

Be Glad AND Give Thanks

At this time of year, we think a great deal about giving thanks. We gather with friends and family, eat a big meal, offer up prayers, count our blessings, then we move on with our lives. This is awesome. What a great day. Let's not allow this day to pass without carrying with us the great lessons of giving thanks.

In **I Thessalonians 5:16-18**, Paul said, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

We've heard "pray without ceasing" all our lives. We've wrangled with exactly what it means. We've preached on it. We've taught classes on it. We've written books about it. And yet, with so much focus on **I Thessalonians 5:17**, we've often missed the two surrounding verses. "Rejoice always" and "give thanks in all circumstances" are getting lost in the shuffle.

When we simply focus on "pray without ceasing" we miss an important part of what we need and what God deserves. While the word "pray" can encompass many kinds of praying, including adoration, thanksgiving, praise, and rejoicing, we most often think of requests. In fact, in this context, that is likely what it means. Rely on God without ceasing, casting your cares upon Him because He cares for you (cf. **I Peter 5:7**). Do this without ceasing. That is, do it repeatedly, continually, habitually, and don't let anything stop your habit.

But when all we focus on is the requests, we can easily get discouraged. God doesn't always do exactly what we ask. We can begin to think God is against us. We can focus on the blessings God hasn't given us yet or may never give us. It is the bookend instructions Paul gives that help us maintain the proper perspective on God.

"Rejoice always." That is, be glad always. Look around and see the blessings of God no matter what is happening in your life. Work on developing an attitude of gratitude. Even when God says, "No," to our requests, we can learn to be glad as Paul was in **II Corinthians 12:7-10**. He was able to see God's grace even in denial and therefore rejoice and be glad.

Paul is a great example of this gladness and rejoicing. Despite being imprisoned for the gospel, when he wrote the letter to the Philippians, he talked about this rejoicing seven times. He rejoiced over the spread of the gospel even when the teachers were trying to harm him (**Philippians 1:18**). He rejoiced at the faith of the Philippians, and called them to rejoice with him, even though he might be facing his own death for the faith (**Philippians 2:17-18**). He was able to rejoice over the support the brethren were giving him (**Philippians 4:10**). Despite the hardship they were all suffering, he rejoiced and encouraged the Christians to rejoice always (**Philippians 3:1; 4:4**). In **Colossians 1:24**, Paul even rejoiced that he was able to suffer on behalf of the Christians.

If Paul could maintain his gladness and rejoicing while imprisoned for the sake of Christ, how much more should we maintain our joy and rejoicing at God's blessings even when we go through hardship. No doubt, there are reasons for sadness (cf. **Romans 12:15**). I don't want to take a shallow view that suggests as Christians we should never feel anything but joy. That is for another article. What we need to see now is that no matter what other feelings we face, we do need to work at turning those over to God and finding the areas where we can maintain gladness and rejoicing.

However, this is not just about gladness. This is not simply about an attitude of gratitude. Paul ended his three statements on prayer with "give thanks in all circumstances." Not only are we to be glad and rejoice, we must verbalize our thanksgiving. We must do this in all circumstances, not just one day per year. A day of thanksgiving needs to be a reminder to give thanks all year, not the giving of thanks for all year. It is to be a boost to give thanks in days to come, not the time for which we save up our thanks.

Colossians 3:17 says we should do everything in Jesus' name, giving thanks to God through Him. We ought to give thanks that we are able to get up in the morning, get dressed, eat, walk, breathe, work, etc. We ought to thank God for allowing us to be part of His plan, doing His work in the name of His Son. He didn't have to allow that. He could have

judged and condemned us immediately with our very first sin. We ought to give thanks for that (cf. **Colossians 1:12**). As Paul so often did, we should give thanks for our brethren and their work in the Lord (**I Thessalonians 1:2; 2:13**).

While we pray without ceasing, offering up our requests, casting out our cares, laying out our concerns, let us not forget to rejoice always and give thanks in all circumstances. Let this past week be a reminder that God deserves our thanksgiving every week. This is God's will for us in Christ Jesus.

--Edwin L. Crozier