

“Principles for Christian Living”

November 19, 2017

1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

I. Introduction

Like anyone who writes a letter, as Paul brought his first letter to the Thessalonian Christians to a close, he emphasized the most important ideas for the new converts to Christianity. Being a follower of Jesus Christ—being a Christian—is more than believing that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died to take away the sins of the world. James wrote in [James 2:19](#), “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.” Obviously, demons are **NOT** Christians and are **NOT** going to spend eternity in heaven. Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is not enough for salvation.

If a person believes that Jesus died on the cross for them, i.e., he or she makes Jesus their Savior, there is still something missing. Later in [James 2:26](#), we read, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” Faith that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for one’s sins and rose again 3 days later is necessary but not the whole story. Paul summarized what it means to be a Christian in [Romans 10:9](#), “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” The *Lordship* of Jesus Christ is important—as Jesus said in [John 14:15](#), “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” [Ephesians 2:10](#) says, “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

In [John 15:12](#) Jesus said, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” In the verses we looked at last week, Paul described what this would look like as he gave instructions concerning attitudes and actions toward fellow believers and other human beings. In today’s Scripture Paul continued describing the Lordship of Jesus Christ as he described the principles for Christian living in terms of the Christian’s responsibilities to God.

II. Responsibilities to God

A. Three Exhortations Paul began with three exhortations which have been called by *some* “*the standing orders of the church.*” They are in the imperative tense, i.e., they are commands from God directing our attitudes and actions. Since feelings cannot be commanded, being joyful, praying, and giving thanks are things other than feelings.

1. Paul began by writing: “**Be joyful always.**” Being joyful doesn’t mean to be happy. This is a joy in the Lord. A Christian can be joyful because he has a firm confidence in God’s sovereign love and a confidence that God’s mighty power is at work on his behalf in spite of any circumstances. He believes and trusts verses like **Romans 8:28** which says, “**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**” It was because of his trust in God and God’s plan that David wrote in **Psalm 28:7**, “**The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.**”

There is so much for which a Christian can be joyful in good times and difficult times: there is eternal life, there is the Holy Spirit and His gifts to believers, there is answered prayer, there are God’s provisions for one’s life, there are even trials and tribulations. Paul summarized this in Romans—**turn to Romans 5:1-5**. The joyful Christian is more concerned about glorifying God than about any earthly difficulties. He thinks more of his spiritual riches and eternal glory than he does of any present pain or material poverty. Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:6-7**, “**In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.**”

2. The 2nd command is: **“Pray continually.”** Prayer is more than asking God for things; prayer includes submission, confession, petition, intercession, praise, and thanksgiving. **“Praying continually”** doesn’t mean that we must always be mumbling prayers. Praying continually means that one keeps the line of communication open with God. Prayer must be so normal that it is the first thing a person does—not just when troubles come, but when a beautiful sunset is seen or when God meets a need or when a sin needs to be confessed or when one needs wisdom. **James 1:5** says, **“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”** Turn to **Philippians 4:6-7**. Pray constantly.

3. The 3rd command is: **“Give thanks in all circumstances.”** Notice that Paul wrote **“in all circumstances”** not *for all circumstances*. It would be foolish to thank God for difficult times, the hurts and pains that come our way, but we can thank Him in the midst of them. As our faith and trust in God and His plans grow, we will find it easier and easier to give Him thanks in all situations. **Ephesians 5:19-20** says, **“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Turn to **Colossians 3:15-17**. Thankfulness should be a part of every Christian’s life.

Paul’s concluding statement, **“for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus,”** attaches to all three commands. It is God’s will that all those who are in Christ Jesus—all Christians should express constant joy, constant prayer, and constant thanksgiving.

B. Three Responsibilities

1. **“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.”** Paul went on to give three other responsibilities of believers to God, the first being: **“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.”** In **John 16:7**, Jesus promised to send all believers the Holy Spirit as a Helper to assist them in ministry and Christian living.

2 Corinthians 3:18 adds that Christians “are being transformed into his, i.e. Christ’s, likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit helps believers grow in their Christian walk. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says that it is the Holy Spirit who gives gifts to Christians to be used in ministry. Believers can “put out the Spirit’s fire” in a variety of ways including refusing to do the will of God, refusing to allow the Holy Spirit to transform them, refusing to use their Spirit-given gifts. The Holy Spirit is grieved when believers through self-will, overconfidence, stubbornness, pride or indifference resist God—even ignore God and operate in their own strength and wisdom rather than trusting God’s strength and God’s wisdom and love. Grieving the Spirit is another way to “put out the Spirit’s fire.”

