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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.