

BE JOYFUL, GIVE THANKS ALWAYS, AND PRAY CONTINUALLY

1Thessalonians 5:1-28

Key Verse: 5:16, 18

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Who are the happiest people in the world? They are probably the people who give thanks always. In fact we only have things to thank God for always. We have fresh air to breathe, and water to drink every day. These are for everyone. But there is God’s gift only for Christians. The best gift we have is the eternal life in Jesus Christ. We lose our thankfulness and complain due to one or a few things we lack while we have so many things to give thanks to God for. If you were traveling to possess a mansion where you will live permanently, you could enjoy a few inconveniences on the way. In the same way we are making a pilgrimage to heaven. Jesus promised that He prepared a mansion for Christians. The more we give thanks, the more we have God’s kingdom in our hearts. The more we give thanks, the more we are happy and healthy in our soul and flesh, and the more we please God. Jesus said that God knows even the number of our hairs. God cares for us until we complete our earthly life. We can rejoice when we believe God’s goodness. We can pray. In 5:16-18 Paul commands, “Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances.” This is God’s will for us in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5 continues to tell the hope of Jesus’ second coming. This generation is often likened to totally dark night. How can we live as the children of day and light in this dark generation?

I. faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet (5:1-8)

In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul says that when Jesus comes again, Christians will be clothed with a resurrection body and live forever with the LORD and with God in God’s kingdom. That day our salvation is complete. In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul says that on the contrary to the children of God, , the day of the Lord, the day of Jesus’ second coming, is the day of dreadful judgement for those who are not in Jesus. That day is the day to end human history. That day is the end of earthly life. Those who are not in Jesus, will be thrown into hell burning with fire and sulfur (Revelation 21:8).

How will the day of the LORD come? Verse 2 says, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” A thief doesn’t say the time and date to steal. Verse 3 says, “While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly.” Everyone knows there will be judgement. But they deny the final judgment because they don’t want to think about judgment in order to enjoy sin. But Verse 3 says that as a pregnant woman has labor pains, they will not escape. When the time comes, a pregnant woman has labor pain. In the same way, the pain of God’s judgment certainly comes.

Look at verse 7. “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.” Here “those who sleep” means those who pursue the desires of the flesh. They are

ignorant of the spirit. They are drunkards. They commit the sin of sexual immorality. They follow lustful desires. They don't want to believe God's judgment. But in fact they have fear and are anxious because of their sinful life. So they are wandering and drinking more and more. They are dragged by Satan.

We were also the children of night in the past. God bought us by Jesus' holy blood to eternal salvation from eternal judgment. God Himself became flesh and died on the cross to buy us from the power of night. So we have become the children of light and day. However, we have flesh. We are living in the generation that is like the dark night. People say that the time of this generation is worse than the time of Sodom and Gomorrah. The temptation of sin is very strong. Satan uses computers and the internet to spread sin. Satan shoots the arrows of sin and physical pleasure diligently at people. Satan tempts people using the lustful desire of their eyes. We are eaten by Satan if we turn our attention from Jesus to this world's trend even for a short time.

What should we do? Look at verse 6, "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober." It says, "Be awake." It says "Not be like others." Others are all people who do not believe in Jesus. They are all who follow worldly value and culture. Verse 6 says they are asleep. When we live like worldly people we are also asleep. We have to control our sleeping, eating, drinking, lustful thoughts, and idleness. We have to arm ourselves with the **Spirit** and defeat Satan's attack.

Look at verse 8. "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." It is important to protect our heart and mind. We can protect our heart and mind by wearing the breastplate of **faith** and **love**. We have to fill our heart with faith in God and Jesus' grace. We have to fill our heart with God's love. Our head is important. We have to wear the helmet of the **hope of salvation**. We learn from Philippians 4:8 about what we should think. It says, "Finally, brothers and sisters, 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." If our thought is not in that list, we have to turn away immediately from that thought. We have to fill our thought with the hope of salvation. We observe that hope is the hope of salvation, not the hope of wealth or fame. When faith, love, and hope are connected with one another for one purpose, salvation, there is synergy—love for saving others, faith for bringing life, and hope for salvation. In Mark 11:22-24, the subject of faith is God. We have faith in God. God is almighty. Therefore the scope of faith is unlimited. Faith is a prayer to God. God wants us to have mountain-moving faith. When we have mountain-moving faith, God Himself will move our mountains. What I have to do is just tell my mountain to go into the sea not doubt it. Then God will do it for me. However, this faith is for God's salvation. When I see myself and my wife, there is nothing I can do. But I look up to Almighty God. And I command the mountain. When we have the hope of salvation, we have faith and love to move a mountain to reveal God's glory. If the faith is to move just a big stone or hill, that is not faith. It can be done by our will power. Our faith should be moving a mountain. Our love should be like Jesus'. Why should we be armed with the faith that moves a mountain, the love that is Jesus', and the hope of salvation? It is because we are living in the end time and Satan's attack is more and more severe. A breastplate and helmet are needed for the soldiers in a battle. Our daily life is a battle against Satan. Without the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation, we cannot defend against Satan's arrows.

