

# 1 Thessalonians

## I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 5:14-22** . . . We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. [15] See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. [16] Rejoice always; [17] pray without ceasing; [18] in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. [19] Do not quench the Spirit; [20] do not despise prophetic utterances. [21] But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; [22] abstain from every form of evil.

B. Pray

## II. Practical Christian living for everyday life and the return of Christ.

A. **[16] Rejoice always;**

1. The first thing I want to emphasize is that this exhortation is for Christians, not unbelievers or so-called Christians. And the reason for this is that only Christians have what it takes to make sense of it and live accordingly.
2. Next, I want to remind you of something I said last Sunday. It is possible to see this simple two word exhortation as a bit extreme or unrealistic. It is also possible to see it as promoting a positive mental attitude so that no matter how bad life gets, you maintain a more positive attitude.
3. However, this exhortation is neither extreme nor unrealistic. Nor is it about seeing the cup half full as opposed to seeing it half empty.
  - a. In other words, this verse is not religious hype intended to keep your spirits up when facing hard times. It is not about focusing on what you have instead of what you don't have in order to psych yourself into a good attitude or motivate you to make the best of a bad situation.
  - b. This exhortation is about seeing life – which includes your current circumstances – in the most realistic, honest way possible, which then provides the reasons for rejoicing always.
4. But what does it mean to see life in the most realistic, honest way possible? It means taking in the full picture of any given moment or

any situation and seeing each part – whether it is a positive or a negative part – according to its true value. The book of Psalms provides many realistic and practical examples of this process.

- a. The reality is, in the midst of your deepest pain, your greatest disappointments, your unwanted limitations, threats from the outside and fears within, you still have God, His immeasurable love, His undeserved mercy and grace, His gift of eternal life, a reconciled relationship with God, the Bible, prayer, the love and support of other believers, God’s empowerment and help to grow in spiritual knowledge and Christian maturity, the ability to be conformed to the likeness of Christ so as to become a new creation in Christ Jesus, and the privilege of fellowship with God.
  - b. You still have the gift of creation and the many ways it blesses you – such as oxygen, the dependability of the four seasons, which includes the annual sowing and reaping cycles, the seemingly unending supply of animals and sea life for food, and the beauty of flowers, trees, sunsets, and different landscapes.
  - c. You still have a world which generally believes in the value of families, pro-creation, meaningful relationships, education, employment, government, and orderly societies – as opposed to lawlessness.
  - d. And for those of us gathered today, we still have each other, a place to live, clothes to wear, food to eat, and transportation, along with warmth in the winter and cool in the summer . . .
5. And I could go on and on – but instead I am going to read the words of a familiar hymn, and as I do mentally assign value to each of the blessings listed. The hymn is “For The Beauty Of The Earth.”
- a. For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies, for the love which from our birth over and around us lies. Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.
  - b. For the wonder of each hour of the day and of the night, hill and vale and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light, Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.
  - c. For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child, friends on earth, and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild, Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.
  - d. For the Church that evermore lifts holy hands above, offering up on every shore her pure sacrifice of love: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

- e. For yourself, best gift divine, to the world so freely given, for that great, great love of Thine, peace on earth and joy in heaven. Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.
6. The point of all this is, when we look at the whole picture of any given moment or any situation and see each part – whether it is a positive or a negative part ... when we see each part according to its true value, we, as Christians, have a rational and actual reason to rejoice always.
    - a. In other words, no matter how sick you are, or how broken hearted you are, or how frustrated you are with a person or situation, or how mistreated you have been, or how much pain you live with, your life is made up of more than the worst that is happening to you.
    - b. And so once again, when we look at life, including our current circumstances, in a realistic and honest way, and when we assign value to each part according to each parts true value, it becomes clear that we, as Christians, can rejoice always.
- B. With those thoughts in mind, let's consider the two words in this verse.
1. The first word is **REJOICE**:
    - a. We rejoice when we feel joy, or realize that what we have left is more than what we lost.
    - b. We rejoice when we experience gladness to a degree greater than any disappointment, sadness, pain, or loss (**James 1:2-4**).
    - c. We feel joy and therefore rejoice when we have satisfying contentment (**Philippians 4:11-13**).
    - d. We rejoice when we are delighted. And as Christians our greatest delight ought to be God, himself (**Psalms 37:4**).
    - e. Exultation is a form of rejoicing, and we exult when we are confident we are safe in God's hands regardless of our current circumstances (**Psalms 28:7**).
    - f. We rejoice when we have a treasure whose value far surpasses the value of anything else we could have, wish to have, or do have. When God is our first and foremost treasure, our joy will exceed any loss we encounter or sorrow we experience (**Matthew 13:44-46**).
  2. The second word is **ALWAYS**: The word "always" has a narrow definition, for always means always. Its synonyms are perpetually and continually – in contrast to sometimes or occasionally.

