

Some of the Bible's commands are not just difficult, but seemingly impossible. *"Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* In all of history, no one except Jesus has ever managed to keep that command! Or, could anyone claim to have achieved perfect obedience to the two great commandments, to love God with your total being and to love others as much as you love yourself?

Our text gives us three seemingly impossible commands "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." This seems impossible no one *honestly* can say, "I rejoice *always*, pray *without ceasing*, and *in everything* give thanks!" If Paul had only said, "Rejoice a lot, pray often, and try to be thankful," I maybe could say, "Okay, I'll try to do that!"

It's interesting that Paul doesn't offer any explanation or help here on what these commands mean or how we can obey them. He just states them in staccato fashion and moves on! But other Scriptures do offer some help in understanding what these commands mean and how we can begin to develop the attitudes and habits that will help us move toward obeying them, even if in this life we may never obey these commands perfectly.

Remember that rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, and giving thanks are *always* God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Now, the last phrase gives the underlying clue as to how we can begin to obey these commands: We must be "in Christ Jesus." Without being in union with Him through His indwelling Holy Spirit, we could never come close to obeying these commands. We are placed into union with Christ the moment that we trust in Him to save us from God's judgment that we deserve because of our sins. As Paul says **1 Cor. 1:30**: *"But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."*

So, to obey these apparently impossible commands, we must have experienced the new birth so that we are in Christ and He dwells in us. As we learn to abide in Him and

trust in Him to work through us, we will progressively become conformed to His image. Jesus was always rejoicing, always praying, and always thankful. So being in Him and relying on Him are the keys to becoming like Him in these three qualities.

## 1. God commands us to rejoice always.

### What does this command mean?

Does “rejoicing always” mean that you always go around with a smile on your face and an upbeat “Tigger” bounce in your steps? Are you sinning if you ever feel sad, depressed, upset, or grieved? I have met Christians who seem to think so.

If “rejoicing always” means always being upbeat and never feeling sadness, then we have a problem, because neither Jesus nor Paul were always happy. It’s interesting that the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament is ([1 Thess. 5:16](#)), “Rejoice always,” but the shortest verse in the English New Testament is ([John 11:35](#)), “Jesus wept.” As He faced the cross, Jesus prayed “with loud crying and tears”. In ([2 Corinthians 6:10](#)), Paul described himself, “as sorrowful yet always rejoicing.” In ([Romans 12:15](#)), he tells us, “Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.” He does not say, “Exhort those who weep to stop weeping and start rejoicing!” So “rejoice always” does not mean, “Deny your feelings, put on a happy face, and never feel sad.”

So, what does Paul mean when he commands, “Rejoice always”? First, it’s important to remember that he wrote this to new believers who were suffering persecution because of their faith. And this commands follow Paul’s exhortation that the believers should not get even when someone mistreats them. Paul had probably taught them Jesus’ words **Matt. 5:11-12** *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

So, given the believers difficult circumstances, this command to rejoice always has to be viewed not primarily as a matter of feelings, but rather of obedience. When we are in difficult trials or if people have mistreated us because of our faith, we have a choice: either we can focus on our trials and lapse into self-pity. Or we can set our minds on the things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God, where our life is hidden in Him and rejoice. As Paul commanded the [\(Philippians 4:4\)](#), “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” That little phrase, “in the Lord” is the key. Since we are eternally “in the Lord” through faith in Christ, we can always rejoice “in the Lord.” Our joy cannot be totally oblivious to circumstances, but neither should it be governed by them.

So “rejoicing always” is a conscious attitude of contentment and hope that comes from deliberately focusing on Christ and the eternal treasures that we have received freely from Him. Sometimes, we have to “fight for joy” in the Lord. We see this often in the Psalms. The psalm begins with the psalmist crying out to God for help in the midst of some trial, tribulation or persecution. But by the end of the psalm the Psalmist is praising the Lord and rejoicing in Him, even though their circumstances haven’t yet changed. What changed was their deliberate focus on the Lord. For example, Psalm 5 begins with David mentioning his groaning and his cry for help. As the psalm unfolds, we see that he was groaning because of enemies, whose hearts were full malice and mouths full of lies against him. But having meditated on God’s abundant lovingkindness David concludes on this triumphant note

### **Psalm 5:11-12**

“But let all who take refuge in you be glad;  
let them ever sing for joy.  
Spread your protection over them,  
that those who love your name may rejoice in you.  
Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous;  
you surround them with your favour as with a shield.”

Of course, Paul himself had displayed this deliberate joy in the Lord when he was unjustly arrested, beaten, and thrown into the stocks in the Philippian jail. At midnight,

he and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God. The same was true of the apostles. After the Jewish leaders flogged them for preaching the resurrection of Jesus, we read, "So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." So, to rejoice always means that we must make this deliberate choice to focus on the Lord and the unfathomable riches that we have in Him, not on our difficult circumstances. And this joy that come from focusing on the Lord shines the brightest in dark situations. If we do all things with joy in the Lord rather than grumbling or complaining, we will stand out as lights in this dark world.

The Thessalonians didn't focus their attention on their hardships and put their emphasis in the wrong place. No, they thought more of their Lord than of their difficulties; more of their spiritual riches in Christ than of their poverty on earth; more of the glorious future when their Lord should come again than of their unhappy past.

So, the question becomes,

### **How can we be9 rejoicing always?**

Yes, to rejoice always may seem an impossible command but take comfort.

**Matthew 19:26** *"Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

*Firstly, walk in the Spirit, not the flesh.* Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit ([Gal. 5:22](#)). To walk in the Spirit means daily to yield to Him and to rely on Him to control your life in every situation. It takes time to produce fruit. It doesn't pop out on a tree the day after you plant it! But if you walk consistently by the Spirit, eventually the fruit of joy will be yours.

*Secondly, daily focus on the riches that God has freely given you in Christ.* For example, ([Ephesians 1:3-14](#)) says that you have all spiritual blessings in Him. God chose you in Him before the foundation of the world. In love, He predestined you to adoption as His child. He freely bestowed His grace on you in Christ. In Him you have

redemption and forgiveness of all your sins, lavished upon you by His grace. He has made known to you the mystery of His will. He has given you an inheritance and has sealed you with the Holy Spirit of promise. These wonderful eternal truths lift our eyes from our present trials and tribulations and set them on eternity.

*Thirdly, sing!* If you're feeling down, get out a hymnbook or put on some solid Christian music and sing of God's goodness, grace, and love. Singing is one way of implementing the second strategy—focusing on the riches that God has freely given to you in Christ. I have I heard once that the most frequent command in the Bible is, "Sing!" The longest book in the Bible is a songbook. Use it often to set your mind on the things above.