

The Principles of Grace

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-25

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The last message that I brought on this station was from the book of 2 Thessalonians, Paul's second epistle to the Church at Thessalonica. I am going to speak today from the first epistle to the Church at Thessalonica, 1 Thessalonians chapter five.

Now I want you to turn to this Scripture. You are familiar with it. There are several very short verses together, 1 Thessalonians chapter five verse 16, beginning at verse 16. "Rejoice evermore," just two words. The next verse is, "Pray without ceasing," just three words. The next verse says, "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God concerning you in Christ." The next verse says, "Quench not the Holy Spirit."

So I am going to speak on those short, powerful verses as Paul writes to the Church at Thessalonica, closes his epistle to the church with these instructions.

Now I call these the principles of grace. I could have called them the rules of grace, but the word rule doesn't go with grace, does it? I could have called it the laws of grace, but the word law just doesn't go with grace. Rules, laws, grace, no.

Those who are objects of God's grace do what they do out of love, not law, because they desire to do it not because it is a rule or a law and they are required to do it. You see, Paul when he wrote to this church in chapter one of 1 Thessalonians he said, "I remember without ceasing your labor of love, your works of faith and your patience of hope, faith, hope and love." And that love labors and that faith works and that hope is patient in waiting on the Lord.

So I will call the message the principles of grace, not the laws or rules, but these are the principles, characteristics of people who are objects of God's grace.

I brought this message to our church congregation several weeks ago and it was a blessing to me and I believe it was a blessing to many of them. So would you open your Bible? Perhaps you would like to look at the Scripture while I read it and speak from it and teach these principles of grace. But here in verse 16, here is the first one. He says in verse 16, "Rejoice, rejoice evermore. Rejoice evermore."

Now this is not outward emotion. You know that and I know that. This is not an outward enthusiasm. This is not getting somebody in front of a congregation to act as a cheer-

leader and whip people up into some kind of frenzy of emotionalism and enthusiasm. This is an inward rejoicing. This is a spiritual heart rejoicing not in ourselves, but in our Lord. That's right.

What does Paul say in Philippians four verse four? He says, "Rejoice in the Lord always and I again I say rejoice in the Lord."

And this is not just rejoicing when we are in church or when we are with a group of believers. It is rejoice evermore, rejoice in the Lord always, not Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night, but ever more, ever more. Always rejoice in the Lord. This is one of the three marks of true Israel. In Philippians three Paul said, "We are true circumcision, the true Israel of God, three marks." He says, number one, we worship God in Spirit, in Spirit. Secondly, we rejoice in Jesus Christ, in his blood, in his righteousness, in his person, in his glory, in his work. Thirdly, we have no confidence in this flesh.

So this rejoicing is not in material blessings. It is not in ourselves. It is in the spiritual blessings, spiritual blessing. God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, justification, sanctification, redemption, regeneration.

You know one time the disciples came to the master and they said, "Master, think of it. We were out preaching and even the devils were subject unto us."

And our Lord replied, "Don't rejoice that the devils are subject unto you. The thing in which you are to rejoice is your names are written in heaven. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Rejoice that all things work together for good to them that love God. Rejoice in the inheritance you have undefiled, incorruptible, reserved for you that fadeth not away. Rejoice in the Lord always ever more."

And this rejoicing is not just in good times, but in all times.

Now listen to me. Rejoice evermore. Rejoice in the Lord always. Now wait a minute. Again I say always in the Lord. Not just in good times.

I heard somebody say one time, "Well, my son went away to war and he came back. The Lord is good."

My friend, if he hadn't come back, the Lord is still good. His coming back or not coming back doesn't change the goodness of God. God is good and God is good to us. And we rejoice at all times. I know, I know, I know it is a lot easier to rejoice in the good times, but that is not what he said. He said, "Rejoice evermore."

And I say this. Let people, circumstances and conditions be what they will. Our God is unchangeable. His love is everlasting. His covenant is ordered in all things and sure. And I am told—and this is a principle of grace—I rejoice in the Lord evermore, always.

Now I want you to...you can't find this Scripture real quickly you write it down because you will want to read it again, Habakkuk chapter three verses 17 and 18. Now listen. Habakkuk 3:17, 18. Listen. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom..." And these people, their livelihood depended on the fig tree. There is no fruit in the vine. The grapes, their vines weren't bearing fruit. The olive tree fails, no oil. The fields yield no grain, no barley, no wheat. The flock is cut off from the fold, no sheep, no lambs, no cattle in the stalls, no milk. Yet...those are hard times. Yet, the prophet said, "I will rejoice in the Lord and I will joy in the God of my salvation."

That is rejoicing evermore, a principle of grace.

All right. Secondly, verse 17. Here is another verse. Pray without ceasing. Pray without ceasing. Believers can't always be on their knees. It doesn't mean that. Believers cannot always be calling on God vocally, publicly or privately. There has got to be a time for food, a time for drink, a time for sleep, a time for rest. There must be time for work. A man has to go to work, put in his eight hours, come home and then do his chores at home. There are family duties. Mothers have children.

