

Don Hargrove
Faith Bible Church
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<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study of the Bible-42 (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22: 3 levels of understanding)

We are in step five of the six fundamental principles for personal Bible study of Paul's epistles:

1. Read the epistle *straight through* at one setting;
2. Notice the setting of the epistle;
3. Study the introduction of the epistle;
4. Notice the outline of the epistle from the introduction;
5. Make a *verse-by-verse* study of the epistle;
6. Meditate upon and *digest* the *results* of your study.

In our last study we noted eight virtues in a verse-by-verse study of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22:

1. Rejoice always
2. Pray without ceasing.
3. In everything gives thanks.
4. Do not quench the Spirit.
5. Do not despise prophetic utterances.
6. Examine everything carefully.
7. Hold fast to that which is good.
8. Abstain from every form of evil.

Before we move into step six, let's go over the three levels of understanding Truth by examining the virtue: "Rejoice" always (Πάντοτε χαίρετε).

1. Level 1: Every believer can understand the basic concept of rejoicing. As a matter of fact, I would argue that even children understand the *basic* human reality of rejoicing or happiness. Not only will a child who is verbal be able to answer the question, "Are you happy or sad?" but a baby just a few months old *experiences* the difference between happiness/joy and sadness, even though he is unable to verbalize that difference.
2. Level 2 deals with the original languages, which gives a bit more precision as to the reality which the word/symbol points to. However, as I have pointed out, the word does not contain or carry the meaning of the reality: it only points to the reality to which man by nature has some intuitive understanding (in the case of ultimate spiritual realities, the reality is only understood through the ministry of the Holy Spirit). The Greek word/sign for the reality of rejoicing in our passage is *ἀγαλλιάω* (agalliao), whereas in English the word/sign that the reality points to is "rejoice." To illustrate that it is the reality that the word is pointing to and not the

word itself, compare the synonyms of each word, which points to the same reality. Here are the various meanings given for ἀγαλλιάω (agalliao) in the various Greek lexicons: to be exceedingly joyful, exult, to be glad, overjoyed, take pleasure in. I have just opened my Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary and for "rejoice" I see that it lists: to experience joy, and gladness in the highest degree, to be exhilarated with lively and pleasurable sensations; to be full of joy. Note the similar descriptions of the reality that each word/arrow/symbol is pointing to. The critical issue is not the arbitrary sign man uses to communicate some reality he grasps (ἀγαλλιάω/agalliao or rejoice), the issue is the reality. Both the Greeks and us Americans have contact with this reality and communicate this reality via words, which act as arbitrary signs to the reality that man "knows." Technically, knowledge is a metaphysical reality as an act (verbal) between a knower and the object known. All of mankind, all over the world, have the same human nature and intuitively understand the basic nature of rejoicing to which he forms different signs/words to express that reality. The Greek is in the imperative mood, but so is the English. The Greek is in the present tense, but that too can be gleaned from the English with the word that follows it: "always." Consider the advantages a Philosophical Realist has over a believer who has not been trained to think in terms of Ultimate Reality. The believer who has not trained in Realism would tend to think that the reality is in the Greek word, and if he does not know Greek, he will lack confidence in understanding the reality in the Bible for himself—a reality that does not depend upon any word. Furthermore, without understanding human nature, he can get into trouble really quick by assuming this is an automatic joy divorced from the mind and will. However, the Realist is connected to Ultimate Reality and when he has a question about the reality of a word in the Bible, he will examine a dictionary or thesaurus to aid him in grasping the reality to which the word is pointing and to which all men know by the verbal act of knowing. More on this later . . .

3. Level 3: This goes beyond *just* grasping the basic ultimate reality conceptually. This is where you move *deeper* and more *fully* into ultimate reality. This is going to require two things in the case of "rejoice": knowledge of the nature of man (natural revelation: philosophical psychology) and what the Word of God (special revelation: the Bible) says about rejoicing. This is where you would examine God's Word on concepts of joy, happiness, and rejoicing. At this point I would like for you to look up the following passages and construct your own doctrine of happiness or joy as if your neighbor was going to come over to your house next week and ask you about what God's Word says about happiness: Ecc. 9:9; Psa. 84:12; 97:12; 100:1-5; 112:1; 119:1-2; 128:1; 144:15; 146:5; Prov. 3:13; 23:24-25; 29:18; Neh. 8:10; Acts 2:28; Rom. 13:15; 14:17; 2 Cor. 12:10; Gal. 5:22; Philip. 4:4; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 Tim. 6:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:8; James 1:2-3; Heb. 13:5; 1 Jn 1:4; Jn 15:11. Again, we need to be grounded in both Realism of human natures as well as the Realism of spiritual joy in the Word of God. We must stay connected with Total Reality at all costs else we remain ignorant and misguided about Truth as such.

In yesterday's Bible class, I noted that the three virtues of faith, hope, and love are "cardinal" virtues. I would like to add a couple of comments. First, all other virtues flow from these three virtues that come directly from God as one grows in sanctification—a person who is not growing in sanctification is going to have great difficulty trusting in God, hoping in God, and loving God. Second, God is our Best Friend in the category of virtuous friendship. This means He is always working for our good, which of course means He is always working to create in us more trust in Him, more hope in Him, and more love of Him—all of which bring great power to the spiritual life. What could ever slow down or stop a believer who was filled with supernatural faith, hope, and love for God? Absolutely Nothing! He is truly unstoppable.

*In 'Ehyeh,
Pastor Don Hargrove*