

1 Thessalonians Chapter 5 v 12 - 28

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Date: 14 January 2018

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- [0 : 00] Let me read to you my second passage of scripture. I mention those things for two reasons, about Wakefield for two reasons. If you look for 1 Thessalonians 5, well I'm continuing to wrap it on to you.
- Mention it for two reasons. Firstly, I promise the folk that if I'm ever not there and I'm somewhere else, if I get half an opportunity, I will tell people about Grace Church Wakefield.
- So I'm fulfilling the promise that I've made, but the real purpose is simply to encourage you to pray for us, if you would please. Thank you.
- So 1 Thessalonians 5, it's page 1188, and I'm reading from verse 12, it's just the section headed in the Church Bible's final instructions.
- 1 Thessalonians 5 from verse 12. Paul writes, 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.
- [1 : 00] Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other, and we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive.
- Encourage the disheartened. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.
- Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the spirit.
- Do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test them. Test them all. Hold on to what is good. Reject every kind of evil. 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 as faithful, and he will do it.
- [2 : 03] 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. Now the passage of scripture that I would like to share with you this morning, get you to think about, is found in the middle of that last reading.
- These words from verses 16, 17 and 18, where Paul says, Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- Now before I come to those words, in order that you might understand them aright, I want to ask and answer a key question. The question is this, what is Christianity?
- And what is the answer to that question in a nutshell? Well at the heart, Christianity is essentially a message, a message from God. More specifically, it is gospel.
- [3 : 21] It is a message of good news. Good news from the living God. That's what gospel means. It means news, and it means good news.

Now it's abundantly clear from this letter, that the Christian faith, is this good news from God. Paul is always talking about it here.

Chapter 1 and verse 4. Sorry, that's not, that's a good start, isn't it? verse 5.

Our gospel came to you, not simply with words, but also with power. He says, he brought a gospel, he brought good news to them. Verse 6. You welcome the message, in the midst of severe suffering, with joy given by the Holy Spirit.

So it's a message from God, and it's a good news message. Chapter 2 and verse 2. With the help of our God, we dare to tell you his gospel, his good news.

[4 : 30] Again, verse 4 of chapter 2. We speak of those approved by God, to be entrusted with the gospel. That's what he's given us. That's what we're about. That's what this Christian faith is all about.

It's about a good news message, from the living God. Verse 8 of chapter 2. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you, not only the gospel of God, it's God's good news, but our lives as well, he says.

Verse 9. Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship. We work night and day, in order not to be a burden to anyone, while we preach the gospel of God, to you.

Chapter 3 and verse 2, say, Timothy is described as, our brother and co-worker in God's service, in the spreading of the gospel of Christ.

So it's good news, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. And what is that good news, concerning Christ? Well you only grasp it really, if you begin to understand the bad news, against which it is set.

[5 : 36] So chapter 1 and verse 10, speaks of coming wrath, the judgment of God. People often look at what happens in life, and they say, well, people get away with all kinds of crimes, why doesn't God intervene?

Well it's because God has set a day of judgment. But there is a day of wrath coming. A day when God's anger against all wrongdoing will be revealed, displayed, and so punishment will be administered.

And that problem is a universal problem. We all face that wrath because of our sin.

Naturally, the way we are, unless God rescues us, that day will bring a terrible judgment upon us. People find that very difficult to understand.

Why is that? Surely God couldn't punish me. Well certainly my experience, my friend, is that what God has done to me, is he's brought a mirror, the mirror of his word.

[6 : 45] And I look in that mirror, and I see the real truth about myself. I remember the very first day, when that happened to me. It was a devastating experience, to begin to understand what God, the real truth about me, not the person I pretended that I was, but the real me.

It's a devastating revelation, realisation. Even the best person, once they see something of the purity of the living God, and the rightness of his laws, his demands, one then realises that there is a devastating problem, that we're just awaiting the judgement of God.

But against that background, is this wonderful news, that God has provided a saviour. These Thessalonians were waiting for God's son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead.

Jesus who rescues us from the wrath to come. Jesus is the saviour. He is the one who rescues us. How can he rescue us?

