

Series: The Fruit of the Spirit

Title: Joy and Peace: Inner Dispositions from the Spirit

Text: Galatians 5:22

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The 2010 film “Inside Job” analyzed the reasons for the financial collapse in the United States at the dawn of the new millennium. Documenting the conflict of interests that led to unhealthy fiscal policies, the film placed the blame on the financial services industry for the recession of the early two thousands. Many blamed the economic downturn on outside forces — terrorism and the war on terror. The point of the film was that America’s financial struggles from 2007 and onward were caused by inside forces. The Great Recession was the result of “an inside job.”

The reasons for the economic crises at the beginning of this century may be debated. However, one thing is certain in the Christian life — spiritual transformation involves an “inside job.” Growth into Christ-likeness is not a mere external thing. Customs, creeds, ceremonies, and cultural religion can never produce the life God desires. One cannot experience spiritual and moral transformation through self-driven effort. An inner transformation must occur.

A Spiritual Interior vs. A Ceremonial Exterior

This was Paul’s entire point in writing his letter to the Galatians. The church was obsessed with outward observances of the Mosaic Ceremonial Law. They were living by the flesh. In fact, many foolishly believed that one, singular work of the flesh was necessary for true godliness. Circumcision was held up as the gold standard of who was holy and who wasn’t.

Paul wrote his letter to correct the church. They needed to know that Christian salvation was the result of faith, not the keeping of the Law (Galatians 3:2). Furthermore, they needed to know that empty observances of the Law could never make one excel in holiness. Faith was needed for salvation, but it was needed for the practical living of the Christian life as well (Galatians 2:20).

The Galatians were too externally focused. They needed to gain an inward focus. They needed to be aware of the way in which the Holy Spirit worked in their souls to produce the life of Christ. This was Paul’s entire point in listing out “the works of the flesh” and “the fruit of the Spirit.” Flesh-oriented living involved an outward focus. Spirit-oriented living was concerned with one’s soul.

Each of the nine fruit of the Spirit are built on an “inside job.” However, two virtues in particular deal with the state of one’s soul — joy and peace. The first fruit — “love” — was concerned with the fulfillment of Christ’s Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40). The second and third — “joy and peace” — deal with inner-dispositions that all Christians can experience because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

CHRISTIANITY INVOLVES AN INWARD TRANSFORMATION.

Before we delve into what all is involved with the experiences of joy and peace, it is perhaps best to first look at the Bible’s emphasis on inward transformation. It is often said that all religions are the same. While many religions contain teachings that can be seen within one another, Christianity is unique because of its focus on inner realities.

Most religions, philosophies, or systems of thought place their most heavy emphasis on external observances and change. The Bible is concerned first and foremost with the transformation of the human soul.

An emphasis on the inward is clearly seen in the teaching of Jesus. In His most famous sermon, one called “The Sermon on the Mount,” He was very forthright and strong on the need for inner transformation. He knew the ruling religious elite of the day had a dead and empty religion that was focused on externals alone.

Some mistake Jesus’ focus as an antagonism against all Law. They assume that He was against all of the Old Testament. Some believe His point was to abolish all past laws in order to establish a reign of love. Such was not our Lord’s intention. He clearly said, “Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). Instead of doing away with the Law, Jesus observed it and obeyed it.

Jesus’ teaching emphasized the permanence and power of the Law. In His Sermon on the Mount, he faithfully expounded on it. Some of His most famous teachings emphasized the need for humanity to faithfully follow the Ten Commandments, the most succinct and accurate statement of the Moral Law. However, in upholding that Law, Jesus did not focus on mere external conformity. He probed deeper, indicating that God desires internal devotion to God’s Law. It is for this reason that He made avoidance of anger, not just murder, the aim of the Law (Matthew 5:21-26). It is also for this reason that He prohibited lust, not just adultery (Matthew 5:27-30). In addition, He advocated total truthfulness and forthrightness in one’s speech instead of simply prohibiting lying (Matthew 5:33-37).

Another one of Jesus’ sermons in Matthew’s gospel highlighted the importance of internal transformation. In His “Olivet Discourse,” He condemned the Pharisees for their vain, outward-oriented religion (Matthew 23:25-28). Our Lord’s preaching indicated that the Christian life is concerned with inward change. It is for this reason, that the apostles promoted similar doctrine (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 3:16; Hebrews 4:12). The Christian life involves an “inside job.” The Galatians needed to become acclimated to such realities. Many modern Christians need to as well. Indeed, “...humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The virtues of “joy” and “peace” teach us that we should be concerned with inward transformation.

