

New Hope Sermon – Spirit Fire – 1st Thessalonians 5: 16-19

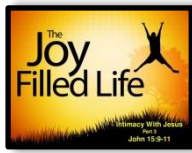
Today as we are nearing the close of I Thessalonians, Paul gives a series of short commands that epitomize the essence of the Christian life. They are straight forward, but sometimes our language of each of these topics obscures our understanding – like the father’s answer to his son’s simple question:

“A 4-year-old son was eating an apple in the back seat of the car, when he asked, "Daddy, why is my apple turning brown?"

"Because," his dad explained, "after you ate the skin off, the meat of the apple came into contact with the air, which caused it to oxidize, thus changing the molecular structure and turning it into a different color."

There was a long silence. Then the son asked softly, "Daddy, are you talking to me?" GCFN 7/13/17

Paul says, “¹⁶Always rejoice, ¹⁷constantly pray, ¹⁸in everything give thanks. For this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹Do not extinguish the Spirit.” It’s not that these words are hard to understand. They are simple words in short sentences. But we complicate their meaning when we try to explain why we can’t live like this all the time.



Paul is prescribing the joy-filled Christian life. It is 24/7 living – not an occasional high or burst of joy – it is always joyful. Continually praying, giving thanks in all situations. So how is this possible?

We can only embody these traits if we are filled up with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit puts this God-life in us. This is the overflow of the Spirit in us. A luke-warm Christianity, Jesus said, was so abhorrent to God he wanted *to spit the Laodceans out of his mouth* (Revelation 3). Lukewarm Christianity or any Christianity when self is at the center and not the Lordship of Jesus Christ is an aberration, not the real product.

The kind of living Paul is advocating comes when we are “**all in**” – when Jesus IS Lord and we are living under the control of the Holy Spirit. It is not automatic. It is a continual choice. As Paul tells the Galatians, “*as you live by the Spirit, so walk (present continual tense) in the Spirit*. The result is what I call “Spirit Fire.” Let’s see what this looks like.

First, always rejoice.

- ❖ Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. As we live by the Spirit he can produce it in us (Galatians 5:22). This is part of Jesus’ promise that if we abide by Christ we will bear much fruit (Jn.15:) Joy is that fruit.
- ❖ Joy also grows in us when we have answers to prayer (John 16:24). We demonstrated this at our Thursday night Bible study this past week. The theme from Romans 8 was how the Spirit helps us pray and prays for us, deep, God-centered prayers. We spent time sharing some of the wonderful answers to pray various ones of us have had in the last month. It was a joyous time.

The Bible story I think of is the healing of the lame man outside the gate beautiful in Acts 3. He was born crippled and had been placed at the temple gate every day to beg from those going inside the temple to worship (Acts 3:2). When Peter told him to look at him, as he and John were getting ready to go into the temple, Peter said ‘*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk,*’ took him by the hand as instantly the man’s feet and ankles were strengthened and he jumped up to his feet and began to walk. Now I believe he must have been praying for that

healing for years. And look what happened. “*He went with them into the temple courts, walking and leaping and praising God.*” Acts 3:8. That’s the kind of joy I long to see released in this church – even in worship today. That we are so full of God’s blessing and answers to prayer that we walk and leap and praise God. We raise our hands in worship. We clap; we stomp our feet; we worship God with our whole bodies. We have saved several of our praise hymns until after this sermon just so we can bring that level of praise to our worship. Joy comes as God answers our prayers.

- ❖ To have God’s joy is “to go on our way with a song in our heart” (Morris, *Ibid.*, p. 171).

Secondly, pray continually.

The Spirit is the One who empowers us to pray continually. Romans 8 tells us that the Spirit is the one who prays for us according to the will of God. As we studied this in Bible study this week, many took comfort in how the Spirit knows what is on our hearts and minds, even if we can’t express those deep or confusing thoughts in words. And then the Spirit works to help us trust God who can deal with our unspoken needs in the best ways. So as we’re connected to the Spirit, we are able to pray continually (Romans 8:26-27).

Interestingly, one of the commentators on this passage said, “prayer and joy go together, for often the believer finds in prayer the means of removing that which was the barrier to his joy” (Leon Morris, *Commentary for First and Second Thessalonians*, p. 173). That’s true, isn’t it?

Think about it for a minute. What are the barriers to your joy and to my joy?

Usually it is some issue we have not fully surrendered, or some fear in the future (a real problem as the school semester resumes and the anticipation of the stress involved raises all kinds of barriers to our joy). Sometimes it is simply our crammed schedule which is so busy there is no time to spend with God or be refreshed by His Word. But as we spend time with God and let Him direct our thoughts, the Spirit can point out an area which is hindering our joy. Prayer and joy **do** go together.

Give thanks in all circumstances

Joy comes as we are living in God’s presence always, and being conscious of his will to bless us. That’s a mind-blowing thought - that God wants to bless us – He wants to shower His love and His grace and His power on us. He wants to quiet our doubts and concerns and help us rest in Him. We do that as we celebrate our spiritual riches in Christ - blessings no one can take away (Ephesians 1:3).

