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Sunday Morning
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1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

The Living, Breathing, Community of Believers pt.2

Related Topics: leadership; encouraging leaders; unruly; out of step; warning the unruly; fainthearted; small-souled; encouraging the fainthearted; strengthening the weak; living in peace; responding to evil; doing good; rejoicing always; prayer; praying continuously; giving thanks; quenching the Spirit; prophecies; despising prophecies; testing all things; holding fast to good things; the appearance of evil; abstaining from the appearance of evil; sanctified by God; trichotomy of man; body-soul-spirit; grace



In verses 12-28 Paul is closing this amazing letter by addressing not the leaders of the church in Thessalonica, but the community of believers at large. In these verses, the Holy Spirit gives to us a clear picture of a living, breathing community of believers.

The Lord willing we will finish our study of 1 Thessalonians this morning as we pick up in VERSE 16.

In Verses 16-18 we have what one commentator called the standing orders of the Christian Church. A series of short exhortations that show how the individuals in the community of believers should live.

1 Thes 16 16 Rejoice always

He has reminded these believers that Jesus has saved them from the wrath to come. That Jesus is going to come and catch them away so that they might forever be with the Him. That they will be reunited with their loved ones who have preceded them into the presence of the Lord. All of that is the glorious hope of every Christian!

And all of that goes out the window when the line at In N Out is long or slow! There's a part of each of us that is prone to THAT. If we believe HALF the things we say we believe we have NOTHING to complain about! THIS is so challenging to me because it is my LIFE'S WORK to study and teach these very truths. I, of all people, have the weakest excuses for not rejoicing.

DON'T MISS THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT:

16 Rejoice always follows 15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil.

You might have slanderous reports about you being spread around town. You might have someone accusing you of things you would never even dream of doing. You might be cut to the heart by the disloyalty or ingratitude of those who ought to have been your friends, but Paul says "Rejoice always."

QUOTE: Charles Spurgeon

"There is no limit to the exhortation. It is ever in season. Through fire and through water, through

life and through death, "Rejoice evermore."

NOTE:

That does not mean that you should be phony! David was filled with the Holy Spirit when he wrote, "Why are you cast down O my soul?" It would appear that you can be filled with the Spirit and depressed. It doesn't say that we DON'T go through hard times or DON'T shed tears. It does say that joy and rejoicing should be a part of our lives, because JOY is not rooted in happenings. HAPPINESS is rooted in happenings. Joy is rooted in Jesus!

1 Thes 5:17 17pray without ceasing,

QUOTE: Spurgeon – He preached from this text and opened his sermon by setting the context...

The position of our text is very suggestive. Observe what it follows. It comes immediately after the precept, "Rejoice evermore;" as if that command had somewhat staggered the reader, and made him ask "How can I always rejoice?" and, therefore, the apostle appended as answer, "Always pray." The more praying the more rejoicing. Prayer gives a channel to the pent-up sorrows of the soul, they flow away, and in their stead streams of sacred delight pour into the heart. At the same time the more rejoicing the more praying..... Holy joy and prayer act and react upon each other.

Pray without ceasing does not mean that you are to be closing your eyes and folding your hands while driving your car. Sorry officer, just praying without ceasing! It means that pray should be a recurrent and regular part of your life.

INTERESTING:

We have a funny take on prayer life and "devotions". Listen, there can be no devotions without DEVOTION! DEVOTION is NOT something that happens for 15 minutes in the morning. Imagine if I did that with my wife, "Come on honey it's 6:00am, let's get up and talk for 15 to 30 minutes." She rolls in at 6:30 and I say, "sorry it's 6:30, devotions are over, see ya tomorrow morning." And she says, "But I wanted to ask you something." And I respond, "No No, we have devotions in the morning, that's when we talk."

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING means that we pray at any time or any place.

- Lord, what do you want me to do here?
- Lord, what do I say? This person is asking me a question as if they really think I have the answer!

Our heavenly Father has His door OPEN ALL the time! It should be the most natural thing in the World for one of God's children to do, like breathing. Talking/Listening - Listening/Talking. It should be one of the most notable EVIDENCES of the New Birth.

You know, prayer is like breathing in the sense that you can do it while you do other things. When we view pray in that light it is never so much a question of what would Jesus do if He were here. It's more of the question of Jesus, what are You going to do since You are here? Such prayer assumes His presence, not His absence! When I am in this mode, the Holy Spirit continually prompts me to pray for people and situations.

Without ceasing – The idea is that of RECURRING prayer. It isn't necessarily wrong to be asking God for something for a day, a week, or a year if it is on your heart to keep it before Him.

EXAMPLE:

Daniel 10 – Daniel was praying for 21 days asking for insight before Gabriel appeared with the answer.

EXAMPLE:

Billy Graham's first evangelistic crusades in the former Soviet Union. (Experience at the Sports Center where the press was so great I was moving but my feet weren't touching the ground – so great was the HUNGER to hear the Gospel). One man was interviewed and he said, "We knew that he was coming, we prayed for him to come to our city for 18 years!"

