peace is an expression of love. Love is the product of living in the Spirit of God. Peace is not an end of a journey, then. Peace becomes the journey itself, the way, the product of a life in God's Presence, God the Spirit. Peace is so desired that people talk about it, sing about it and write books about it. Oh do they write books.

On the [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) website there are over 71,000 books about peace. Many of them are self-help books. You can buy books that deal with peace prayers to, from and about children. There are some novels about peace warriors, the mind boggles. There are several books about the history of the famous peace symbol. How there can be even one, much less multiple, books about any symbol escapes me, but there you are. All we are saying is give peace a chance.



What kind of peace do we want to give a chance, though? In general there seem to be two types of peace that people talk about. First, there is peace defined as the absence of something. Peace, in this case, is no war. Cynics refer to that as the brief events when everyone is reloading at the same time. Peace, in this view, is a lack, a lack of hostility, a lack of violence, a lack of conflict. Do you hear the negativity of such a description?

If we define peace as a condition of what is not, then we might not have anything we want. There is the peace of the grave, after all. Dead people are very peaceful. Yesterday, after the Concord Academy graduation exercises in our Sanctuary, I met several of our members doing yoga on the edge of the cemetery. They were not disrespectful and none of the dead complained at all. That is a type of peace.

There is the peace of tyranny. A ruthless tyrant will have peace, through terror, a willing application of violence until everyone realizes the cost of speaking up and instead they shut up.

There is an old story of a king who wanted to teach his son how to rule. The king took the prince outside to a wheat field. Using his sword, the king lopped the top off of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwJQffbssxo>

every wheat stalk that was taller than any other stalk. “Make sure that all of your subjects are exactly the same,” said the ruthless old man, “and that way you will have peace in your kingdom.” That is peace defined by a negative, no exceptions, nothing special, and no one different.

A peace based on the negative has this other draw back; it depends on what the other person thinks of you, it is based on how the other person relates to you. The old woman taught us that while it takes two to tango, it only takes one to start a fight. If peace is based on a negative, the absence of conflict, then you will always be filled with concern about the other person’s behavior and their attitudes.

If your peace is based on your concern about the other’s behavior and attitudes, then your life is literally pre-occupied. Before you get to any place, before you arrive at any experience, before you meet any person, your life is so occupied by concern over what they think, by what they feel, by what they do, that there is no room for the new place, experience or person in your life. The best that you will be able to do in that condition is to try to fit the new into the old. Your preoccupation with keeping things without conflict will preoccupy your heart and mind and soul and strength. The old will fill you up, leaving no room for the new God will send your way. Jesus said, “Do not put new wine in old wineskins.” There must be another way.

The other way is the bible’s way to peace. The bible’s way is a positive description. The peace of the bible is summed up in the Hebrew word *Shalom*. Maybe you’ve seen the bus for the Jewish Community Center with *Shalom Ya’ll* painted on the side. That is a reminder that southern is Jesus’ second language.

*Shalom* is more than the absence of conflict. *Shalom*—at the core meaning—is wholeness and well-being in all areas of life. This peace is one where we enjoy the goodness of food, the pleasure of company, the blessings of family and friends, not because of what they give us, but because they are present.

*Shalom* is not an escape from the world. *Shalom*, biblical peace, is an embrace of the world. This is God’s creation. God creates good things. If we do not see good in the world, that says more about us than about the world. Mosquitoes, perhaps, excepted.



We are created by God to live in the world. All parts of the world can work in harmony. On the Philmont trail in New Mexico, you see the burned out places where forest fires sweep away the underbrush that chokes the life form great trees.

We learned the use of fire in forests in 1988. That year an out of control fire consumed a third of Yellowstone National Park. If we had allowed previous fires burn through the forest, the 1988 fire ought not to have been a big deal. Artificial peace, a peace that defines itself in negative terms, will arrogantly go into and extinguish fires. Do we think that we always know better than nature? Nature knows that to keep harmony, to stay in balance, to have peace over the long term, we sometimes need fires. *Shalom*, a positive peace that embraces the whole of creation sees that forests need to burn every few years. Fires are essential for healthy forests as ways to remove growth that will choke out trees. The heat from fires is the only way we know of that some trees can reproduce. Biblical peace,

shalom, sees that while we may well be the crown of creation, we are a part of creation. How did we lose this truth and how do we get it back?