GOD WANTS US TO BE HAPPY.

If you were to ask the average American parent about their desires and wishes for their children, you might hear this reply — “I just want them to be happy.” It seems that happiness is the unspoken aspired life goal of most. Health, meaningfulness, prosperity, and strong relationships are all secondary to this one pursuit. It seems like humanity is hardwired with an unsurpassable desire for happiness.

Interestingly, the Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit has the ability to make us happy. We see this in the second fruit of the Spirit — joy. Some may not equate joy with happiness. For many, the two are seen as contrasting virtues. There is a form of Christian-cliché teaching that maintains joy is an inward experience of contentment. Such teaching also proposes happiness is a human-centered bliss based on outward, material things.

Believers do not need to make such distinctions. The Lord is not constricted by English terms. Plain and simple, the word rendered “joy” in the New Testament is one that referred to happiness. One has said it depicted “a feeling of inner-happiness or delight.”¹

Happiness and the Self-Help Phenomenon

Much is made of the pursuit of happiness in contemporary self-help literature and teaching. It is commonly believed that happiness is not a fixed state one can attain. Instead, it is regarded as a moment one can pass through for a short period of time. People are advised to not pursue happiness directly. Doing such will reportedly make one less happy. Doing things that are meaningful — exercising, building positive relationships, eating well, pursuing enjoyable work — will bring more moments of happiness.

While there is a degree of insight in such worldly wisdom, the Bible presents a different picture of happiness and joy. It teaches that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer gives a sense of happiness and joy in every season of life. Even when there are seasons of struggle, one can experience a deep, abiding joy.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he encouraged them to give to gospel ministries by holding up the Philippians as an example of faithfulness. He said, “During a severe trial brought about by affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part” (2 Corinthians 8:2). Though the Philippians were poor, and though they encountered some sort of “severe trial,” they still maintained a deep sense of happiness in the Lord.

Joy, No Matter What Happens

A believer’s joy is not dependent upon outward circumstances. It is not a momentary, passing type of thing. It persists no matter what life may bring. The Psalmist knew this to be true. In the midst of pain, he could sing, “You turned my lament into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness” (Psalm 30:11).

Jesus is an example for us in this regard. He had joy from the Lord, even when He faced the cruel agonies of Calvary. The author of Hebrews said, “For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). The fruit of joy is not dependent on circumstances. It can grow among crises, catastrophes, crucibles, and crosses! It is for this reason that James was able to tell his readers, “Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials” (James 1:2).

Christian happiness isn’t an end destination. It isn’t a moment we pass through. One does not need to wait until vacation, retirement, or the achievement of a certain goal to experience it. Life does not need to be free from stress or struggle. Happiness can be the present possession of every believer. How so? The answer is found in the Holy Spirit.

Joy from the Holy Spirit

¹ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom].

The New Testament continually links the fruit of joy to the presence of the Third Person within the souls of God's children. In Romans 14:17, Paul said, "...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." For the apostle, joy didn't come from fleshly, earthly excitements and diversions. It was found in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. In the first-century world, Greek thought saw joy as coming from things like pleasure and patriotic pride. Paul presented a countercultural perspective. He upheld that joy came from a consciousness of one's relationship to God.² We see him advocate for this perspective in other places of Scripture as well (Romans 15:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).

Paul's teaching helps us settle the issue related to the supposed distinctions between "happiness" and "joy." Believers can be thought of as enjoying both experiences. One does not need to choose one at the expense of the other. The key issue is the ground or basis of one's happiness and joy. Earthly people find momentary blips of worldly bliss and happiness from time to time. Christians have the opportunity to experience an enduring, permanent form of happiness and joy in life. The Holy Spirit is the agency that imparts such lasting joy.

Joy from the World, or Joy from the Lord?

The ungodly primarily find their happiness in temporal things. Scripture attests that a level of satisfaction can be found in earthly relatives. James 4:9 indicates that some first-century believers were possessed a sort of joy that came from self-absorbed living. Many of James' readers were marked by money-loving, prejudiced behavior that led them to mistreat others, yet they had some sort of happiness.

A similar scene is found in the Old Testament. Prior to captivity, the people of God enjoyed a level of earthly joy through carnal and idolatrous living (Jeremiah 16:9; 25:10; Lamentations 5:15). They were marked by a happiness that came from the world, not a happiness that came from the Lord. Consequently, the prophets called them to repent.

The issue with joy and happiness is not a matter of definitions. The two terms can be thought of as being nearly synonymous. The issue is the object of one's joy or happiness. God wants His people to be happy. He just wants them to find their happiness in the right type of things.

