

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 12-29-13 AM NOTES
"SEVEN COMMANDS FOR A NEW YEAR"
1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-22

Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV) "19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [a command], baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age."

Legalism is when we seek to obey God's commands in our own strength to try to merit God's acceptance.

"Command what You will, but give what You command."

—Augustine

I. Rejoice Always (v. 16)

Psalms 97:12a (NKJV) "Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous..."

Habakkuk 3:18 (NKJV) "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Nehemiah 8:10b (HCSB) "...your strength [comes from] rejoicing in the Lord."

Romans 5:11b (NKJV) "...we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Philippians 3:1a (NKJV) "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord."

Philippians 4:4 (NKJV) "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

James 1:2 (NKJV) "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

Joy—"Delight in God and His salvation for the sheer beauty and worth of who He is."

—Tim Keller

Psalms 5:11 (NKJV) "But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You."

II. Pray Without Ceasing (v. 17)

This command has been described as, "Practicing the presence of God."

Nehemiah 2:4-5 (NKJV) "4 Then the king said to me, 'What do you request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.'"

III. In Everything Give Thanks (v. 18)

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV) “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

What we have in this command is a command to trust in the sovereignty of God.

Romans 8:28-29 (NASB) “²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.”

IV. Do Not Quench the Spirit (v. 19)

Ephesians 4:30a (NKJV) “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God...”

We grieve the Spirit when we sin by doing that which is forbidden. We quench the Holy Spirit when we sin by not doing that which He tells us to do.

V. Do Not Despise Prophecies (v. 20)

Isaiah 66:5a (NASB) “Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at His word...”

VI. Test All Things (v. 21)

“Good” means genuine instead of counterfeit.

VII. Abstain From Every Form of Evil (v. 22)

1 Thessalonians 5:22 (KJV) “Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

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“SEVEN COMMANDS FOR A NEW YEAR”
1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-22

2013 has been quite a year. We have seen some amazing culture shifts – more than I thought possible in a single year. We’ve gone from a culture where the majority valued traditional biblical marriage – one man and one woman – to a very unbiblical view that says “marriage is for any who feel love for one another whether opposite sex couples or same sex couples.” I have been shocked with how fast this culture shift has taken place. I fear that it may indicate that God has taken His restraining hand off of our country and given us over to our sin. I hope that I am wrong! Now, just before 2013 has closed out, a judge in Utah seems to have made a ruling that is the first step in legalizing polygamy. If two people loving one another justifies them being married (even though they are the same sex), then how far behind can legalized marriage be for 3 or 4 or 5 or more people who love each other and want a polygamous marriage?

When we look at 2014, what will it hold for us? We don’t know. What is going to happen with Obama Care? Will we economically improve or drift back into an even greater recession? We just don’t know. If we focus on all of these possibilities, it’s enough to drive us crazy! I don’t know what the future holds, but I do know who holds the future! Rather than focus on the unknown and live with “headline hysteria”, I want to focus this next year on 7 things in one short passage of Scripture (43 words in English translation) that God commands us to obey. I plan to put the notes from this message in my prayer journal and pray through them weekly throughout this next year and be reminded daily of what God desires of me. I believe that in obedience to these 7 commands we will be changed and draw near to God no matter what happens in the culture around us.

Before we look at the specifics of these commands, let me say some things about the commands in God’s Word. I remember reading or hearing someone (a preacher, I think) say, “The Bible is not a book of commands; it is a book of principles.” It is true that the Bible contains many principles that are to guide our lives, but I believe that statement the preacher made was in error. The Bible contains many commandments. We think immediately of the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments, but there are numerous commandments in the New Testament. For instance, Jesus in the Great Commission told us in **Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV)** “¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples [a commandment] of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” There are numerous commandments that Jesus gave us in the Gospels. One man has counted over 100! In our text in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, the grammar indicates that these are commandments [imperatives] to be obeyed! It is not “legalism” to say that we should obey the commandments of the New Testament. Legalism is when we seek to obey them in our own strength to try to merit God’s acceptance. Since the Holy Spirit’s coming at Pentecost to indwell every true Christian, we have God’s enabling power to do everything He commands us to do. To state it another way, every command carries with it the promise of enabling grace to obey the command through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The fourth century church leader, Augustine captured this truth when he prayed, “Command what You will, but give what you command”. To be under grace and not under law doesn’t mean that there are no more commands; it means that God now enables us to obey all that He commands through His enabling grace and the filling of His indwelling Spirit.