We lose peace when forget our place. God creates us to live in harmony and equality with all people. Equality is not a legal concept here. This equality recognizes that each of us needs something uniquely fitted to you and you alone. Your place in the world is not one size off the rack one size fits all. Your place is special to you, to your gifts, talents and calling. Envy, greed, pride, resentment, all of these failings are the result of forgetting our place. They cause us to leave where we are well placed and can flourish and seek to take someone else's place. Another aspect of this failing is when we insist that all the pegs go into the square holes, even though many of the pegs are round, triangles or rectangles that don't match the square holes. We forget that we are not the creator. We try to impose our order, our limited vision on the world around us and then, when people fail to meet our expectations or desires, we say that there is something wrong with them.

We lose our peace when we give into the hurry up attitude. The graffiti is true that notes: "Time is nature's way of preventing everything from happening at once." We lose our peace when we try to squeeze ever possible diversion into life: "skydiving, tennis, jogging, racquet-ball, skiing, swimming and water skiing." (*The Tao of Pooh*). All of those are good things, but one has to have time for them. To be helpful, strenuous exercises and events need to be relaxing, not competitive, unless you are trying for the Olympics. Peace allows things to take the time needed. Consider:

Because of erosion, the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse on the North Carolina Outer Banks, was threatened with washing into the Atlantic Ocean. Congress appropriated \$12 million for the National Park service to move the lighthouse. The possibility of moving the lighthouse was proposed April of 1982. They relit the light in November of 1999.<sup>2</sup> Why did it take so long? Well, it did not really take too long. Moving a 208 foot tall, 9.7 million pound building 2900 feet takes time. (From Fresh Illustrations)



Small things can be moved quickly. Big things take time. We lose our peace when we give way to the modern demands of do, do, do, now, now, now. There is the old story of the time Abraham Lincoln gave a speech. In making a point about being ready, of taking the time appropriate to the task, the President said that were he given an hour to chop down a large tree he would probably spend the first fifty minutes sharpening the axe. That is how we keep our peace, by taking the time to do what is needed, especially when that is the time needed to prepare. We lose our peace when we overestimate what we can do in a weekend and underestimate what we can achieve over a lifetime. How do you resurrect peace in your soul?

**First**, remember that God is in control. That is rule one. If you have problems with any of the other steps I give you, go back to rule one.

**Second**, change what you think about. If you examine your thoughts during the day you will probably find that they are drawn to things of what seem to be pressing concern. Most people do think of what seems immediate before they begin to restore peace in their life. Without peace, people seldom think about heavenly things. Instead, a

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Md2nNuXldl4>

mess and mass of concern, desire, plan and “what do they think of me” issues dominate our thoughts. People without peace seldom think it is with their soul. What should we do instead? You need to cultivate the habit of remembering God and thinking about God’s presence in your life.

**Third**, realize that the only person you can change is you. The people in your life are who they are. Most of the people you know have not changed much if at all while you have known them. You both have to accept that is who they are and if you plan to spend any significant time with them, you have to find a way to genuinely like them.

**Fourth**, pray for God to give you the ability and the desire to enjoy yourself. Yes, we are all imperfect. God loves you anyway. Most people don’t love and enjoy themselves because they have bought into one of the human myths of what gives peace; more money, more power, a younger partner, a good doctor’s report, exceptional children, and all the rest. Whatever stands between you and loving yourself, ask God for the power to set that concern aside, give you the strength to see you are more than that issue and grow in the grace God gives you. If that means finding a therapist, 12 step program, support group or simply saying, hey, there’s nothing wrong with being bald, so be it. God created you and God does not make junk.

**Fifth**, avoid being critical of other people. Remember that it takes no size to criticize. People with small souls spend their time talking about other people. People with broken souls spend their time criticizing other people. Before you say something it is not enough to know if it is true. You must also decide if it will build up or tear down, support or injure. If you do not agree with a position, statement or action of another person and you do not think that the person is totally evil, then keep your comments on the statement, behavior or position, not the person.

**Sixth**, engage in acts of selfless service. Spiritual peace does not mean becoming a hermit. Christian peace means being servants of Christ to a hurt and troubled world. Remember the prayer of St. Francis:

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

**Finally**, when all else fails, give your worries to God. God will be up all night anyway. Let God deal with it while you get some rest. Remember Rule 1.

That is a way to peace that allows us to grow in God, grow in love and Christ like service, and grow into the body of Christ alive in the world today.

