

Concluding Exhortations and Commandments (2)

Introduction:

We are in the midst of addressing the last section of Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians. From verse 12 unto the end of the epistle, the Lord has provided for us through the pen of the apostle have a series of 18 exhortations and commandments. We have addressed the first six of these, which brings us through verse 14. Let us read again our passage, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28.

¹²We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil.

²³Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

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. (1 Thess. 5:12-28)

The first eight exhortations and commands address relationships between people. Last Lord's Day we considered the first six.

1. **Paul's exhortation to show regard to church leaders**, who are probably elders (1 Thess. 5:12f).
2. **Be at peace among yourselves** (5:13b).
3. **And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle** (5:14)
4. **Encourage the fainthearted**
5. **Help the weak**
6. **Be patient with them all.**

Paul urges patience toward all at this point, for in all of our *helping*, all of our *encouraging*, all of our *admonishing*, we do not always see positive responses and immediate results. But we are to be patient, knowing that sanctification is not a work accomplished fully in a few moments, but often occurs only by slight degrees and over prolonged periods of time. We need to be patient with them all, when we are working with them all in one way or another.

Let us now consider the next command. Actually the next two are in one sentence:

7. **"See that no one repays anyone evil for evil**, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone." (5:15)

The first half of this sentence does not precisely say, "**you** are not to repay evil for evil", although that is certainly implied. Actually it is instruction for us that we make every effort to prevent others from

repaying anyone evil for evil. Of course it is not as though we are going to be able to prevent this from occurring, but in as much as we are able, we are to **“See that no one repays anyone evil for evil.”**

Not only is it the duty of the entire membership to exercise this virtue, patience or longsuffering (v. 14), but the brotherhood must also see to it that each individual member cultivates it and manifests this grace toward everyone.¹

Let us attempt to understand what is included in this command, by first asking, what is meant by the word “evil”? There are several Greek words that are translated as “evil” in the New Testament. The word Paul used here is the most commonly used Greek word for “evil.” It is an adjective, which describes anything that is evil in character, in influence or in effect. It is the opposite of what is “good.” The word “evil” can describe persons or things. There are evil persons, evil qualities, evil emotions, and evil works. It can describe what is injurious, destructive, or grievous.

Christians are not to be characterized by evil. Peter wrote,

Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay *evil* for *evil* or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8f)

Paul gave the same command in Romans that he wrote here in 1 Thessalonians 5:15: “Repay no one *evil for evil*, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all” (Rom. 12:17). James wrote of how conflicting it is for a Christian to speak evil of others.

But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless *evil*, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. (James 3:8-12)

We are not to give undue attention or have interest in evil things. Romans 16:19 records, “I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is *evil*.” Paul writes that evil is not present where true love is present. Love “does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, ***thinks no evil***” (1 Cor. 13:5).

Evil is characteristic of unbelievers, of ones who order their lives contrary to God’s will. John wrote of this in his third epistle. “Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; ***whoever does evil has not seen God***” (3 John 11).

The wrath of God will one day come upon those whose lives are characterized by evil. We read in Romans 2:5ff:

⁵But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: ⁷eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness-- indignation and wrath, ***tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil***, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹For there is no partiality with God. (Rom. 2:5-11)

¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1955, 4th printing, 2007), p. 137.

Much of the evil which people commit is in their words. But it is there words that will either condemn them or exonerate them before the Lord Jesus Christ in the Day of Judgment. Our Lord said,

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. ³⁶But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. ³⁷For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matt. 12:35-37)

It is *natural* for people to render evil for evil. By describing this as *natural*, we are saying that it is in accordance with their sinful nature; it is natural to them. And people feel quite justified in doing so. If evil is done to them, it is quite natural, even right, it is thought, to do the same in return. We want “payback.” It is the plot of many movies in which someone is treated terribly in the first portion of the film, which in turn justifies personal vengeance on the part of the “hero” in the rest of the story. We feel that is just that what people do to us we are justified in returning it upon them.

This commandment prohibits taking vengeance upon another. The Holy Scriptures tell us that the Lord alone has the authority to bring vengeance upon lawbreakers. We are commanded,

¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰Therefore

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”

²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:17-21)

Paul quotes from the Old Testament. It is a reference to Deuteronomy 32:41, which reads,

“If I whet My glittering sword,
And My hand takes hold on judgment,
I will render vengeance to My enemies,
And repay those who hate Me.