As much as we would like to be engaged in prayer all the time it is impossible. As much as we would like to be engaged in worship all the time it is impossible.

Well, what does this mean? Pray with out ceasing. Well, the meaning, first of all, is this. I will give you several things that this means, pray without ceasing. Number one, it is to pray daily. It is to pray often. It is to pray about everything, everything, all things. It is to live in an attitude and a spirit of fellowship with God, of communion with God.

You and your wife live together. There are a lot of times you don't talk. You may go on a trip in the automobile and drive for two or three hours. She reads and you are just driving along not saying a word. But you are in communion, you are in fellowship. You know she is there. She knows you are there. She is dependent upon you and you upon her for so many things.

So this praying without ceasing is to pray daily, to pray often, to pray about all matters and to live in a spirit of fellowship and communion with God.

Secondly, the meaning of pray without ceasing is don't quit praying. Pray without ceasing to pray. Don't cease. Don't quit. Don't stop. Don't give up.

Sometimes it seems like God closes his ears to our prayers. Sometimes it seems like the heavens are brass and our prayers just come back. Sometimes it feels like there is a cloud up there that you just cannot get through, but don't quit. Don't cease to pray.

John Bunyan said, "Sooner expect a natural man to live without breathing as to expect a believer to live without praying." He cannot live without praying, without fellowship with God because the Spirit of God lives in him. If any man have not the Spirit of God he is none of his.

So prayer and worship is the life of the believer. And then pray without ceasing means this also. It means to pray at all times, not just in trouble and distress. I know all of us are much in prayer in time of trouble. We find it much easier to pray when the way is difficult and when the night is dark and long and sleepless.

And we don't cease to pray, do we? We pray through our troubles.

But here is what he is saying. Don't cease to pray when the trouble is over. Keep on praying. Pray without ceasing.

You know, prayer is not just asking and receiving. There is a whole lot more to prayer than asking God to give us certain things. Prayer, number one, is lauding the attributes of God.

Listen, how does the disciples' prayer begin? When they said, "Lord, teach us to pray. Not only teach us how to pray, but teach us to pray."

He said, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.'" That's lauding the attributes of God.

Prayer is also praise to his name. "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

I haven't asked for anything. But we are lauding the attributes of God. We are praising the name of God and prayer is thanksgiving for the blessings of God. Thank you, Lord, thank you.

I have a zillion things to be thankful for, don't you?

Prayer doesn't have to be vocal. Somebody says, "Well, I just...I just can't pray aloud."

Well not many people can. That's just fact. Not many can. I know we can say words aloud, but I said pray. Not many people can pray aloud, conscious of the presence of someone else. It is difficult. A lot of preachers do a lot of preaching while they are praying. But that is not prayer. That is preaching.

Prayer doesn't have to be vocal. There is public prayer, private prayer, mental prayer. There is prayer that can be prayed while we are engaged in the work and affairs and duties of life. Pray. Pray without ceasing, without ceasing. Give thanks.

All right, thirdly. It says here principles of grace, rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing. And I tell you, it takes grace. These are not simple easy things. These are principles, life principles.

Here the third one is, "In everything give thanks."

Boy, this is a tough one, now listen. In everything give thanks. This is a companion verse to Ephesians 5:20 which says, listen. Ephesians 5:20 says this. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God our Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Giving thanks always for all things? Yes, all things. Yes, all things. For who I am, for what I have, for what I am, for where I am.

The song writer says, "Content with beholding his face, my all to his pleasure resigned. No changes of season or place would make any change in my mind. While I am blessed with a sense of his love, a palace, a toy would appear. And prisons would palaces prove if Jesus would dwell with me there."

Paul could have written that, couldn't he? Paul says, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am to be content giving thanks for who I am, where I am, for my food, for my clothing, for my family, for my friends, for the Word of God, for true ministers of the gospel, for God's covenant of grace, for his redeeming love, for the Lord Jesus, for his life and blood, his righteousness, for the call of his grace, the hope of eternal life, for all things in this life and the life to come, giving thanks always for all things in everything.

Now watch this next line. This is so important here. Now listen to it. "In everything, good or bad, give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Now listen to me. You believers, listen. I can't explain how your troubles and your trials and your disappointments are the will of God in Christ concerning you at this time. I can't explain that. But I know it is true. I know it is true. I know that God is the first cause of all things. I know that Satan couldn't touch Job without God's permission. I know that everything that happens in a believer's life, all things, all things are by the will of God and for the glory of God and for our eternal good. And all things are working together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. And this is so difficult, so extremely difficult, especially when our bodies hurt, when our children are a disappointment, when our plans fall and fail, when we have to say goodbye to a dear, precious loved one. Yet in everything give thanks. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

I am telling you the truth. There is not anybody out there, not anybody out there who knows God and lives, believes the gospel who has not been hurt, tried, gone through trouble, tears, sorrow, heartache, pain. In this world you will have tribulation. Man is born of woman, few days and full of trouble, trouble. And yet the believer, for the believer, for the child of God if he is a child of God and if God says, "If you know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your Father give good things to them that know him and love him and ask him?"