Isaiah 11:2 summarized how the Holy Spirit would assist Christ during His earthly ministry and this suggests the kinds of power all Christians have through the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him, i.e., Jesus Christ, -- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.” But believers--Christians can take advantage of these resources only when they are filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) and walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). None of this is available if the Spirit’s fire has been put out.

2. “Do not treat prophecies with contempt.” Prophecy is more than fore-telling, i.e., telling the future; prophecy is also forth-telling—applying God’s Word to daily life. 1 Corinthians 14:3 puts it this way, “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” Such prophecy is essential to the health of the church. As the Word of God, Scripture is the supreme source of truth; it is the source of all true happiness; it is the source of victory over sin and the forces of evil; it is the ultimate source for spiritual growth; it is the only perfectly reliable source of guidance on how to live one’s life; it is the source of hope. With all these credentials, the reading and studying and applying of God’s Word must not be ignored or treated with contempt. Instead every Christian’s cry should be that of David in Psalm 42:1-2, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my

soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”

3. Be Discerning Back in [1 Thessalonians 5:21-22](#) Paul wrote, “**Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.**” Paul was saying that every Christian has the responsibility of being discerning. Spiritual discernment is the ability to distinguish the truth from error and half truth and is essential to Christian life. Turn to [1 John 4:1-3](#). Paul gave three steps concerning being discerning.

a. Step 1: “Test everything.” *Test* means to distinguish between true and false, right or wrong, good or bad. *Everything* leaves no exceptions; it includes every issue and idea that might come before believers regardless of the source. The Bereans of [Acts 17:11](#) are an example of those who tested everything: “**Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**” Step 1: “Test everything.”

b. Step 2: “Hold on to the good.” Once they “**test everything,**” believers must then “**hold on to the good.**” “*Hold on*” means “*to embrace wholeheartedly.*” When believers find what is “*good,*” they must embrace it and make it their own—[Philippians 4:8](#) says, “**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.**” Step 2: “Hold on to the good.”

c. Step 3: “Avoid every kind of evil.” Conversely, believers are to “**avoid every kind of evil.**” The emphasis is on the complete avoidance of any evil teaching or behavior. Nowhere does Scripture permit believers to expose themselves to the influences of what is false or evil; instead they are to “**avoid**” such things—other verses say to “**flee**” sin ([1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14](#)). “*Evil*” includes lies and distortions of truth as well moral perversions. Don’t play with fire. It isn’t enough to apply a test; one must act on the results: hold on to the good; avoid every kind of evil.

III. Conclusion

It's easy to be a Christian when times or circumstances are good, then it is easy to rejoice and give thanks. But what about when (like in Thessalonica) circumstances don't seem so good. Do you truly believe that God's salvation is of more value than the cost of persecution that comes as a result of accepting and living the Gospel? Then demonstrate that conviction by rejoicing in the midst of such persecution. Are you really persuaded that God will indeed deliver his people and bring justice on their behalf? Then pray with persistence and patience, waiting and watching expectantly for God to act. Does your readiness to pray prove your claim that you love God? Are you genuinely convinced that **"in all things God works for the good of those who love him"**? Then demonstrate that conviction by giving thanks in all circumstances.

These are not human responses, the only way one can do such things **"in all circumstances"** is through the power of the Holy Spirit—as **Philippians 4:13** says, **"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."** Don't put out the Spirit's fire, instead ask Him to fill you—**Ephesians 5:18** says, **"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit—actually the Greek means to be continually filled."** Study God's Word so that you will know the true Gospel from the false—be discerning, hang on to all that is good and flee from all that is evil. Don't play with fire—all it can do to you is burn you. Allow the Holy Spirit to transform you into a child of God who, when you stand before God's throne, will hear, *"Well done, good and faithful servant. Welcome home."*

Paul's concluding benediction points to the only source of power for obeying all the exhortations found throughout Paul's letter including those in today's Scripture. In it he reminds us that God is the source of power and the source of sanctification—separation from sin to holiness. This is also the prayer of every pastor for his flock as well: *"Now may the God of peace make you holy in*

every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God, who calls you, is faithful; He will do this.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”