Bible scholars say we are living in the end time. Some scholars say that God's judgment has started already. This is the time of spiritual battle against Satan. We are on the battlefield against invisible Satan. This battle continues day by day. When we are awake, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet, we can win the victory over Satan's attack and temptation. We can save our children, family, and many others. We can reveal the glory of God.

II. Encourage one another and Build each other up (9-15)

Paul reminds us with God's love in verses 9 and 10. Let's look at verses 9 and 10. "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him." God appointed us not to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. What should we, Christians, therefore, do for each other?

First, Paul says, "Encourage one another and build each other up." Look at verse 11, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." We have to encourage and build up each other. Why should we do so? When we understand the times we live in, we understand why we must do so. What is this generation like? 2 Timothy 3:1-4 say, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." These verses describe exactly the people in this generation. So it is certain that we are living in the end time. We Christians are influenced by this generation. So our heart shrinks. We often become self-centered. We may follow the list in 2 Timothy 3:1-4. But instead, we Christians, should try hard to encourage one another and to build each other up. Encouraging is not to give human pity to a person in trouble but to share the living hope with that person. It is to encourage with the word of God. Building up is like building a house. It is considering others better than myself and speaking highly of their good points. Next Paul says, "Live in peace with each other (13b)". If we want to be in peace we have to lower ourselves and lose rather than win. We have to win against Satan. But it may better for us to lose against our brothers and sisters. Once I beat M. Peter Yoon in arm wrestling at staff conference. He was a good friend of mine. But there was distance during staff conference between us. I won arm wrestling but lost a friend during the conference. And also my right shoulder now has an injury. It is wise to win friends by yielding to them. I unwantedly discouraged others. If anyone here has been discouraged by me, please forgive me. I repent of the harsh words I spoke. My wife probably is the one who suffered most by my ungodly words. M. Gideon Bahn may be hurt by my harsh words. Please forgive me. I ask God for forgiveness for all of the tearing-down words I spoke knowingly or unknowingly.

Second, we have to highly regard those who work hard and care for us (12, 13a). Look at 12 and 13a, "Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work." Note here "those" "the highest regard" and "in love". Here by

“those” it does not mean one person but the group of servants that work together. Paul doesn’t use any titles for church leaders, but instead talks about Christians in the church who care for others and show love. One person is not dominating, but many are working together respecting each other. They are there to work hard among Christians and to care for other Christians and the church in love and in Jesus’ humility. The leaders are there in church not to exercise authority but to care for the church and other Christians. We have to respect them in the highest regard in love because of their labor in love. Then church is built up and the holy vessel is formed.

Third, Encourage, Help, and Be patient (14-15). Look at verse 14. “And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” Those who are idle and disruptive are the ones who are unruly and not faithful to their work. They behave purposely. We warn those people. Warning means to help them to repent. We have to encourage the disheartened. We have to help the weak. We have to be patient with everyone. Here everyone includes unbelievers outside of the church. Then we can preach Jesus to them. Encouraging, helping and being patient is the way to save others to Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 15. “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.” We don’t have to pay back wrong for wrong but always strive to do what is good for everyone else. We have to trust God about those who do wrong. What we do is to do good always for each other and for everyone else with the love of God. The standard for Christians is very high. I didn’t practice this way. I want to struggle to follow this instruction from now on.

III. Rejoice always, Pray continually, and Give thanks in all circumstances (16-18)

Look at verses 16 through 18. “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.” This is our Lord Jesus’ holy command. This is also the wonderful blessing for the Christians in this world who have living hope. By obeying this command we can please God and have true happiness. Let’s think about these three commands one by one.

First, rejoice always. How can we rejoice always? We can rejoice always in Christ Jesus. Think about Christ Jesus. God freed us from sin, death, and judgment by shedding Jesus’ holy blood on the cross. Even though I fall down in sin 77 times a day Jesus cleans me from sin when I repent. When we think about this wonderful grace of Jesus we can only rejoice always. We can rejoice even in hardships, misfortunes, and sufferings, since Jesus Christ is the source of our joy. I trust Christ even though I have to die for Him. Christ will prepare a mansion in heaven for Christians. Therefore it is a great sin for Christians to live without the grace of Jesus. In these end times, in the course of fighting against Satan, struggling to live by faith, or sometimes falling down in sin, our heart can be hardened and we can lose joy. Therefore we have to repent daily and renew the grace of Jesus that has saved us. We can rejoice in the Lord when we trust the Lord’s goodness.