It is for this reason that Jesus used the Greek term that meant "happiness" over and over again in a portion of His teaching known as "the Beatitudes" (Matthew 5:3-10). Christians have an enduring happiness in life because they have the Holy Spirit. This does not mean they cannot take delight in earthly pleasures to some degree. It just means they are not reliant on such things for joy. Their joy comes from an abiding relationship with God via the Holy Spirit of God.

GOD WANTS US TO HAVE REST IN OUR SOULS.

In the spring of 1969, John Lennon, one of the famous songwriters for the groundbreaking rock group the Beatles, along with his wife Yoko Ono, staged a demonstration to advocate for peace. The now famous event was unique in that the newly married couple protested by staying in bed for an entire week. They invited the

² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 431.

press to visit their hotel room in the Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam. The press was invited to take pictures and interview them from 9am to 9pm each day.

Peace is an aspired virtue of most of humanity. Perhaps it is the remnants of the image of God in man that has led many, like Lennon and Ono, to persistently advocate for world peace. While many bypass Christianity as a means for pursuing the virtue, the Bible consistency advocates for it. In fact, it was during the same time period in which John and Yoko staged their demonstration that Bob Dylan wrote a song that used Scripture to call for peace. The Byrds sang the words he borrowed from Scripture — “To everything (turn, turn, turn), There is a season (turn, turn, turn), And a time to every purpose, under heaven. A time of love, a time of hate, A time of war, a time of peace.”

Shalōm Peace

The peace humanity desires cannot be found in the world, but it can be found in the Lord. Paul upheld the fruit of the Spirit as involving the inner-experience of “peace.” The Greek word translated “peace” was a robust and meaningful one. The hippie, anti-war movement has made many think that the virtue is defined by a simple absence of war. The biblical concept involved much more.

For Paul and his counterparts, peace was directly related to the Hebrew concept of “shalōm.” Jews indeed regard peace as involving the cessation of war and hostilities, but they also envisioned it as consisting of a state of well-being and prosperity. Peace was a state of wholeness, soundness, health, and abundance. It involved a deep-seated, ongoing experience of inner-tranquility. One has said it was regarded as “a wholeness of soul” which resulted in “a tranquil disposition regardless of outward circumstances.”³

The Gospel of Peace

Christians have promise of such peace. Paul used the word over and over again in the salutations of his letters. In fact, each of his writings opened with mention of the promise of peace (1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 1:7; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3). Paul placed repeated emphasis on the virtue for good reason. Because of Jesus and His work at Calvary, we have the privilege of an abiding sense of peace.

The inner tranquility Christians enjoy is not based on circumstances, riches, or the state of current events in the world. Instead, it is rooted and grounded in the gospel and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In his letter to the Romans, Paul said, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Writing to the Ephesians, he proclaimed, “For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace” (Ephesians 2:14).

Whereas believers were formerly in a state of war with God because of sin, Christ has vanquished the enemies of sin and death. He has removed all hostilities and

³ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 431.

established a covenant of peace. When the Lord looks at His children, He sees the righteousness of His Son. As a result, there is nothing but tranquility between the believer and the Heavenly Father.

Practical Peace

To bring God's peace home into one's heart, one must learn to personally live by the gospel. Though one is positionally at peace with God, one can forfeit the practical experience of peace. Sadly, many believers are victims of such a sad demise. They have never learned to live by what Paul said in Colossians 3:15 — "And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful."

More will be said about how to practically pursue the fruit of joy and peace at the end of this chapter. For now, know this — peace is experienced through both positional and practical realities. Our positional standing in Christ makes peace possible. However, we must learn to practically experience peace through the Lord's means of grace. If we don't learn to live by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), our lives will be devoid of the inward tranquility God promises His children.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS OUR HELPER.

In all of our talk about joy and peace, it is important to pause and remember that such things are "the fruit of the Spirit." The Third Person of the Trinity is the one who generates such virtues in our souls. Such was Paul's entire point in Galatians 5. He wanted his readers to pursue joy and peace via the Holy Spirit, not via human-oriented customs and mechanisms.

Jesus also indicated that the Holy Spirit is the primary means for disciples to experience peace and joy. When speaking of the need for inwrought virtues like peace (John 14:27), Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever" (John 14:16). Our Lord knew He was going to soon leave His disciples (John 14:18). He also knew that His departure would cause a degree of anxiety (John 14:27). Consequently, He promised that the Holy Spirit would come and help provide His followers with peace.