Hebrews also quotes this verse. In Hebrews 10:30 we read, “For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

Now someone might say, “But do not the Scriptures say, ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe’” (Exo. 21:24f)? This verse, however, is not a license to take vengeance, but it sets forth the principle of justice that should characterize civil government in executing judgment. It is simply asserting that the punishment must fit the crime.

The Lord Jesus addressed this in His Sermon on the Mount. He said,

³⁸You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. ⁴¹And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. ⁴³You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax

collectors do so? ⁴⁸Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:38-48)

But it is the way of the fallen world for people to want to have vengeance on those that harm them. But though this is the way of the fallen world, it is not the way of the Lord. As we see in the second clause of our sentence before us, which again reads, “**See that no one repays anyone evil for evil...**

8. “...but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.”

Here the instruction is written directly to us. We are to see to it that others do not repay evil for evil, but we ourselves are to seek to do good to one another, that is, to the brethren in the church, but also to “everyone”, who would be all those outside the church. We are to be as our Lord Jesus, “who *went about doing good* and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). In contrast to repaying evil for evil, the Christian is to be as the Lord, seeking to overcome evil by doing good. We are to do as Paul wrote in Romans 12:21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but *overcome evil with good.*”

If we always seek to do good to one another and everyone, it must be that we desire good for others, both in the church and outside the church. Christians are to be like their heavenly Father. God has a general benevolence for all mankind. This does not mean that He loves everyone the same, for that is not the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. God has a covenant love for His people that He has only for them and for no others. Nevertheless, God is kind and good to all of His creatures because that is His nature. He is a good God who does good to His creatures. We are to be like Him. We are to treat others kindly because we are to be as our Father. Our Lord Jesus taught us:

“But I say to you, love your enemies, *bless those who curse you*, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? ⁴⁸Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:44-48)

The Lord tells us through the hand of Paul that we Christians should be clothed or characterized as ones with compassionate hearts. “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on *tender mercies, kindness*, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (Col. 3:12). We are to put on “tender mercies.” We are to have deep feeling of concern and desire for the well-being of others. This is not to be only toward those that have this same kind of regard for us, but this should be our general regard for all others, regardless of how they regard us or treat us. We are to have a general benevolence for all people everywhere, desiring their wellbeing before God. Did not our Lord teach this very thing in his parable of the Good Samaritan? He told of the Samaritan, who was despised of the Jews, nevertheless, when he saw the man who had “fell among thieves, who had stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead”, the Lord said that this Samaritan had compassion when he saw him (Luke 10:33). This word, “compassion.” We are to put on, that is, we are to be characterized as having hearts of compassion for others.

We are also “to *put on kindness.*” One might say that this quality flows from what went before. We should not only have compassionate hearts toward people, but it ought to move us to show “kindness” to them. This, too, characterized the Good Samaritan. Our Lord said of him, that he

set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denari, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ (Luke 10:34-35)

The Good Samaritan was “good” because he had mercy on this afflicted one and he showed him kindness. John wrote, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from

him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:17). Similarly, if a man says he has “put on” a “compassionate heart”, but is devoid of “kindness”, his claim is a sham.

Now we just dealt with how Christians should relate with one another. Beginning with verse 16, we read of the inner life of the Christian, of what should characterize his inner attitude and how it expresses itself. We read of three related and briefly stated commands: (1) Rejoice always, (2) pray without ceasing, (3) give thanks in all circumstances.

(9) Rejoice always (5:16)

We are to rejoice always in the Lord! Believers in Jesus Christ are to be a people known for their joy in their Lord. Psalm 32:10f:

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked;
But he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him.
Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous;
And *shout for joy*, all you upright in heart!