Let’s look at these 7 commandments for the coming year and indeed for every year we exist on planet earth. In addition to being imperatives, these commands are also in the present tense which speaks of continuing action. In other words, these commands should control the way that we walk though life.

I. Rejoice Always (16)

The Greek words for joy, rejoice, and grace are all from the same word family. The key to rejoicing is in understanding and appropriating God’s grace. You cannot rejoice until first you begin to understand and

to draw upon God's grace. The roots of rejoicing are in God's grace, not in our circumstances. Let's focus on that word "always". It literally means on every occasion, in every set of circumstances. Many, if not most of the times that we are told to rejoice, it is connected to the phrase "in the Lord" or "of the Lord". **Psalms 97:12a (NKJV)** "Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous..." **Habakkuk 3:18 (NKJV)** "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." **Nehemiah 8:10b (HCSB)** "...your strength [comes from] rejoicing in the Lord." **Romans 5:11b (NKJV)** "...we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." **Philippians 3:1a (NKJV)** "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." **Philippians 4:4 (NKJV)** "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" As I have said hundreds of times, we miss joy because we confuse it with "happiness". When we read the writings of theologians of old, they often used happiness and joy as synonyms, but today the meaning of happiness has changed. Today, happiness is always tied in to pleasant circumstances and desired outcomes. Joy or rejoicing is in the Lord. I think that Tim Keller nails it when he defines joy as, "Delight in God and His salvation for the sheer beauty and worth of who He is". Keller says that the opposite of joy is hopelessness and despair. The counterfeit of joy is elation that comes with blessings, not the Blesser; it is mood swings based on circumstances. That last part is what most mean today by happiness. Happiness today depends on what happens. To be "happy always" would mean that I could never experience painful, uncomfortable times. Joy, rejoicing is rooted in the person of Christ, the purposes of Christ and the perfection of Christ. Therefore, I can "count it all joy" (James 1:2) even when tragedy strikes, because I am rejoicing in the Lord – the beauty of His person and purposes to conform me to His likeness and provide for every genuine need (and He has the right to determine what I need). The greatest commentary on this command to rejoice always is **Psalms 5:11 (NKJV)** "But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You." This is a fantastic verse! I can "rejoice always" because my trust is in God and His grace, His sovereignty and His love for me. I know that He will care for me and as I know Him more and more, I love His name (all that He is) and that allows me to be joyful on every occasion and in every set of circumstances.

II. Pray Without Ceasing (V17)

There is a connection between the first command and this second command. It is as I live in an attitude and atmosphere of prayer that I can see from God's perspective and rejoice always in every circumstance. That phrase, "without ceasing" means **constantly** recurring, not **continuously** recurring. It means to persistently and regularly pray. It speaks of a lifestyle where prayer is as natural as breathing. It is rooted in a spirit of dependence on God and constant gratitude toward God that should characterize each of us. When we see something beautiful, we praise the Lord. When we hear of a need, we breathe a prayer to the Father. When we say something that didn't need to be said, we immediately confess it with repentance. When a thought crosses our mind about God, we praise Him, or when an evil or untrue thought invades our mind, we pray taking it captive to the obedience of Christ. When we are asked a question, we breathe a prayer for wisdom to answer correctly. I think you get the idea. It's as though we never hang up the receiver. Some have described it as "Practicing the presence of God". We see an example of this in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah had been diligently praying for an opportunity to ask permission from the king to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls around the city. One day, in the king's presence, his opportunity came. He had to say the right thing. He had no time to go into a quiet place to pray. Look at what he did in **Nehemiah 2:4-5 (NKJV)** "⁴ Then the king said to me, 'What do you request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.'" That is an example of praying without ceasing. It is remaining in an attitude and atmosphere of prayer.

