

Rejoice Always

By Patrick Swayne

As Paul closed out his first epistle to the Thessalonians, he wrote several short but powerful instructions to the church at Thessalonica. Like the content of the rest of his epistles, he intended these instructions to be relayed to Christians everywhere (Colossians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 4:17). The first of these instructions is to “rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

Though easily understood, this command is not always easily carried out. As we face the various trials and tribulations of life, it can become difficult sometimes to find reasons to rejoice. However, Paul is not expecting the unrealistic with this command; he is not expecting us to be unaffected by trials and tribulations. Christians pattern themselves in all things after their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and even He wept (John 11:35). Paul does not forbid sorrow, but he does expect Christians not to “sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Rejoicing always is not about ignoring sorrow; it is about maintaining joy even in the midst of sorrow.

By turning to the very epistle in which this command is found, we can find at least three reasons to rejoice always. By reflecting on these reasons (and many more that we will not examine in this article), we will find that no matter what evil may face the church and her members, there is always cause for rejoicing.

Christians can rejoice always because they are elect of God (1 Thessalonians 1:4) – they are those whom God has called and chosen. This election is a truly wonderful thing, because in it God calls Christians from uncleanness to holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7). This calling takes Christians from being of the night and of darkness to being “children of light, and the children of the day” (1 Thessalonians 5:5 KJV). No longer are those in Christ appointed “to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9). This certainly is a great cause for rejoicing, and it encourages Christians to “be even more diligent” to make their “call and election sure” by obeying the commands of Christ (2 Peter 1:10; 1 John 2:3).

Christians can rejoice always because they are examples to the entire world in all that is right (1 Thessalonians 1:7). The apostle Paul found much comfort in the fact that the Thessalonian brethren were “examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia.” Because of their enduring faith in spite of “much affliction,” the news of their faith spread farther and faster than they themselves could, as they went and “sounded forth” “the word of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 8). It is the privilege and honor of every Christian to be a light to the world, reflecting the light that is Jesus Christ to the lost of the world, through the power of the gospel (Matthew 5:16; John 8:12; Romans 1:16). Christians reflect that light by teaching the lost and walking properly in the sight of unbelievers (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:12).

Christians can rejoice always because they will be in the presence of the Lord at His Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 2:19). The Thessalonians had a fear that those who died before Christ’s return would be annihilated and gone forever. However, such a worry was not consistent with the Christian message – the sting of death was and is gone (1 Corinthians 15:55). Paul encouraged them, saying that those who are alive at the second coming of Christ will be caught up in the air with those who have died in Christ, there to ever be with Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Such words allow the Christian to rejoice, while offering the non-Christian only fear and trembling.

Those outside of Christ cannot rejoice always, because they are not the elect of God, they are not the examples to the entire world in what is right, and they will find themselves in the presence of the Lord only to hear Him say “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:23). The exact opposite can and must be true of the Christian, who ought never to find himself without a reason to rejoice. With these things in mind, we ought to find peace and be able to “rejoice always.”