Well, it's hinted at in chapter 5 and verse 9. God did not appoint us, says Paul, to these Christians, to suffer wrath, which is what we deserve, but to receive salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 13] And how? How can he rescue us? Well, here is the answer. He died for us, so that we may live together with him.

He died for us. He bore our sin in his body on the tree, as Peter says. He paid the punishment that we deserve. That is the wonderful good news.

My friend, have you embraced that? Have you come to God for mercy, through the Lord Jesus Christ? That is the critical question in life.

Nobody will ever ask you a more important question, than the one I've just asked you. Have you sought and found mercy, with the Holy God? The God who must punish sin.

The God who is revolted by our rebellion. And the priorities that we choose. Have you made peace with him, in the only way that is possible, by crying out for mercy, and depending absolutely, on the only saviour there is, the one who died in the place of the guilt.

[9 : 22] Now I'm saying all that, lest you come to our passage for this morning, and imagine this is the basic Christian message. People do. They think this is what Christianity is all about.

Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. Do those things, and if you do them well enough, then you will have earned a place in heaven.

That is not the message. It can't be the message. It would leave out the whole business of Jesus coming into this world, and he's dying.

The sinless one being punished. It would leave that absurdity without any explanation. How can God punish one who is sinless, and curse him, and damn him upon the cross?

And the only answer is the answer that God himself gives. That he is willingly dying in the place of the guilt, so that we may go free.

[10 : 27] And anyway, if you make these things here the rules of your life, who is ever going to rejoice always?

Which of us can say that we pray continually, or that we give thanks in all circumstances? That is a righteousness which is beyond us.

We're being exhorted to pursue it, to aim at it, to seek to live in that way. But if it required us to live perfectly like that, to be acceptable to God, there would be no hope for us, whatever.

It's too hard for us. But Paul is not saying that. This is not his gospel. His gospel is grace.

It is forgiveness with God on the basis of what another has done, so we can utterly depend upon it. Notice the words here. It's in Christ Jesus that we're acceptable to God.

[11 : 30] What he is doing here is answering a question that is in the heart of every real Christian when they're thinking aright. How can I begin to respond to the amazing love and grace of God in providing me a saviour at such tremendous cost?

And that's the question I want to answer this morning. And it is answered in this text helpfully, simply, and briefly, and beautifully. And that's why I've got the text for you this morning.

So the words are these. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

So how do I respond to God's grace and live in the light of it? Well, by living a very different life. By living a life of joy and trust and gratitude.

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances. That's a very different life from the world around us, isn't it? The world around us is not marked by rejoicing and thankfulness, let alone by continual dependence upon the living God expressed in unceasing prayer.

- [12 : 58] But it's also a very different world from the world, from the different life, from the life we used to live before.
- radically different. Which of us has lived a life before ever we came to embrace the gospel of Christ, if you have embraced it?
- Was your life really marked by rejoicing? Whatever happened to you? And by thankfulness? Whatever difficulties you faced?
- Let alone by always being in a spirit of dependence upon the Lord. It's a very different life. It means deep change within. It means a stress on attitudes, on instincts, on reactions. You see, that's what's so searching about these words.
- [13 : 59] If you're going to rejoice always, always, then that means our instinctive reaction to problems that arise.
- They're not going to be feeling burdened, weighed down, feeling depressed, discouraged. There's got to be a change, fundamentally, a deep change, so that our instinct is always to remember so much that we have to rejoice in.
- It's about attitudes. Funnily enough, the person who first taught me the significance of these verses of Scripture was your former pastor, Peter Brumby.
- I remember him opening up this passage of Scripture on a church holiday we were running from Dewsbury and he was the guest speaker. And I don't remember a great deal of people that said that night, but this stayed with me, that I was to aim in terms of my response to God's extraordinary grace to me, to aim at being the kind of person whose instinctive reactions, not who's measured, you know, after a while, thinking about a thing, came to be rejoicing, prayer and thanksgiving, but whose instinctive reactions in every situation were to rejoice, to pray and to give thanks, to see reasons, to give thanks to God.
- And you see, it's consistency that he is holding out before us here. Consistency, always rejoicing, continually praying and in all circumstances give thanks.
- [15 : 48] And actually, those are the order of the words in the original. The stress is on the adverbs, the always, the in all circumstances, the continually.
- That's where the stress of the text lies. And all three at once, you see. If we're going to rejoice always and to pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances, that means that we're going to have this complex reaction to everything, that our basic spirit all the time is characterised by all three things at once, rejoicing, praying, giving thanks.
- These are, this is a tremendously different way of life which is being commended to us here. A life of devotion.
- Because these things, they're about devotion to the living God, aren't they? We rejoice in his goodness to us, always rejoicing in his goodness.
- Prayer is an act of dependence, of devotion to God. Thanksgiving is thanksgiving to him to whom all, from whom all our blessings come.
- [17 : 08] so, we respond to God's amazing grace, to free acceptance on the basis, not of our works, but on the basis of the works that another, the Lord Jesus Christ has done.
- How can I ever respond to that? Well, Paul has given me an answer to that. It's a glorious opportunity. This is a way of being, showing gratitude and doing what God wants.
- in my life, in your life. To be rejoicing, prayerful and thankful people continually.
- It's living a very different life, a pretty difficult life, a life to which I think we're all tempted to say I can't.
- Let me assure you, if you haven't made peace with God this morning, you're definitely right, you can't. There's no way you can live this life. But it's striking here.

