

## 5:16–18 *Rejoice, Pray, Give Thanks*

THERE IS ALWAYS A REASON TO PRAY. JOHN CALVIN: In the first place, he would have us hold God's benefits in such esteem that the recognition of them and meditation upon them shall overcome all sorrow. And, unquestionably, if we consider what Christ has conferred upon us, there will be no bitterness of grief so intense as may not be alleviated and give way to spiritual joy. For if this joy does not reign in us, the kingdom of God is at the same time banished from us, or we from it. And very ungrateful is that person to God who does not set so high a value on the righteousness of Christ and the hope of eternal life, as to rejoice in the midst of sorrow. As, however, our minds are easily dispirited, until they give way to impatience, we must observe the remedy that he subjoins immediately afterward. For on being cast down and laid low we are raised up again by prayers, because we lay upon God what burdened us. As, however, there are every day, nay, every moment, many things that may disturb our peace and mar our joy, he for this reason bids us pray without ceasing. Now, as to this constancy in prayer, we have spoken of elsewhere. Thanksgiving, as I have said, is added as a limitation. For many pray in such a manner as at the same time to murmur against God, and fret themselves if he does not immediately gratify their wishes. But, on the contrary, it is befitting that our desires should be restrained in such a manner that, contented with what is given us, we always mingle thanksgiving with our desires. We may lawfully, it is true, ask, nay, sigh and lament, but it must be in such a way that the will of God is more acceptable to us than our own. COMMENTARY ON 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16.<sup>6</sup>

Lee Gatiss, Bradley G. Green, and Timothy George, eds., *1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon: New Testament*, vol. XII, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019).

THE EFFECTUAL PRAYERS OF GOD'S PEOPLE. HEINRICH BULLINGER: The prayers of the faithful are effectual, staying the wrathful judgments of God, yea, and taking them clean away. For whereas they object again that prayer is a declaration of things that we require of the Lord, and that God foreknows all things, therefore that those things are unprofitably and superfluously declared to him, which he already knows, and so for that cause that prayer is unprofitable; it is confuted of Christ our Lord himself, who when he had plainly said, "Your heavenly father knows what things you have need of before you ask him," but nevertheless adding a form of prayer he teaches us to pray. In another place he commands us and stirs us up to pray often, "Watch, and pray," says he, "lest you enter into temptation." And Paul says, "Rejoice always, pray continually." In every place there are many precepts of this kind. OF PRAYER.<sup>7</sup>

REJOICE IN LASTING THINGS. THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: Carnal joys are but like a blaze of a fire nourished with stubble, which soon goes out. They who rejoice in their foods, in their children, in their peace and worldly safety, in their honor and preferments, or the descent of their pedigree, their joy is transitory. Those who rejoice in the Holy Ghost and the comforts of the Spirit, their joy is everlasting. Wherefore though you find many troubles in the world and causes of grief, yet still rejoice in the Lord and comfort yourself with the hope of a better life. Even when you grieve and mourn for your sins, rejoice in this, that you grieve in a godly way, and that the more abundantly you sow in tears,

<sup>6</sup> CTS 42:296–97\* (CO 52:174–75).

<sup>7</sup> Bullinger, *Fifty Godly and Learned Sermons*, 917; citing Mt 6:8; Mk 14:38.

the more plentifully you will reap in joy. ANNOTATIONS ON 1  
THESSALONIANS 5:16.<sup>8</sup>

SANCTIFIED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. HEINRICH BULLINGER:  
Now this purging or purification, which is made by our care  
and our industry, is called by the name of sanctification,  
not because it is made by us as of ourselves, but because it is  
made of those who are sanctified by the blood of Christ, in  
respect of Christ his blood.