New life in Jesus Christ is to be characterized by joy. We may voice to our God,

In Your presence is *fullness of joy*;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psa. 16:11)

God has promised that they who come to salvation will encounter great joy. God has said:

For *you shall go out with joy*,
And be led out with peace;
The mountains and the hills
Shall break forth into singing before you,
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. **Isaiah 55:12**

Our Lord Jesus told His disciples that their own salvation was to be the basis of their joy. On one occasion when their rejoicing was based upon demons being subject to them through Jesus’ name, Jesus told them not to rejoice in this, but to express their joy that they were recipients of salvation. He said to them:

Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather *rejoice because your names are written in heaven*. (Luke 10:19f)

Later, on another occasion, the night our Lord Jesus was betrayed and arrested, He spoke to His disciples of the temporary sorrow that they would experience because of His sufferings and death that He was to encounter. But He declared to them that upon His resurrection and thereafter they would be characterized by joy. Jesus said in **John 16:20ff**:

Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but *your sorrow will be turned into joy*. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; *but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you*.

The fact is that we should be a rejoicing people. When people see us and they reflect upon us, we should so live before them that they perceive us to be joy-filled people. We should always be rejoicing.

Now, when we speak of joy, we are not speaking of that which might be generally characteristic of a cheerful and optimistic personality. There are many non-Christians who may be of that nature. We are speaking of a deep-settled and abiding joy that may belong to the true Christian. His natural personality might be more melancholic than others; nevertheless, he may be filled with and characterized by joy that the sanguine personality has never known. No, we are not speaking of one who is a bubbly and happy person by nature. *The joy of which we speak is a deep-settled sense of well-being, satisfaction, confidence and delight in knowing his God and knowing that he is in a right relationship with Him.* This person will have a calm spirit under trial. He will have a sense of well-being and confidence when humanly speaking all seems to be hopeless. He will have a measure of stability and confidence when others seem to be losing control. His is not self-confident, but he is confident in His God and His relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He delights in this, and it settles his soul. He is at peace with God and his soul is at peace.

Life is filled with difficulties and trials. They will tend to get you down if you fail to exercise this duty: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). But Paul is not exhorting his readers merely to be happy in Jesus, but when he says, "rejoice in the Lord" he is telling them to place all their trust, all of their hope, all of their assurance upon Jesus Christ and Him alone. This will result in a sense of well-being, a true rejoicing in one's soul.

If you fail to fix your mind on the Lord and rejoice in Him and all that is promised in Him supremely, then you will probably end up rejoicing in something of this world, things that are temporary, uncertain, and fleeting. If you focus on Christ you may have realized the promise that our Lord gave respecting His disciples,

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These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. (John 15:11)

Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:20-24)

This last statement of our Lord gave reference of the sorrow that His disciples experienced when the Lord was arrested and crucified. The joy that no man could take away was the joy knowing that all promised by Him would come to pass because He had been resurrected from the dead.

Last evening I referred to one of volumes of the works of **Thomas Manton**. Manton was an English Puritan pastor. He was a clerk at the Westminster Assembly, which produced the Westminster Confession and catechism. He was a chaplain to Oliver Cromwell. He was a favourite of J. C. Ryle (late 19th c.) and Spurgeon. Spurgeon said of Manton that his works were "a mighty mountain of sound theology" and his sermons were "second to none." He said, "Manton is not brilliant, but he is always clever; he is not

oratorical, but he is powerful; he is not striking, but he is deep.” Manton gave a sermon on 1 Thessalonians 5:16. Of verse 17, which reads, “Rejoice evermore”, he wrote:

The words are brief and short, and therefore they may be easily carried away. They are independent on the context, and therefore will need no long deduction. They press you not to a painful, but pleasant duty; therefore you should be readily induced to practice it. But yet, when we look more intrinsically into the nature of it, it is not so easy as we first imagined. Every one cannot receive this saying; it is hard to keep the heart in such exact frame as to “rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks;” as Christ saith in another case, ‘He that is able to receive it, let him receive it’ (Matt. 19:12). But what if we prove it to be a duty incumbent on all Christians, and that at all times? The text seemeth to enforce it, ‘Rejoice evermore.’