[18 : 12] Christians have moved from the realm of saying I can't into the realm of saying by God's grace, this is what I can increasingly be.

So, secondly, let me give you some powerful reasons for living in this way. I'll mention three. The first is the obvious one that's in verse 18.

This is, God wants you to live like this. The text says, rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

For whom? all the people in the church in Thessalonica, whatever their temperament, whatever the present difficulties of their life.

God, who has been so wonderfully kind to you, wants you to be like this. So you must aim at this. I hope I'm not going to give any youngsters the wrong idea, but imagine this, if you can imagine this, you've reached 18 years of age, and for your 18th birthday, your parents have bought you a car, a decent car, and driving lessons.

[19 : 39] Well, I told you you needed a good imagination. What would your response be to that? Amazement? Delight?

It's fabulous, isn't it? To be able to get on the way of learning to be able to drive. And I trust that that experience, experience the extraordinary, unexpected generosity of your parents, self-denying, very costly what they've done, would be to make you more sensitive to how you behaved at home, more grateful for other things, more aware of their kindness to you, more thoughtful, more helpful when you can be.

God, you know, it's surely like that with the living God. If we begin to grasp for a moment how astonishing it is that the God who is offended by our sin could pay such an extraordinary price personally, could ever imagine putting his son in our place and bearing our sin, bearing that curse of the cross, taking our nature to start with, the creator becoming a creature, all that's involved in reconciling us to God is not the response to say, Lord, whatever pleases you, show it my heart, I want to do what you, I want to be what you want me to be, because this is what this is about, it's not just about doing, it's about being something, being full of joy, being utterly dependent on the Lord, being mindful of him all the time, being thankful, seeing that even in the hard things, that he is kind.

So, powerful reasons for living this way, number one is God wants you to live like this, number two it's the only sensible way to be. Let me assure you my friends, it's easy to be miserable, prayerless and grumpy as a Christian.

Do you know, every time I get out of bed in the morning and look in the mirror, I see a guy who is far too miserable, prayerless and far too inclined to be grumpy, sadly.

[22 : 16] But it makes no sense, does it? How is it possible to be miserable as an object of God's passionate love and care and promises? How is it possible to be prayerless when life is demanding and it is demanding if we're going to try and live like this, for example?

How are we going to do that unless we're utterly always looking to the Lord for help, to be joyful, prayerful and thankful people?

How can we be prayerless when God has promised to help us? Jesus Christ said, ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened to you.

And because he knows that his disciples will never believe that that promise is made to them, he makes sure, he underlines it. And he says to those who think those words, you know, Christians who think those words are for other better Christians than they are, he says, for everyone who asks, receive.

Did you hear that? Everyone who asks, receives. He who seeks, finds. And he who knocks, the door will be opened to the one who knocks.

[23 : 31] And who can be ungrateful when every spiritual blessing is ours? My friends, this is the only way to be if you're a Christian. There is no other way to be than joyful, thankful and prayerful.