For unless that sanctification, which is the very true and  
only sanctification indeed, goes before our sanctification (I  
mean that which we work), it is nothing at all. But if that  
[i.e., the sanctification from Christ's blood] goes before,  
then is this ours imputed for sanctification, although in the  
meanwhile the spots of sin remaining in us defile it, and  
that we do put no confidence in it. Therefore so often as you  
shall read in the holy Scriptures that righteousness is  
attributed to our good works, you shall think straightaway  
that it is done for no other cause than those which I have  
hitherto already declared to you. For the apostolical spirit  
cannot be repugnant or contrary to itself.

This will then be made a great deal more manifest if we  
call to remembrance and consider that the apostles had to  
deal with two kinds of people, the one sort affirming that  
they were sufficiently able of their own strength to satisfy  
or fulfill the law, and that they could by their deserts and  
good works merit eternal life, and affirming that the merit  
of Christ was not sufficient enough to acquire salvation,  
unless human righteousness were added to it.

Against these Paul disputed very constantly and pithily  
in all his epistles. For they made Christ and the grace of God

<sup>8</sup> Downname, ed., *Annotations*, 3K3r\*; citing [Eccles 7:6](#); [Phil 4:4](#).

of no effect. The other sort were such as abusing the doctrine of grace and faith, wallowing like swine in all filthy sins, because they thought that it was sufficient to salvation if they said that they believed. OF [CHRISTIAN LIBERTY, WORKS, AND MERITS](#).<sup>9</sup>

**A CALM MIND IS THE SOURCE OF JOY.** [JOHN CALVIN](#): “Rejoice Always.” I refer this to moderation of spirit, when the mind keeps itself in calmness under adversity, and does not give indulgence to grief. I accordingly connect together these three things: “rejoice always,” to “pray without ceasing,” and to “give thanks to God in” all things. For when he recommends constant praying, he points out the way of rejoicing perpetually for by this means we ask from God alleviation in connection with all our distresses. In like manner, in [Phil 4:4](#), having said, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known to all. Be not anxious as to anything. The Lord is at hand,” he afterwards points out the means of this: “But in every prayer let your requests be made known to God, with giving of thanks.” In that passage, as we see, he presents as a source of joy a calm and composed mind, that is not unduly disturbed by injuries or adversities. But lest we should be borne down by grief, sorrow, anxiety, and fear, he bids us repose in the providence of God. And as doubts frequently obtrude themselves as to whether God cares for us, he also prescribes the remedy—that by prayer we disburden our anxieties, as it were, into his bosom, as David commands us to do in [Psalm 37:5](#), and [55:22](#); and Peter also, after his example ([1 Peter 5:7](#)). As, however, we are unduly precipitate in our desires, he imposes a check upon them—that, while we desire what

<sup>9</sup> Bullinger, *Fifty Godly and Learned Sermons*, 464.

we are need of, we at the same time do not cease to give thanks.

He observes here, almost the same order, though in fewer words. For, in the first place, he would have us hold God's benefits in such esteem, that the recognition of them and meditation upon them shall overcome all sorrow. And, unquestionably, if we consider what Christ has conferred upon us, there will be no bitterness of grief so intense as may not be alleviated and give way to spiritual joy. COMMENTARY ON [1 THESSALONIANS 5:16](#).<sup>10</sup>

AT ALL TIMES, WE SHOULD DIRECT OUR EYES TOWARD CHRIST. JOHN CALVIN: God has such a disposition toward us in Christ that even in our afflictions we have large occasion of thanksgiving. For what is fitter or more suitable for pacifying us, than when we learn that God embraces us in Christ so tenderly, that he turns to our advantage and welfare everything that befalls us? Let us, therefore, bear in mind that this is a special remedy for correcting our impatience—to turn away our eyes from beholding present evils that torment us, and to direct our views to a consideration of a different nature—how God stands affected toward us in Christ. COMMENTARY ON [1 THESSALONIANS 5:18](#).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> [CTS 42:296](#) ([CO 52:174](#)).

<sup>11</sup> [CTS 42:297](#) ([CO 52:175](#)).