Manton then began to expound on the text by setting forth a doctrine from these words: ***“That God’s children should make conscience of rejoicing in God at all times and under all conditions.”*** He then set forth these points:

I. What rejoicing the apostle speaketh of. There is a double rejoicing--a carnal rejoicing, and a spiritual rejoicing.

1. The carnal rejoicing is in the world, and the good things of this world apart from God; Luke 12:19, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”

2. The spiritual rejoicing is in God. Phil. 3:1, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord”... These two sorts of rejoicing must be carefully distinguished, for they differ in their causes. To the one we are prompted by carnal nature, which taketh up with present things, and the other is excited in us by the Spirit of God, therefore often called ‘joy in the Holy Ghost.’ The one is called the joy of sense, the other the joy of faith. The joy of faith is in God, the joy of sense in the creature; the joy of faith is most in future things, the joy of sense in present things; the joy of faith is in the good of the soul, the joy of sense in the good of the body or the provisions of the flesh; the joy of faith is built on the covenant and the promises of God; Psalm 119:111, “Thy testimonies I have taken as an heritage for ever; they are the rejoicing of my heart.” The joy of sense on the blessings that flow in the channel of common and general providence. Now the first sort of rejoicing the apostle would not press us unto. Nature there needeth a bridle rather than a spur; but to the latter delight in God, and all things that come from God and lead to him.

Manton then begins to explain the doctrine, under these headings:

[1] (We are to rejoice always in) God himself, as God, is a lovely nature, and the object of our delight; for he is good, even before and without apprehension of his doing good. Psalm 119:68, “Thou art good, and doest good.”

[2] We are to delight and rejoice in God as he hath discovered himself to us in Christ.

[3] We rejoice in God as we rejoice in the fruits of our redemption, or in all those spiritual blessings which are offered or given to us by Christ; such as reconciliation, or God admitting of us into the privileges of his holy covenant.

[4] We rejoice in God when we delight to do his will, and are fitted for his use and service. To be set and kept in the way to heaven is a greater comfort to us than if we had all the world bestowed upon us.

[5] We also rejoice in God when we rejoice in the blessings of his providence, as they come from God and lead to God.

II. How this must be constant and perpetual, “rejoice evermore.”

1. In all estates and conditions; this joy must not be infringed. God’s children have or may have cause of rejoicing in God, whatever their outward condition be; and therefore they should make conscience of it, whether their affairs be adverse or prosperous.

[1] A state of worldly sorrow and affliction is reconcilable and agreeable enough, or consistent with our rejoicing in the Lord. The Scriptures abound in the proof of this: 2 Corinthians 6:10, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”; 1 Peter 1:6, “Wherein we greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations”; 2 Corinthians 7:4, “I am filled with comfort, and am exceeding joyful in all tribulations.”

[2] A state of sorrow and affliction is not only consistent with this holy rejoicing, but doth much promote it; partly as afflictions conduce to refine, and purge the soul from the dregs of sense, and make it capable of the comforts of the Spirit.

2. We must rejoice evermore, because it is not a duty to be done now and then, or which doth only belong to some eminent Christians, that are assured of God’s love; but from our first acquaintance with Christ till the last period of our lives it is of use to us.

[1] Some act of joy our first entrance into Christianity.

[2] As to our progress in the duties and hopes of the gospel, it is still carried on with joy.

III. The many reasons which show we should have a greater inclination to this blessed work than usually we have, and be oftener in it.

1. Because God hath done so much to raise it in us. All the persons of the Godhead concur and contribute their influence, in that way of operation which is proper to each, to give us grounds for joy.

[1] The Father giveth himself to us, and his favour as our felicity and portion. God’s love is the bosom and bottom cause of all our happiness, which sets all other causes at work.

[2] The Son is also a matter of rejoicing to us, as our Redeemer and Savior. You are to consider what the Lord Jesus hath done to deliver you from sin, and the bitter curse of the law, and the fears of death, and the flames of hell.

[3] The Holy Ghost concurreth in his way of operation, as a sanctifier, guide, and comforter.

2. All the graces tend to this--faith, hope, and love.

[1] Faith, that is dependence upon God for something future that lieth out of sight.

[2] Hope breedeth this joy also; Romans 12:12, “Rejoicing in hope.”

[3] Love to God also causeth us to rejoice in him, for it showeth itself in complacency and well-pleaseness of mind in God as our chief good.

3. All the ordinances and duties of religion were appointed to breed, and feel, and act, and increase this joy in us. Reading, hearing, praying, meditating, the Lord’s Supper; all these duties were appointed to quicken the soul to delight in God, and they all must be used to this end.