It is a better life. Isn't it so much better to be a happy Christian, thankful Christian, to live in dependence on the Lord?

And isn't it much more attractive to others? Sometimes we find it difficult to have friends. But it's because of the way we are.

It's because we're always complaining. It's because we're not thankful. It's because we're kind of trying to work it all out ourselves and not dependent on the Lord.

And in terms of influencing this world, you find Christians who are like this and people are going to sit up and take notice. they cannot but because there are so few people like this.

[24 : 43] It's not easy. Perhaps sometimes you just feel resentfully, life isn't working out as I want.

God isn't answering my prayers. So why should I, what have I got to rejoice in? or to pray about or to be thankful for. My friend, your life may be very difficult, my Christian friend, but you're still greatly loved and heaven bound.

There's always reason to rejoice. God said, ask and you shall receive. So you'd better go on praying. And the Lord has promised that all things, he will work all things, including the hard things, including the things in which you've messed up.

He will work them for your good. So there's always reason for thankfulness. Powerful reasons for living in this way. God wants you to be like this.

It's the only sensible way to be. And gloriously you can be happy and dependent and thankful by God's grace. There's a tragic irony here. There's a world of people out there who think that they can naturally be joyful and thankful.

[25 : 58] And they're wrong. They can't. And there's a world of people in the church who think they can never be like that. And the irony is, by God's grace, you can be.

Notice the words that are at the end here when he says, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. You're in union with Christ.

You can be like this. Sin will not have dominion over you, Paul says. You're not just under law, you're not just dependent on the nagging of conscience, you're under the power of grace.

Christ in you, the hope of glory. And you see it in Paul. Acts 16, as Paul and Silas, they're in prison.

They've been beaten, they've been beaten, not senseless. But what are they eventually doing? They're singing praise to God in the night. Well, if it's possible for them, the same grace is available to you and to me.

[27 : 04] And these people in Thessalonica, they were new converts. Paul was only there about a month. And yet, what kind of people are they?

Well, he says, you welcome the message in the midst of severe suffering with joy given by the Holy Spirit. They were rejoicing in the hardest of circumstances because the power of grace is real.

So, powerful reasons for living in this way. God wants you to live like this. It's the only sensible way to be. And you can be happy, dependent and thankful by God's grace. So, finally, how do I go about it?

Just a few things here. How do I go about it? You may think, well, I've been a Christian a lot of years and I'm not doing very well. I know what God wants. I know it's a beautiful life you're describing to me.

I know scripture says I can. So, tell me, give me some practical help. Help me to get moving. Help me to make progress with this. Well, let me give you three hints from the text and then we'll conclude.

[28 : 11] The first thing is, my friend, if you want to be like this, make it your aim every day. all the time. That's what the exhortation is, always, in all circumstances, continually.

So, make it your aim every day. Make a conscious effort to be consistently joyful and dependent and thankful. Aim at it, work at it, all the time.

when my boys were growing up, Matthew got a dartboard. I'd never been, I'd played a bit of darts in my teenage years, but I am one of the world's least coordinated human beings, so sometimes playing darts when I was around was a dangerous pastime for others because you've got to get on the board, first of all, and they're sharp and they're serious arrows.

And, I didn't like the idea that a 13, 14 year old lad would be able to lick his dad every time, so I tried to practice a bit. And if you hadn't seen a dartboard, you know that the best score you can get on the dartboard is treble 20 and it's pretty near the top.

I used to find it, actually I used to get a lot of problem with shoulder, and this was only late 30s, early 40s, but so I found it easier to aim at the treble 19, very small area which is much further lower down the board, and I found that by practicing quite a lot, I gradually got at least ways that sometimes it went into the treble 19, quite a lot of the time it went into the 19, unfortunately sometimes it went into the 3, which is not worth very much of course, but nevertheless by practice that I could make progress, not a great deal of progress, but sufficient to make a bit more of a respectable job of it, and that principle applies here, my friends, think about it, if you read this every morning and you prayed that the Lord would make you contented, joyful, praising, praying, thankful person, then you would find you started to do better, and don't think you've succeeded until these things become your instinct, so whatever happens, your instinct is to be, full of joy, depending on the Lord, and thankful.