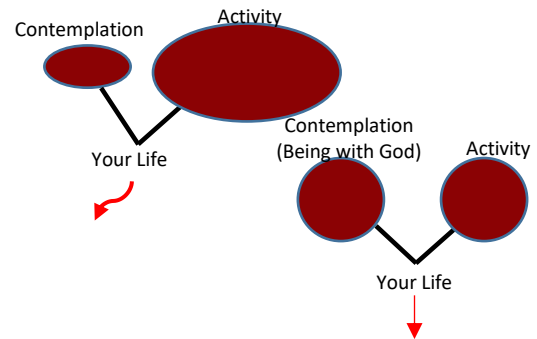
With that mindset we can give thanks in all situations, not for the situations necessarily, but for our God who is present in those situations and can redeem them.

Do Not Extinguish the Spirit

The Spirit is the One who can give us God’s joy, who can help us pray continually by living consciously in God’s presence, and who can help us give thanks in all circumstances. So, since the Spirit is central to a joyful Christian life, Paul tells the Thessalonians *do not quench or extinguish the Spirit* – do not put out the Spirit’s fire. How do we quench the Spirit?

First, I think we forget the scriptural truth that God often speaks in a still, small voice. Ps. 46 says *Be still and know that I am God*. But we are so busy, we often don’t slow down enough to take the time to be still in His presence. Pete Scazzero, in his book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, says “We are

too active for the kind of reflection needed to sustain a life of love with God and others.....The real



question is, are you paying attention to God? See graph

“We need to stop and be with God so we might create a continual easy familiarity with God’s presence at all times...When we gain the ability to integrate activity with contemplation, we find the arrow of our lives has a beauty, a harmony and a clarity that makes “doing” life straightforward and joyful.” (Scazzero, *Emotional Healthy Spirituality*, Thomas Nelson, 2006, pp. 49-50).

Spending time with God also helps us grow to love and recognize God’s voice. Jesus says “*My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow Him. The voice of strangers they don’t recognize.*” Voice recognition is an important part of bonding in relationships. It is critical in all phases of our life. For example, research has shown that babies recognize their mother’s voice, even in the womb from the seventh and eighth month. A fetus's heart rate slows down slightly whenever his mother is speaking, indicating that mom's voice has a calming effect. By the time they're born, babies can actually recognize their mother's voice. *Science Daily*. 2003. A fetus heart races when mom reads poetry; is in more negative response when a stranger reads the same passage.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2003/05/030513080440.htm>

Similarly, people in a coma can also hear and the consistent voice of a loved one can accelerate their recovery. Listen to this story and research: “Every five seconds, someone in this country suffers a traumatic brain injury; a third of those cases will be severe enough to cause a coma. Doctors often tell families to constantly talk to their loved ones, even if they're unconscious, but the question has always been: Can they hear? For the first time, reports CBS News correspondent Ben Tracy, science may have an answer. Four years ago Godfrey Catanus had his hands full. He was a new dad and an inspirational youth pastor in Southern California. He led groups of volunteers who helped rebuild after Hurricane Katrina and traveled to the Philippines on a charity mission. But then a blood clot in his liver sent the 32-year-old and his wife Corinth rushing to the hospital. "He had 3 1/2 feet of intestine taken out and then he had a brain hemorrhage that required nine hours of surgery," Corinth said. A medically-induced coma saved his life, but doctors feared Godfrey would never wake up. The sedatives wore off and doctors informed his wife he was still comatose.

"It's devastating; devastating this person that I love most in this world -- this is my kid's father -- just completely devastated," said Corinth, but she never lost hope and talked to her husband constantly. "I would tell him he needs to get out of his coma, just prayed, read to him, how his daughter was doing and how I was doing. I was pregnant with our second daughter at the time," she said. In a groundbreaking [Northwestern Medicine and Hines VA Hospital clinical study](#), Neuroscientist Theresa Pape performed brain scans on 15 coma patients, including Godfrey. The results of that study, released Thursday, show that when patients heard unfamiliar voices, brain scans showed little activity, but when they heard close relatives calling out their names or talking, the scans lit up. Pape's team also asked the families to record stories loved ones would recognize and play them repeatedly for a month and a half using headphones. The stories were played for eight of the patients, including Godfrey. The other seven only heard silence. The eight patients that heard the stories recovered

significantly faster. The Northwestern Medicine and Hines VA study is available in the journal "Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair." Jan.22 2015© 2015 CBS Interactive Inc.

Now transfer those findings to being able to recognize God's voice. The more we spend time with the Lord and build up a memory of how He has spoken in His word, or through others, or through nature time after time, the more consistently we will recognize His voice and not follow the voice of strangers (Jn.10:)– or the culture or people who don't walk in God's ways. God's voice will be what we long to hear and therefore what we listen for. It will be a voice of healing and multiple answers to prayer and thus joy and thanksgiving.

The second way we can quench the Spirit is to ignore the promptings of the Spirit when they come. Eventually this leads to deadening our conscience against His voice.

And finally, we can quench the Spirit when we don't obey what God is saying. We just don't do what the Spirit is urging us – often in a still, small voice that may not make sense. So we rationalize our disobedience and shut down the Spirit. This grieves the Spirit but also quenches the Spirit.

Through the Spirit we can ¹⁶*Always rejoice,* ¹⁷*constantly pray,* ¹⁸*in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* ¹⁹*Do not extinguish the Spirit.*" IThes. 5:16-19. Now let's pray and put these admonitions into practice!

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 8/13/17