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**“I AM THANKFUL FOR…”**

(I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Big Idea: We need to develop an attitude of joyful, prayerful gratitude.

**INTRODUCTION**

 *\* A Season of Thanks*

- Good morning, and Happy Thanksgiving!

 - I know…the holiday is past.

 - You may have already turned your attention to Christmas.

 - I know the entire retail world has!

 - But the Thanksgiving holiday is that time of the year when we turn our attention to God and give Him thanks for all He has done to provide for us - in both material and spiritual ways.

 - It’s important for us to focus our attention on gratitude, even if the calendar tells us to move on.

 - Sometimes, we bemoan the Thanksgiving holiday because we feel like it might confine gratitude to a particular day of the year.

 - In reality, it does no such thing.

 - It picks a particular - and appropriate - time of the year to emphasize thankfulness.

 - Our Communion emphasis is not designed to be practiced every moment of every day.

 - Instead, it is designed to be practiced periodically to remind us to focus our attention on the death of Christ.

 - Thanksgiving - this autumn season of thankfulness - was instituted by our God-fearing forebears in America to remind us to give thanks to God because He was the One who supplied the harvest and provided our material needs.

 - Other reasons for Thanksgiving Proclamations have been given - victory over our enemies is notable among them.

 - However, the original focus was God’s provision.

 - So the Thanksgiving Holiday is good.

 - I consider it one of the best national holidays on our cultural calendar.

 - It reminds us once a year that we need to be grateful to our God. - That’s a good thing.

 - I want to turn our attention to I Thessalonians 5 and focus for these few moments on verses 16-18.

 - You can turn there in your Bibles.

 *\* A Complete Sentence…5:16-18*

 \* Often, when we arrive at I Thees. 5:18, we read that verse as if it is a complete sentence.

 *In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* \* It sounds like a complete sentence, but it’s really not.

 - The thought begins back in v. 16 with the words, *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing…”*

 - In light of that, I want to examine Paul’s concept of gratitude as he expressed it to the Thessalonians. What are these separate ideas and how do joy and prayer connect with gratitude?

 - In addition, I want us to notice that each of these three concepts revolve around attitudes, not events.

 - They are attitudes each of us as believers need to cultivate.

 \* Let’s begin with the concept of Continuous Joy.

**I. JOY SHOULD BE CONTINUOUS** (5:16)

 \* The phrase in v. 16 is short and sweet; “Rejoice always” (or, in the KJV, “Rejoice evermore”).

 **A. Joy Is An Attitude**

 \* We have noted the difference between happiness and joy on number of occasions.

 - ***Happiness*** is a feeling of euphoria based on things that happen to us.

 - It’s circumstantial and fleeting.

 - Coke commercial.

 - I can be happy because something pleasant has happened.

 - My team won, I woke up with no pain, I got a check in the mail, I celebrated a birthday…

 - I may, on the other hand, be sad because something awful has happened.

 - My team lost, I woke up with a stiff neck, I got a huge bill in the mail, I endured another birthday…

 - Those are responses to circumstances.

 - We tend to be happy when our circumstances are pleasant., and not so happy when they are not.

 - ***Joy***, on the other hand, is an attitude that stems from my position in life.

 - It endures through the ups and downs of life.

 **B. Where Does Christian Joy Come From?**

 \* We have discussed the nature of joy in the past - that it is different from circumstantial happiness.

 - ***Joy*** stems from our position in Christ.

 - It is deeper than my surface circumstances and is not dependent on them.

 - Instead, it is rooted in who I am in Christ.

 - I am a child of God.

 - I am an heir to all God has offered.

 - I am a member of the family of God.

 - I have eternal life.

 - Those are not subject to the changing fortunes of daily life.

 \* The command to “rejoice” is based on who I am and what God has given me that no one and no event can take from me.

 - That’s why, as you study the annals of history and consider followers of Christ who have been subjected to cruel imprisonment, they have endured those trials better than their non-Christian counterparts, by and large.