[31 : 08] Second hint of how to go about it is to keep God in view, as he really is and as he is for you, remember that he is committed to you, amazing, but through Christ, you're an object of his mercy and love.

How will that help keeping God in view? Well, it's only, when life is tough, sometimes the only reasons we have for thanking God, I say the only reason, they're superb reasons for being, for rejoicing and being thankful, are his promises, are the great future he holds out for us, for the fact that he's forgiven our sins.

These are things to rejoice about and to be thankful for. But if you also keep him in mind, that always gives hope of his help and stir you to pray.

Trust in God, you see, is the key to being joyful, prayerful and thankful people. And it's God's grace that provides motivation to keep going.

So study the scripture in order that you might keep God in view. That's hinted at later on in this passage. Do not treat prophecies with contempt.

[32 : 33] Sometimes we treat the word of God with contempt by just not really reading it, ignoring vast tracts of it. And notice he says, he asks, I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters because we all need, Christians need the word of God.

So make it your aim every day, keep God in view and then don't give up in despair. It's tempting sometimes, isn't it? You look back on a day and everything's gone wrong but the thing that has really gone wrong is you.

You know, you've been miserable and grumpy and not prayed at all, not sought to depend on the Lord, not sought to confess during the day at all what you've been like.

Don't give up in despair, it's easy to do. Notice those words, in Christ Jesus. One of the great things about becoming a Christian, and there are many, one of them is that I become united to the Lord Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.

So I die to sin, to its dominion, its bondage, and I rise to a new life, a life of obedience to God, a new power, his power within, his resources for asking.

[34 : 09] So remember my friends, you will succeed. Take heart what Paul says down here in verse 23, may God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you. He's in the business of doing it.

In the end, it's his work. Through and through he'll do it. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice these words, the one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

While our notion is that somehow we've got to do all these things as if we were living on our own, it's not so. By his grace, he is the one who is committed to making us like his son.

So when we pursue that path, we are going the way that God intends us to be, and the way he has determined that we shall be.

So don't give up in despair, you will succeed. So never stop trying. Never stop seeking to rejoice, praying.

[35 : 12] Never stop looking up. To stop trying is to grieve and quench the spirit of God. So when Paul says, as he does to us, rejoice always, pray continue, give thanks in all circumstances, he's saying aim at it all the time, keep trying, never give up.

It's like learning to drive. Most people who get into a car for the first time, apart from those who are super confident, they have a lesson or two and think, I'm never going to get this. How is it possible both to look at the road ahead, change gear and steer, and remember to move which feet you're moving, and if you're uncoordinated as I am.

That was a nightmare, I could not believe it. The only encouragement I had was the thought of some of the other people I knew who had learned to drive. And so in the Christian life sometimes the comfort is that you've seen God's grace at work changing other people who are, you know, not super Christians, but who are people who are empowered and helped by the Spirit of God.

God. So there we are. Have you got these words? If you don't remember anything else, remember the text. 1 Thessalonians 5, 16. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will.

People worry about, you know, am I in God's will? And they're always asking about, am I making the right decisions in life? The key thing about doing the will of God is obedience to his commandments.

[37 : 09] That's the really key issue. These, this is God's, this is what God wants you to be. Rejoicing, dependent, thankful people.

It's a great recipe for life for anyone. It's not the way of salvation. This isn't the way you get right with God. This is the way you express gratitude. This is the way you express your new allegiance to Christ as king over all.

And it's not possible unless you are right with God. And surely if you don't learn anything else this morning, you learn that you need a saviour.

Who can be, this is what God wants of us, who can be like this, who has been like this. So start there my friend. Whether it's for the very first time this morning or the nth time, come back to God.

Ask his mercy. Tell him that you've failed miserably. You are so often miserable. So often you're self reliant. So often you're ungrateful.

[38 : 26] Tell him that. Tell him that you cannot change yourself. Cry out for mercy. But be determined by God's grace to be more and more like this.

Set your heart on this beautiful life, my Christian friend, and know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with you.

this you see is the life described here that every Christian must, should, and can live.
May God help us to be such people.