I pray for 18 minutes and wonder why God hasn't answered!

Constantly recurring prayer is what the life of the individual within the community of believers should look like and then the community is a praying organism.

QUOTE: E. M. Bounds

The little estimate we put on prayer is evident from the little time we give to it. (Power Through Prayer)

1 Thes 5:18 18give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

It does not say "FOR everything" give thanks. It does say, "IN everything, every circumstance. When Valerie got word from the pathologist that she had breast cancer, we did not thank God for her cancer. We were able to thank Him for his nearness to us. We were able to thank God for the string of tender mercies He wrapped us in.

- Our two oldest children being in town on the very day we got the news. Deb had come into town because she had recently gotten a job with Donna Karen and just HAPPENED to have her VERY FIRST business trip and it was SACRAMENTO! Danny RARELY misses a Monday night, and it just so happened that he was out of town on THAT Monday and Sean was in town leading worship on that Monday night!
- I was able to thank God for how my son, having just heard the news in my office, was carried along by God and went out and led you guys in the worship of Jesus.
- I RARELY have guests ministry on a Monday night when I am in town, but I was able to thank God that our dear friends Michael and Pam Rozell were at Metro that night and I was able to go straight home to be with Valerie after opening the evening in prayer and they loved on Ashley taking her to our house after the service.

EXAMPLE: When dating Valerie I closed my own right index finger in the car door when we got out of the car at McDonalds. I did not say, "Thanks you SO MUCH LORD FOR me smashing my own finger." I did thank Him that Valerie didn't look at me and start to pray, "Lord, what was I thinking when I started to date this clown?"

.... 18For this is the will of God concerning you in Christ Jesus

First, isn't it great that God wants us to know His will? He is the God who speaks. The opening chapter of the first book of the Bible we find 10 times, "God said...."

Second, this is the clearly revealed will of God, for you and me as individual believers and for the community of believers as a whole. We all find ourselves wondering, "Is it the will of the Lord for me to _____?" But this is one area of our lives where we should never be scratching our heads asking, "I wonder what the will of God is for me?" This is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus!

DON'T MISS THIS, we are told to do these things because it is the will of God. The idea here isn't so much "this is God's will, so you must do it." The thought is rather "this is God's will, so you can do it." It isn't easy to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks, but we can do it because it is God's will for you and me as individual believers and for the community of believers as a whole.

1 Thes 5:19 19Do not quench the Spirit.

KEY QUESTION:

How do we quench the Spirit?

First, this is not an excuse for weirdoes. There are some spirits that need quenching. There are those people who act in extremely bizarre ways and when you try to address them they say, "Don't quench the Spirit brother" or "The Lord told me to do that!" Paul says, "Don't put the fire of the Holy Spirit out."

If you want to put out the fire of the Holy Spirit in a community of believers here is how you can do it!

- Don't take warnings.
- Don't love one another.
- Don't be at peace with one another.
- Don't warn the unruly
- Don't comfort the small-souled person
- Don't lay hold of the weak
- Repay evil for evil

THAT will quench the Spirit. Stop rejoicing — Stop praying — Stop giving thanks.

If there is anything we truly do need, it is the fire of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives!

What does that look like?

QUOTE: An early Church Father speaking of the power of the Holy Spirit in a service.

"The power of the Holy Spirit was present to melt the heart of the most hardened sinner with the love of Jesus Christ!"

1 Thes 5:20 Do not despise prophecies

Rev. 19:10 For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Prophecy is not merely predictive in nature. Prophecies comes from a compound Greek word.

Prefix pró = before or forth

Suffix+ phemí = tell

Has the literal meaning of speaking forth.

QUOTE: Vine

"Though much of the Old Testament prophecy was purely predictive, prophecy is not necessarily, nor even primarily, foretelling. It is the declaration of that which cannot be known by natural means,"

CRUCIAL OBSERVATION:

They were not to despise or hold in contempt someone coming to them and saying, "I think that the Lord is putting this on my heart for you." Think of the context. If you are going to warn or exhort or comfort someone, surely the ministry of the Spirit and the testimony of Jesus is going to be a part of it. So if someone comes up to you and says, "I think you should pray about this," you don't start by despising them or their word. You start with the next words of Paul:

1 Thes 5:20-21 Do not despise prophecies, 21but test everything; hold fast what is good.

To examine carefully implies a working knowledge of the Word of God.

2 Tim 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

The "prophecy" is first tested against the standard of God's Word and then we hold fast to what is good.

Sometimes prophecy comes as a "Thus saith the Lord." It is not to be judged on the basis of "I like the sound of that." "That sounds so exciting, so spiritual!" First, it is based upon the test of Scripture, then, there is the

test of discerning the genuineness of it.

1 Cor 14:29 ...let the others weigh what is said.

Then, there is the test of IF it is Divine in origin then it WILL come to pass.

In the OT, THAT was the proof a prophet. If it didn't come to pass you were a false prophet and you were stoned to death.

There are a lot of people who lightly are saying, "Thus saith the Lord," or "The Lord told me..."