That is what I want to characterize my life over this next year! I want to so closely walk with Him and be in communion with Him that if my heart stops or a semi runs over me, I will just finish the conversation in Heaven!

III. In Everything Give Thanks (V18)

This is (in my opinion) the most difficult of these 7 commandments. We need to be reminded that we do not obey in our own strength, but in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The ESV says, *1 Thessalonians 5:18a (ESV)* “give thanks in all circumstances...” I believe that obedience to this command can do more to bring about a life that glorifies God than almost any other command in Scripture. Let me tell you what this doesn’t mean. It’s not the old adage of, “Find the silver lining in every cloud”, or “look on the happy side / sunny side”. It also doesn’t say that we are to give thanks FOR everything. When something sinful affects us we are not thankful for the sin. A key word is the little preposition “in”. It means “within”. It has reference to **place**. It refers to a sphere of action. In other words, it means that in the midst of every circumstance we are to give thanks. **What we have in this command is a command to trust in the sovereignty of God.** To obey this command is to say, “Father, I believe that You are sovereign and that you allowed this circumstance and that you are using it for Your glory and my good.” A companion passage that needs to be seen alongside 1 Thessalonians 5:18; is *Romans 8:28-29 (NASB)* “²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren”. If God causes “all things” to work for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose, then that includes the circumstances you are going through right now. Our God promises that He will be glorified in every circumstance by using that circumstance to conform us to the likeness of Jesus Christ. That is what we give thanks for. Whatever circumstance we are in, we say, “Father, I believe that You allowed this even if it involved someone’s sin and You didn’t cause it. I choose to thank You in this circumstance that you are using it to conform me to the likeness of Christ and to thus bring glory to your name.” Corrie Ten Boom in her book, “The Hiding Place”, tells about an experience in the Nazi prison camp where she and her sister Betsy were incarcerated for hiding Jews from the Nazis. They were transferred to another place and upon entering their new barracks found them to be flea infested. As Betsy and Corrie were reading this passage, Betsy suggested that they stop and thank God for what He was doing in allowing them to be in a flea infested barracks. Corrie refused to thank God, but at Betsy’s persistence she gave in and thanked God for what He was doing through the fleas. During the months at that camp, they were surprised at how openly they could hold prayer meetings and Bible studies without guard interference. It wasn’t until months later that they learned that the guards refused to come in because of the fleas and for several months the word of God flowed freely even in a Nazi prison camp. In my own life, obeying this command has many times liberated me from unforgiveness, discouragement, and worry. Oh the joy of resting in the sovereign “causings” and “allowings” of God. I would paraphrase this verse this way, “In the middle of every circumstance give thanks by faith because we know that our sovereign God has allowed or caused this circumstance to bring about His glory and our conformity to the image of Christ. This thanksgiving is always the will of God in Christ Jesus for every one of His children.” I believe that obedience to this command is one of the greatest displays of faith God’s children can experience. Our giving thanks is a testimony that we totally trust God and His sovereign plan to accomplish His purposes in and through us.

IV. Do Not Quench the Spirit (V19)

The word “quench” was used of extinguishing a fire. The adjective form is the Greek word “asbestos” which we know as a fire retardant. The Holy Spirit and His work are often compared to fire in the Scripture. This command is to stop refusing to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and His work. We quench the Holy Spirit when we refuse to obey the leadings and direction of the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 11:2 we are given seven things that the Holy Spirit does and one of them is that He gives counsel and guidance. When we refuse to follow the guidance and the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we have quenched the Holy Spirit. Quenching the Spirit is one of the two ways we sin against the Holy Spirit. We are told in *Ephesians 4:30a (NKJV)* “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God...” **We grieve the Spirit when we sin by doing that which is forbidden. We quench the Holy Spirit when we sin by not doing that which He tells us to do.** It may be that the Holy Spirit guides you to share Christ with someone, give a