 - Their unwavering faith in God; their settled position in Christ sustained them when the fortunes of life turned in a very difficult direction.

 **C. Why Does God Require Joy?**

 \* As we noted, the word “rejoice” is a command and indicates action on our part.

 - God requires us to rejoice.

 - “Isn’t that kind of like ‘requiring’ laughter?”

 - How can God require us to rejoice…and to be continuously rejoicing?

 - Well, it’s not because God doesn’t like tears.

 - After all, Jesus wept.

 - He commands us to rejoice continuously because He knows that’s good for us.

 - Solomon told us that a “merry heart”…

 - changes your face (“countenance”) from sad to cheerful (a blessing to everyone else, as well - 15:13),

 - turns pity to party (makes life seem like a “continual feast” instead of one bad day after the next - 15:15), and

 - is like medicine that heals a wasting disease - 17:22

 - Joy is a life-changer.

 - Joy is a life-saver.

 - Joy produces laugh lines instead of worry creases.

 -That’s why God requires joy.

 - God also commands us to rejoice because that demonstrates trust in His wise direction for our lives - even when we can’t see how that direction could possibly be good.

 - It honors God and demonstrates to a watching world that we are at rest in our Father’s good grace.

 - We are personally blessed, we honor Him and we testify to others when we rejoice continuously.

**II. PRAYER SHOULD BE CEASELESS** (5:17)

 \* Verse 17 takes us in a different and seemingly unrelated direction - prayer.

 - Let’s take a look.

 **A. Prayer Is An Attitude**

\* Notice that a God-honoring prayer life is also a matter of attitude.

 - We get the idea of prayer - it’s communion and communication with God.

 - It’s the idea of “without ceasing” that requires a little extra thought.

 - People sometimes view “pray without ceasing” as an unreasonable thought, as if God is asking us to put everything else in life on hold to participate in a life-long concentrated prayer meeting where we never get off our knees.

 - But that’s not the idea.

 - It is a life-focus on prayer…

 - And it’s a focus on continual, ceaseless prayer…

 - But is not a matter of active praying that never stops.

 - Instead, it’s the idea that we should always be ready to approach the Throne with our request, concern, praise, etc.

 - Let me give you some examples:

 - Someone gives you good news and you respond, “Praise the Lord!” - that’s a quick response of gratitude directed at God. That’s ceaseless praying.

 - Someone shares a prayer request with you over the phone and you stop right then to offer that request before God. That’s ceaseless praying.

 - God brings a missionary to mind during the day, and you pause to bring that missionary and his ministry before the Lord. That’s ceaseless praying.

 - God pricks your heart with conviction about something you should have done but didn’t and you pause to confess that sin of omission. That’s ceaseless praying.

 - It’s not that you have your head bowed every moment of every day; it’s that you are ready to pray at any moment of every day as the need arises.

 **B. The Connection Between Prayer and Joy**

 \* Verse 17 is a continuation of verse 16, so Paul is tying joy and prayer together.

 - What does ceaseless prayer have to do with joy or gratitude?

 - Keep this in mind: Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sees a connection.

 - He is the one who placed these together in close proximity - all in the same sentence.

 - We’re not spinning this or making up a connection that’s not there. It’s right here in the text.

 - So what is the connection?

 - If the original command in the sentence is to always be rejoicing, then the two subsequent commands (pray and be thankful) are subordinate and supportive of the first one.

 - The place of emphasis in the Greek language is the beginning of the sentence - where the thought starts.

 - So, Paul is telling us that prayer supports the idea of continuous joy.

 - When we are in a constant attitude of prayer - ready at any moment to take a matter before the Throne of Grace - we are just a moment away from the presence of Almighty God.

 - No problem is so big that it overwhelms God.

 - No sin is so big it cannot be forgiven by God.

 - No request is beyond the scope of what God can do.

 - We have a resource available to us that is amazing…and gives us reason to live life joyfully!

 - By the same token, it is very difficult to obey the first command if you aren’t in an attitude of prayer.