Every good and perfect gift cometh from God and sometimes these gifts are in unusual manner, an unusual way. But in everything give thanks. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

My friends, I love the way that the hymn writer put those words. “God moves in a mysterious way.” Mysterious to us, known to him, strange to us. “His wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps on the sea, he rides upon the storm. Ye fearful saints fresh courage take the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy...the clouds are big with mercy and they will break with blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace, behind a frowning providence there is a smiling face.” And what he is doing is for our good and for the good of his children and the good of his Church, the good of his people. That’s right. “His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour. Oh, the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.”

Rejoice evermore. Pray with out ceasing. In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Now look at that next verse. “Quench not the Spirit. Quench not the Spirit.”

I have heard so many bad interpretations of that. I believe in declaring what this means it would be well for us to state what it does not mean. I will tell you what that does not mean. It does not mean that you can hinder the Holy Spirit in his work. It does not mean that you can prevent the omnipotent, almighty Spirit of God from accomplishing his will and his purpose. Our Lord said the wind, the breath of God, the breath of God...the breath of God is the Spirit of God It bloweth where it listeth. He blows where he pleases. And you can hear the sound and you can see the results. You cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. The Holy Spirit divides to every man severally as he will. You are not going to hinder or prevent the Spirit of God from accomplishing the will and purpose of God who said, “I have spoken. I will do it. I have purposed it. I will bring it to pass.

But what this is saying is this, speaking to you believers, the same people that he tells to rejoice evermore. And sometimes we don’t, but we are told to.

Pray without ceasing. Sometimes we don’t, but we are told to.

In everything give thanks, everything. That is hard to do. I don’t always do it. I wish I did, but I am told to.

These are things, principles of grace for me. Now this one here, quench not the Spirit in your life. And it means this. Don’t neglect and suppress the Spirit of God and the grace of God and the fruit of the Spirit in your lives and in your fellowship.

What is the fruit of the Spirit? Love. When I don’t love like I ought to, I am suppressing the Spirit. I am neglecting the Spirit. See that?

What is the fruit of the Spirit? Joy. When I don’t have the joy of God and I don’t express that joy I am quenching the Spirit.

You see, the fire of the Spirit burns to give light and warmth to all in the house of God. Don't quench the fire. Don't quench the fire by suppressing and neglecting the fruit and graces and gifts and talents that God gives you. Love, joy, peace. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of peace and when we disturb the peace in the home or in the church we are quenching the Spirit. We are putting out the fire. We are stopping the light and the warmth and the fellowship.

What is the fruit of the Spirit? It is love, joy, peace. It is patience, gentleness, kindness, faith, humility. And these things are to be expressed and worked and exhibited and shown and they are the Spirit's gifts and Spirit's fruit. And when I neglect these things and suppress these things I am quenching, putting the fire out.

All of the graces and gifts and ability within us is the gift of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, so when I don't love and rejoice and give and forgive and generally glorify God in my life I am quenching the Spirit in here. I am not going to stop God from doing what he is going to do. I am not going to hinder the Holy Ghost from sweeping down and taking control of hearts, but I am not using my gifts for his glory, quenching the Spirit. That's right. That's right.

And then he says, fifthly, "Despise not prophesying."

The Old Testament was written by the prophets. God spoke to our fathers by the prophets the prophecies of Christ's coming, the prophecies of Christ's work, his person, his glory, his death, his righteousness. That...the Old Testament. Don't despise the prophecies. Don't despise the writings of the prophets. To him give all the prophets witness. Read the Scriptures. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures in the Old Testament. He rose again according to the Scriptures.

And then the New Testament, that is the Word of God from the apostles. Prophesying is preaching. Despise not preaching.

Today God has his true preachers. Yeah, there are a lot of false preachers, but God has his true preaching. Don't despise the preaching of the Word.

I know that there is some bad preaching today, just bad preaching. But there is some good preaching. God still has his witnesses and God still has his true preachers and God saves by the preaching of the Word and God comforts by the preaching of the Word and God teaches by the preaching of the Word and God reveals himself through the preaching of the Word. So despise not preaching, but hold fast that which is good. Prove all things and hold fast that which is good.

Some people embrace anything religious. Some people are critical of everything religious. But the wise prove all things and when they hear a true message they hold fast to that which is good.

Principles of grace: rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesying, hold fast the truth when you hear it. Prove it and hold it fast and abstain from every appearance of evil.

And last, brethren, pray for us.

All right. Principles of Grace. That is this message. Last week's message will be on this, these six unforgettable gifts. Send two dollars. We'll mail it to you. Here is the address. Until next week God bless you.