Second, pray continually. This is to command us to live in prayer. We pray regularly at set times. We can also pray at any time. We can talk with the LORD always through prayer. We can pray while walking on the street. We can pray in the car. Whatever we do, studying, working in a company, or teaching the Bible, we do not depend on our experience or ability but depend on

God by talking with Him through prayer. Prayer is our spiritual breathing. We die spiritually when we stop our spiritual breathing. As we breathe always to sustain our physical life, we sustain our soul through praying to God in the name of Jesus. We can live a happy life through prayer. Prayer is also to seek God's will. 1John 5:14-15 say, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him." What a wonderful and encouraging promise this is! In these verses it says God's will is to love one another. Then God hears us whatever we ask. When God hears, we have what we ask. There is no limit in prayer. Mark 11:22-25, another of my favorite verses, says, "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." I want to learn the secret of 1 John 5:14-15 and Mark 11:22-25 in this time of uncertainty for my family. One clear thing is that God encourages us to have mountain-moving faith. God wants to move a mountain through our faith. God gives us a big hindrance in order to reveal His glory.

Third, give thanks in all circumstances. This command is to give thanks in any circumstances. In any situation we can give thanks to God when we believe God's sovereignty, His walking with us, and His goodness. Why do we feel unhappy? It is because we lose our thankfulness toward God. When we have empty desires or compare ourselves with others, or lose our absolute sense of self before God we complain and lose our thankful heart. When we are not guided by the Holy Spirit or become proud, we lose our thankful heart.

We Christians have to practice giving thanks as athletes practice to train their bodies. In the early morning we can start our day with thanksgiving and we can write or speak thanksgiving at the end of the day. Let's express thanks positively. Instead of demanding something we don't have, let's simply say "thank you." When we are doing well, let's say "thank you". When we are not well, let's say "thank you" also, believing that God hears our cry to Him.

The Lord's command and Lord's will, "Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances" come together. Rejoicing, prayer, and giving thanks are one and cannot be separated.

I will share my battle and experience from the last week. I lost my job at Argonne National Lab on May 15, 2016. When I came to Argonne National Lab, my target was not my recent position. I had another interview for a principle engineer position in the Nuclear Engineering division at Argonne. They were waiting for funds from the DOE. But all three proposals failed last November. When I completed the urgent work from current division, there was no proper work for me at that division. I voluntarily resigned the position. I thought that I could get a job quickly. But still I don't have a job. One position I have applied for is at Madison WI. The HR manager said that more than 100 applied for that position. But I was proud. I had confidence in my ability. Last Saturday the HR manager emailed me, "You are not selected for the first screen." I learned that it is not by my ability to get the job but God's work. When I realized and repented of depending on myself I challenged again. I asked the HR manager to reevaluate me. Then I was

on board again. I am learning that God is Almighty. It is God's work that I get that job or move to Madison WI through a job. It is God's will whether we stay in Chicago or move to another city for campus mission. There is still competition next week and then third screen. Only two will be selected among more than 100 applicants. I seek God's will rather than fearing 100 applicants. If God's will is to build up one-to-one Bible study and raising one leader in Madison WI, God will give me that job even if 1000 applied for the position. If God's will is to build up my son and daughter-in-law and the ministry in Chicago area, God will give me a job in the Chicago area. The Lord's command is very practical at this time to me and my family. Spiritual battle continues and I earnestly pray that I and my wife may win the victory in this spiritual battle and encourage others through this victory.

IV. DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT (19-28)

Look at verses 19 through 22, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil." Quenching the Spirit is to put out the fire of the Holy Spirit. Salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit. Ignoring gospel work, or not participating in gospel work, or hindering gospel work is to put out the fire of the Holy Spirit. When we ignore the work of the Holy Spirit, we quench the Holy Spirit. When we hide sin, we quench the fire of the Holy Spirit. When we live for the flesh we quench the Holy Spirit.

Prophecy is to interpret the word of God and to apply the word of God to our life. Or prophecy, by the gift of God, is to tell the future things God will do. We have to respect God's word as it is. Testing prophecies means to have discernment in our application and interpretation on God's word. We hold on to what is good. However, we have to reject false prophecies.

Paul finishes his letter by prayer. Look at verses 23 through 28. "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." Paul's hope toward the Christians in Thessalonica is well expressed in this prayer. Paul prays that God may sanctify them. Paul prays that God may keep them to be blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul believes that God will complete His work among the Christians in Thessalonica.

Paul asks them to pray for him and his coworkers. "Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters." Paul blesses them that the grace of Lord Jesus Christ may be with them.

Conclusion:

The day of the Lord is the day of salvation for the Christians. However it is the day of God's judgment for unbelievers. At this end time people pursue their lustful desires and material wealth. Satan continually attacks and tempts us to fall down. We have to put on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. We have to win the victory against Satan's temptation and attack. We have to encourage one another and build each other up. We have to

rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances. In this way we can complete God's will for us.