 - Every burden is yours to carry.

 - Every sin is unconfessed and unforgiven.

 - Every need is overwhelming.

 - You’re on your own…and your resources are no match for what life brings your way…and joy is out of reach.

 - That’s the connection.

 - When we are in touch with our Father, we have access to all that produces joy.

 - When we are not…life becomes a burden.

**III. GRATITUDE SHOULD BE COMPREHENSIVE** (5:18a)

 **A. Gratitude Is An Attitude**

 \* You’re probably seeing a pattern here.

 - Joy is an attitude.

 - Prayer is an attitude.

 - Gratitude is also an attitude.

 - “In everything give thanks…”

 - Once again, gratitude is a state of mind that is not dependent on circumstances.

 - Oh, we say “thank you” for things that happen, but the attitude that chooses to be thankful is what leads us to express gratitude.

 **B. The Scope of “Everything”**

 \* “In everything give thanks…”

 - What is meant by “everything”?

 - You may consider that self-explanatory, and to a degree, it is.

 - However, it requires some examination.

 - Are we to be thankful for sin?

 - Sin is ever-present in this life.

 - The consequences of sin include broken homes, ruined lives, death and eternal doom.

 - How are we to be thankful for that?

 - Are we to be thankful for death?

 - Death is the natural result of sin.

 - It, too is ever-present.

 - It separates loved ones, leaves potential unfulfilled, and pushes people into eternity without God.

 - How are we to be thankful for that?

 - We could talk about natural disaster, divorce, disease, famine, war - all the things in life that are bad.

 - How do we come before God’s Throne and thank Him for all of that horror and loss?

 - A thankful person finds reasons to say thanks - even in the midst of disaster, whereas an ungrateful person finds reasons to complain, even in the midst of a fantastic blessing.

 - We can give thanks for “everything”…

 - because God is in control,

 - because even sin does not thwart His plan,

 - because out of terrible circumstances, God is able to make wonderful things happen,

 - because whatever happens to us is not the end.

 - There is more we cannot see that God is working out.

 - But that kind of gratitude requires an attitude of trust, of love for God, of appreciation for who He is, as much as what He gives.

 **C. The Connection Between Gratitude and Prayer and Joy**

 \* Verse 18 is, yet again, a continuation verse.

 - Paul is not only tying joy and prayer together, he is connecting those two with gratitude.

 - So, as with joy and prayer, it is the attitude that is in view.

 - A joyful person, who is in constant contact with the Lord, will find things for which to be grateful.

 - The circumstances of the moment will not dictate gratitude nor will they demand ingratitude.

 - The person who is thankful is the person who has determined that “the joy of the Lord” is a choice; who keeps in constant contact with the Giver of joy and who sees God’s hand in every circumstance of life - good and bad.

 - It’s all one sentence…and the three ideas really are connected.

 - But the key is a vibrant, trusting, prayerful relationship with God - a relationship that changes my attitude about everything..

**CONCLUSION**

 \* God’s Will (5:18b)

 - At the end of the sentence (v. 18), Paul gives a reason why we need to be joyful, why we need to be in constant communication with our Father, and why we need to be thankful in every circumstance of life.

 - It’s God’s will for us.

 - People often grouse about the will of God - maybe not publicly, but in private.

 - “God’s will is such-and-such…but I don’t want to do that!”

 - But God’s will for us…is what is good for us!

 - Joy is good!

 - It’s a life-attitude that makes everything in life better.

 - Prayer is good!

 - It keeps us in touch with our Creator, our Redeemer, the Lover of our souls.

 - Gratitude is good!

 - It reminds us that we are blessed.

 -…and the attitude that produces those characteristics is the attitude that will produce success in the Christian life.

 - Don’t be that grumpy old Christian who always sees the dark side of life.

 - Be the Christian who chooses to be joyful, who easily comes into the presence of God in prayer at a moment’s notice, and who finds reasons to say “Thanks”.

 - That’s living life God’s way.

Let’s pray.