(10) Pray without ceasing (5:17)

In all circumstances we are to rejoice, and in all circumstances we are to pray. The apostle was not laying a burden upon the shoulders of his readers that was burdensome. He was calling them to prayerful activity that would be their delight and to their benefit. “Pray without ceasing.”

This command to pray without ceasing follows the command, “Rejoice always.” **Matthew Henry** wrote of this:

Note, the way to rejoice evermore is to pray without ceasing. We should rejoice more if we prayed more. We should keep up stated times for prayer, and continue instant in prayer. We should pray always, and not faint: pray without weariness, and continue in prayer, till we come to that world where prayer shall be swallowed up in praise. The meaning is not that men should do nothing but pray, but that nothing else we do should hinder prayer in its proper season. Prayer will help forward and not hinder all other lawful business, and every good work.²

We might first attempt to understand the nature of true prayer. Here is a good definition: “Prayer is the offering up of our desires to God, in the name of Christ, for such things as are agreeable with his will.”³

First, prayer is the offering up of *our desires*. Our words in prayer may or may not express our desires. And so, it is not our words, but the desires that we express to God to which He shows regard. Psalm 10:17 reads, “O LORD, *you hear the desire of the afflicted*; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear.” Our words are to express our desires, but it is not merely our words, but the desires of our hearts that God shows regard. Our Lord spoke of this. He told His disciples, “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their *many words*” (Matt. 6:7). Great and good desires expressed in fewer words are preferable to little desire expressed in many words.

Second, these desires are not simply expressed, but they are expressed *unto God*. As a priest offered his sacrifice unto God in the days of the Old Testament, so Christians are priests who now offer to God their sacrifices of praise, even the desires of their hearts. Peter wrote, “a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).

Third, these desires are to be expressed to God in the name of Jesus Christ. In other words, our prayers should always be offered to God on the merit of Jesus Christ as our Mediator, through whom our prayers are received by our Holy Father.

And fourthly, the desires that we express to our God through Jesus Christ must be in accordance with His most holy will. We read in 1 John 5:14, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” Our prayers are to be regulated by His Word and inspired by His Word.

Another question that we might answer is a rather simple, or obvious one. “What is it to pray without ceasing?” Some have pressed this too far. Others have fallen far short of this command. First, there are those who neglect other duties for they felt that they always needed to be in private prayer. But Paul was not intending to say that Christians have to be continuously, consciously praying. That is not possible. *What Paul meant is that Christians should always be a praying people*. He expressed himself similarly in other places. Consider these:

Romans 1:9. “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that *without ceasing* I make mention of you always in my prayers.”

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell), PDF version, p. 1394.

³ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 17 (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), p. 491

1 Thessalonians 1:2. “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering *without ceasing* your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.”

1 Thessalonians 2:13. “For this reason we also thank God *without ceasing*, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

Now, it is not possible to interpret these absolutely literally. For how could the apostle pray “without ceasing”, in other words, continuously without interruption, on behalf of the church at Rome? Did he not also have responsibility to pray for other matters, for other people, and for other churches? Of course he did. What he was saying to the church at Rome was that he was always praying for them. When they came to his mind, he prayed for them.

Similarly, we read of Paul saying to the church at Thessalonica, that he was “remembering without ceasing” their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope. Was that all Paul remembered, these things? Did he remember only these things about this church 24 hours a day? Of course not. He was simply conveying to the church that whenever he thought of them and was praying for them, he remembered these characteristics of this church.

And later when he wrote to this church that he thanked God for them “without ceasing”, was he saying that is all he prayed for, continuously, 24 hours a day? Of course not. When he said that he remembered. Or thanked God, or prayed for them “without ceasing”, he was simply saying that whenever he considered them, these things were before him concerning them. Paul was simply expressing his great interest and attention to these matters, praying about them frequently, even without ceasing.

For you and I to pray “without ceasing” means simply that we are to be praying people. Prayer is an essential aspect of being a Christian, having a relationship with the Lord. Yes, we are to go through the day, as though we are carrying on a conversation with our God, as we express our desires to Him. But to assume that you are not fulfilling this command because you have to give yourself to other duties and responsibilities of life, is to press this command beyond what was intended.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f)