The Greek word Jesus used of the Holy Spirit, the word translated "Counselor," is one that spoke of an "advocate" or a "comforter." In Jesus' and Paul's day, it was used of a legal advisor, a proxy, or one who came forward as a representative of another a court of law.⁴ The title was used five times in the New Testament. Interestingly, four uses were applied to the Holy Spirit. One was applied to Jesus. As a result, both the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity can be regarded as advocating on behalf of believers in some fashion.

In Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, the language of the text used a subtle, grammatical indicator to speak of the way both Jesus and the Holy Spirit advocate on behalf of believers. Our Lord called the Third Person "another Counselor." In the Greek-speaking world of the first century, there were two terms that could be used to speak of "another" person, place, or thing. One referred to "another" of the same kind. The other referred to "another" of a different kind. Jesus implemented the former term. He depicted the Holy Spirit being "another Counselor" of the same kind.

⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 217.

Jesus' point was that the Holy Spirit was and is of equality quality to Himself. Our Lord's teaching provides insight into the relative functions of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit in our lives. Christ has served as an advocate for us before the Heavenly Father. Though we were naturally cut off from God because of our sins, Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension have all given us a new standing before our Creator.

On top of Jesus' work, we also have the Holy Spirit now serving as an advocate for us. He brings Jesus' ministry to bear on our hearts. We can practically experience all of the peace and joy Jesus has earned for us through His indwelling presence. The Holy Spirit acts, as one has said, "...as Christ's substitute on Earth."⁵ It is for this reason that Jesus said, "Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

THERE ARE "MEANS OF GRACE" WE CAN USE TO EXPERIENCE MORE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP.

In Catholic theology, it has historically been maintained that there are several "means of grace" that impart God's goodness to faithful worshippers. The sacraments are regarded as the primary means of grace. The priestly office has been upheld as another avenue for experiencing God's unmerited favor. All in all, constituents are dependent on the church and its leaders for any spiritual advance.

With the dawn of the reformation, protestants began to see grace from a different perspective. Salvation was not received through the people or processes within the church. It was regarded as a personal thing, wrought in the heart of man and woman by the unmerited favor of God. In addition, protestants saw "means of grace" as being separate from an institutional entity. They regarded certain Holy Spirit activities as imparting grace to believers.

While the language "means of grace" may seem foreign to many modern, evangelical believers, it provides a helpful way of thinking about our growth as Christians. There are certain activities and disciplines that have a way of helping us experience more and more of the life of God. The concept of "means of grace" helps us understand how the grace of Jesus, via the Holy Spirit, is practically experienced. When we study the New Testament's usage of the Greek words for "joy" and "peace," we find that there are four primary means of grace that produce such virtues in our lives.

Prayer

Prayer is a pathway for advancing in joy and peace. In John 16:24, Jesus said, "Until now you have asked for nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete." Paul told believers, "Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). If you want to learn how to be more happy and more peace-filled, make it your aim to make meaningful prayer a part of your life.

People

⁵ Zodiates, ?.

The body of Christ also has a way of helping with the fruit of the Spirit. Through the encouragement, equipping, and edification we receive from other believers, joy and peace can become more of a reality in our personal lives. This is why John said, “Though I have many things to write to you, I don’t want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face so that our joy may be complete” (2 John 12). It is also why Paul enjoined believers to work to “to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). If you want to experience more and more of God’s joy and peace, don’t just go to church. Be a part of a church. Form meaningful, Christian relationships that can bless and build you up.

Personal Worship

Personal times of communion with the Lord have a way of instilling more peace and joy in our souls. His presence has a way of charging our spiritual batteries. The discontent and hostility of a fallen world grows dim in the light of our Lord. When the first witnesses of the Resurrection rushed from Jesus to report news to the disciples, they did so with joy in their hearts (Matthew 28:8). Paul told believers that peace came from “the God of peace” (Romans 15:33). If you want to advance in your understanding of happiness and inner-rest, get to know your God. Spend personal time in His presence.

Preaching to Self

I would commend one final way to grow in the second and third fruit of the Spirit. As a believer, it is one of the most helpful tools I have discovered for experiencing the peace and joy of the Lord. I call it “preaching to myself.” Through this practice, I talk to myself and remind myself of the Lord’s truth. The realities of God’s Word have a way of wiping out unhappiness and inner turmoil. This is why Jeremiah told the Lord, “Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart, for I bear your name, Lord God of Armies” (Jeremiah 15:16). It is also why Paul said the following to the church at Philippi:

Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9).

If you want to know more and more of God’s joy and peace, make it your practice to regularly tell yourself the truth.