word of encouragement, go on a mission trip, get involved in a ministry, give a very sacrificial offering to missions or some need of the church, and you refuse. You have quenched the Holy Spirit and sinned against God. Not only can individuals quench the Holy Spirit, but also a church can quench the Spirit. Here is a church experiencing the fire of the Holy Spirit's working as He preserves the unity and works powerfully through the ministries of the church and then a squabble breaks out. Someone elevates a personal preference to a Scriptural principle and begins sowing seeds of discord. Somebody doesn't like a staff member or the way a program is being run and they begin creating dissension. I've seen it time after time. The fire of the Spirit's working is quenched and the power is gone and the church falls into a "run the programs" mode. I would rather kiss a cobra than to cause dissension and disrupt the Spirit given unity in a church. When the leadership in a church doesn't confront sin or begins teaching or tolerating false doctrine, the Spirit is quenched and unless it is dealt with you can in the words of 1 Samuel 4:21 write "Ichabod" over the door which means, "The glory has departed".

V. Do Not Despise Prophecies (V20)

A prophet is one who speaks forth God's word. Before the New Testament was completed, the Holy Spirit spoke through yielded servants to the churches. Today, we have the completed New Testament and the ones God uses in His church to teach and preach use the completed Scriptures. We can legitimately apply this command to preaching and teaching in the church. The word "despise" means to treat lightly or hold in low esteem. We are to elevate, highly esteem, and treat seriously God's word when it is read or taught. Sometimes we treat God's word so flippantly. Listen to *Isaiah 66:5a (NASB)* "Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at His word..." Do you tremble at the word of God? Sometimes I fear with hearing preaching or teaching we approach it as entertainment. When someone is animated or humorous or tells a lot of stories people talk about how much they "enjoyed" the message. When the word of God is taught and preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, one of the most common responses ought to be people esteeming the word so highly that they tremble with conviction as the word is applied to their life. Whether it is opening His word in your quiet time or listening in your small group or sitting in a worship service there ought to be an attitude of saying, "Father, this is your word. I want to listen carefully and hear what you have to say and with the enablement of your grace, I will obey. I tremble at your word and treat it with esteem and ultimate seriousness."

VI. Test All Things (V21)

This command balances the command to not despise God's word. We are not to despise God's Word, but neither are we to blindly accept every message that purports to be God's Word. The word "good" means genuine as opposed to counterfeit. When God's word is being taught or preached we are not supposed to be gullible and naïve and blindly accept what the speaker says. The word "test" means to discern, to approve as worthy to be received. Everything that purports to be a word from God is to be tested by how it lines up with Scripture. If it is genuine, we are to "hold fast" to it. That means to seize it and bring it close. It is an attitude that treats a word from God as precious and serious and understands that we are responsible for our response to the genuine word of God.

VII. Abstain from Every Form of Evil (V22)

The word "Abstain" means to keep oneself from. The word translated "every form" can mean every sort or kind of evil or it can mean the look or appearance of evil. Both are true because they are clearly taught elsewhere I think the meaning is the form or appearance of evil. I like the KJV translation of verse 22, *1 Thessalonians 5:22 (KJV)* "Abstain from all appearance of evil." The Knox translation says, "and rejecting all that has a look of evil about it." As ambassadors of our king, we must be very careful in this foreign land not only about abstaining from evil, but also about avoiding the very appearance of evil. This involves setting up fences in your life to protect you from evil. We don't see how close we can get to sin without crossing over the line. We set up fences to keep us away from the actual line that involves evil or sin. For instance, we have a code of ethics for our Elders that involve some fences. We are not to eat out

with or be alone in a car with a non-relative member of the opposite sex. Is it a sin to eat alone or be in a car with a non-relative member of the opposite sex? No, but it is a fence to keep us from sin, and a way to avoid the very appearance of evil. We have windows cut into the door of our offices as well as other safeguards. This verse is a command. Even if it makes us look radical and out of step with the customs of the world and what is commonly acceptable in the business world, we are to avoid every form, every appearance of evil. This command applies to lots more than sexual sin. It involves being totally above board in financial matters such as expense accounts. It involves refusing to cut corners on deals or contracts. It is refusing to compromise with government regulations and paying the taxes you owe. Abstain from every form of evil.

CONCLUSION

If we in the power of the Holy Spirit obey these 7 commands as a way of life, we will see God powerfully at work in us in 2014 and beyond.