Again, It might sound weird, it might even come from someone who looks weird, but that does not mean it is not the Lord. That is why we are not to DESPISE prophecy or hold it in contempt.

EXAMPLE: Funky guy in funky church in downtown Santa Ana said to me, "You are going to sell records and play music around the world." That night when I took Val home she asked, "What did you think?" I didn't bear witness to it because you can't play and you can't sing!

MOST times prophecy is TELLING FORTH of the mind of the Lord.

EXAMPLE: Ric Brennan

Clueless as to what had happened in our day, the Lord told me to come and give you this verse. I have no idea what it's about, but here I am and here's the word. Simon, Satan has desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith might not fail.

We are so glad that he obey the Lord.

Do not despise prophecies. It is understandable why some people do.

Valerie and I took a lot of our baby steps as Christians in the Catholic Charismatic movement. We "cut our teeth" so-to-speak in an environment where people exercised the gift of prophecy, the word of knowledge, the gift of tongues, etc. As a result we are probably more comfortable around such things than those who have never been exposed to such things, but that same background has also provided us with a fairly keen sense of what is contrived. Some of you might despise prophecy because your only exposure to prophecy is what you have see the abuses and contrivances of the gifts in certain nationally known "ministries." Perhaps you grew up in a church culture that was a microcosm of the those ministries. Perhaps you grew up in a church where everyone had a "word from the Lord" for you and as a result you have a low view of prophecy, but the Holy Spirit instructs us here to not despise such utterances.

The flip side of this, some people say, "Why are there no spiritual gifts in operation at Metro?" Well, I would differ with them. Week after week the gift of prophecy is in operation. The very mind of God for this community of believers. The very mind of God for individual men and women. This takes place during worship. Notably, 2 weeks a go, a young lady who has been fighting cancer was faced with the return of her cancer. This takes place in the teaching of the Word. Week after week there is the presence and power of God to heal.

We are so conditioned by the course of this world to measure the supernatural in terms of the spectacular. This is not at all a broad stroke dismissal of the spectacular in God's ability, but we must not confuse the spectacular with the supernatural. God can use any of us to foretell or tell forth the mind of the Lord.

1 Thes 5:22 Abstain from every form of evil.

"refuse to do anything which is evil," or "refuse to act in any way which even seems bad."

KJV - the appearance of evil.

What does it look like if you are throwing back 5-6 virgin margaritas? What does it look like if you and your girl

friend are living together, but not sleeping together?

The way to abstain from every form of evil is to hold fast to that which is good. Paul has given to them a picture of the living breathing community of believers. The local church as it ought to be, as it is waiting for the coming of the Lord. But Paul understood the utter futility of his instructions if the Thessalonians were left to themselves to live them out! In fact, the un-aided human efforts to live the Christian life are worse than futile. They are destructive to the believer, to the community of believers, to the cause of Christ.

Christianity TRULY IS ALL ABOUT JESUS! JESUS is the AUHTOR of faith. JESUS is the FINISHER of faith. Paul knows that, so he instinctively turns to the Lord in prayer for them.

1 Thes 5:23 23Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely,

He asks God to completely set your live aside for Himself and for His purposes. We should not fight against that work of God. When you and I were in the world, the god of this world set you and me apart completely for his purposes. Before we were saved we served a different master. SIN was our master. NOW, we have a NEW master. NOW, we have the RIGHT master. Sensual pleasure was a cruel task master. Money was a cruel taskmaster (Money's a great servant but a cruel master). NOW we have the RIGHT master and THAT is the ultimate pursuit of life, to find the RIGHT master! And Jesus is THAT master who is not cruel. He is that master who hung on a cross in our place and poured His own blood into the ground so that we could be set free from the taskmasters of Sin and Satan.

Isn't THAT the master you want. Why would you NOT want to have as your master the King of the universe who died to save the traitors in His universe? And isn't it GREAT to be used by Jesus? There is NOTHING in the universe that can touch the joys of being set aside for the master's use.

23and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The ONLY way to be kept blameless is to be IN Christ and WASHED by His blood.

Eph. 1:4 4even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Jude v.24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,

23 your whole spirit and soul and body

QUOTE: F.F. Bruce

"Paul's theology of the human being is definitely as a trichotomy."

We have been created in the image of the Triune God. You are a spirit. You live in this body. You possess a consciousness, your soul, that relates to this world through your body. When Adam sinned he died spiritually. He was alive physically. His consciousness was still alive. But he was no longer in fellowship with God who was his life.

Before being born again, the body and the soul are alive, but because we are spiritually dead we are incapable of fellowship with God who is spirit. That is why prior to being born again we are driven by our bodies and our emotions.

Eph. 2:3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body ? and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

That is why Jesus said, "You must be born again." Born again is not a cliché, it is a reality in which you are spiritually made alive to God. Thus enabling you to participate in the very life, the very power, the very peace of God. And as a result, you are no longer driven by the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, like the rest of mankind.

1 Thes 5:24 24He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

It really is ALL ABOUT JESUS!

1 Thes 5:25-28 25Brothers, pray for us. 26Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

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