- C. When we join these two words (*rejoice always*) with realistically and honestly taking into account the full picture of any given situation and assigning the true value to all the parts that make up that situation, it becomes realistic to say that such rejoicing is – or at least ought to be – a normal part of the normal Christian life.
1. Paul writes something similar in **Philippians 4:4**, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” Notice that this time he says, “Rejoice in the Lord,” which infers there is more to the picture than the current circumstances – be they good or bad.
  2. However, if rejoicing always is a normal part of the Christian life, why is it so uncommon among Christians?
  3. My answer is this: **We become so consumed** by the trials or troubles of the moment, or by the repeated failure of someone near and dear, or by a seemingly unending sickness or suffering, or by the sorrow or grief of loss **that we lose sight** of the full picture.
    - a. And when we lose sight of the full picture we treat relief from our suffering or an end to our grief as having the greatest value.
    - b. Therefore, until or unless relief comes or we get what we want, we see no reason to honestly and sincerely rejoice. We might put on a happy face, but our heart knows no joy.
    - c. The reality is, once we assign more value to relief than to anything else that makes up a given situation, relief becomes the only acceptable reason to rejoice.
  4. In my opinion, it is this narrow perspective that is the reason so many Christians are frequently and repeatedly discouraged, distraught, discontent, angry, and depressed. The truth is, we cannot know continuous contentment, inward peace, and joy until we properly value all the parts that make up any and every situation in our life.
- D. The following scriptures present tangible things that are more valuable than relief from our current trial or tribulation or sickness or grief.
1. **Matthew 13:44-46**, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. [45] Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, [46] and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”
    - a. One of the truths contained in these two parables is that God’s kingdom and all it includes is of such value that even if we had

to sell everything to obtain it, we would have significantly more than we had before we obtained it.

2. **Matthew 5:11-12**, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of [your faith in Christ and life lived for Christ]. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
  - a. Though persecution can be financially or socially costly, though it can do serious harm to family members, and though it can include beatings, imprisonment, or a painful death, the eternal rewards from God are of such great value that they make the cost of persecution seem insignificant by comparison.
3. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**, “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations (*that Paul had received from God*), for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself (*giving in to pride*), there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! [8] Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. [9] [But] He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for (*God’s indwelling*) power is perfected (*produces its intended results*) in (*human*) weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my (*human*) weaknesses, so that the power of Christ (*for godly living and effective ministry*) may dwell in me. [10] Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak (*from the human perspective*), then I am strong (*and I know I am strong when I assign the true value to all the parts of the situation*).
4. **Romans 5:3-5**, “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; [4] and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; [5] and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”
  - a. The overriding value in difficult situations is the spiritual growth you gain by going through the situation with godly thinking, attitudes, and behavior.
5. **Colossians 1:24**, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.”

- a. As many a pastor or teacher or elder or leader has found, church ministry can be difficult, challenging, and tiring, and the people served may be unresponsive to truth until they have heard it numerous times in varied ways. And yet, in spite of the costs, the value of serving, the value of believers growing toward Christian maturity, and the value of a spiritually healthy church outweighs the cost so much that the cost is joyfully paid.
6. **Philippians 2:14-18**, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing; [15] so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.”
  - a. We all experience difficult people and challenging tasks, yet how we deal with difficult people and challenging tasks creates our Christian testimony, and our Christian testimony is of greater value than whatever it is we have to deal with.
7. **Acts 5:40-42**, “They took [Gamaliel’s] advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. [41] So [the apostles] went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for [Jesus] name. [42] And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”
  - a. Being flogged and threatened could be reason enough to make avoiding its recurrence more important than living for God and being His witness to unbelievers. However, after assigning value to the various parts of the situation, the disciples decided that there was greater value in being of such godly character and having such a Christian testimony to be treated as a threat to the religious establishment of the day.

### III. Conclusion

- A. There is more that can be said about the exhortation to rejoice always, but it seems wise to stop here.
  1. Let me summarize by reminding you that rejoicing always is a normal part of the Christian life. However, it requires realistically and honestly taking into account the full picture of any given situation and assigning the true value to all the parts that make up that situation.

2. And when you do this, it becomes realistic to rejoice always regardless of the situation or circumstances.
- B. But please keep in mind that always rejoicing does not mean you don't feel the pain of such things as trials, tribulation, sickness, broken relationships, or persecution. But it does mean that relief from the pain never becomes your top priority or greatest value.
  - C. What do you value most in times of trial or tribulation?
  - D. I will end with the words from a familiar song, and as you listen, assign value to the truths conveyed and consider how those values should or could affect your life when experiencing hard times.
    1. You are my strength when I am weak. You are the treasure that I seek. You are my all in all. Seeking You as a precious jewel, Lord, to give up I'd be a fool. You are my all in all. When I fall down, You pick me up, When I am dry, You fill my cup. You are my all in all.