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

Personal Study of the Bible-44 (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22 – more on 4 virtues)

We have been working through the seven fundamental principles that enable any rational believer to understand the Bible for himself:

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. Do a categorical/doctrinal study of a word/concept.
7. Meditate upon and *digest* the *results* of your study.

In our last few lessons on 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, we have been noting the eight virtues. Since we have been spending a great deal of time at FBC on virtue, you should have a more developed realist view of virtue as character and not merely isolated acts. As we have noted, there is a vast difference between a believer who is by character a gossip and a believer who may gossip *on occasion* but is not a gossip by nature because of virtue. The person who is a gossip by character (vice) actually sees gossiping as something attractive, desirable and good, at least on some level. However, the person who has virtue in that area does not see gossip as desirable or pleasurable or a good. The more virtue a person has in that area the more disgusting gossip will be viewed for him.

This principle of virtue is applicable to all virtues. A person who really loves God preeminently will be devoted to Him *by nature/character* and love His Word and plan. For instance, he will have the character that will love Bible teaching. A person who loves mammon, first and foremost, will have a character that will seek mammon and will have the character that is preoccupied with the details of life and things of this world (money, fame, sex, food, entertainment, self, gossip). It really is all about character, i.e., virtue—there is natural virtue available to all and supernatural virtue only available through the execution of the spiritual life.

Let's note a few more things about the first four of the eight virtues that we have been considering in our passage:

1. *Rejoice always*. This is the shortest verse in the Bible in the Greek. Instead of thinking of this in terms of isolated acts of joy associated with fellowship, consider it as a virtue, as character. Are you the kind of person who is filled with joy about the Word of God and the plan of God? Is that your character? Or have you habituated your nature into the vices of carnality so much that you are a complainer about the details of life? You are your character and you are forming it every day by how you live out your life. The heart of true spirituality and Christianity is the outlook of joy, a joy about God, the Word of God, and the people of God. This joy is not dependent on the circumstances or details of life. This joy is directly related to life with God and His wonderful promises, read Psalm 16:11 and Philippians 4:4. Recall that the

Thessalonians were under persecution, yet they were exemplary in their spiritual lives. If you are not a person who is joyful about the Lord and the Word of God, you should know that you cannot change overnight. You did not become complacent about God overnight. What you are going to have to do is change the direction of your life and start making good choices to rebuild the virtue/character that you have lost—it will take some time. The only way things can turn around *quickly* is for you to experience a major life crisis that forces you to see God in a whole new way.

2. *Pray without ceasing.* The person who has the spiritual virtue in the area of prayer prays continually (not continuously or non-stop). This means that this person has the spiritual character, which prays to God about everything: in thanksgiving, before meals, in time of trouble, for their loved ones, for fellow believers, for personal wisdom, for strength, for virtue, for God's strength in dealing with certain temptations (obnoxious people, thought testing, food, sex, and difficult circumstances). Virtue in this area means that the believer by nature enjoys talking to God about all things, small and large, which means he lives a life of regular fellowship or communion with God.
3. *In everything give thanks.* The believer with spiritual virtue in this area sees, for example, 'Ehyeh giving existence to all things and working all things out together for good to them that love God (Rom. 8:28). This spiritual virtue recognizes that everything that comes into the life does so only because of the will of God. He knows that God is in control. This mandate (performance of mandates under the FHS alone creates virtue) includes the phrase "for this is the will of God." This is God's will for your life. Only by recognizing that God is in absolute control can you thank Him for everything, prosperity as well as adversity. Nothing short of the power of virtue has the power to give believers capacity to be thankful for all things because only spiritual virtue gives the believer the ability to see and believe all things in their lives are from the will of God. *God has a purpose for everything that happens to your life!*
4. *Do not quench the Spirit.* "Quench" carries the idea of putting out a light or a torch, lamp, or fire. It is used metaphorically here to speak of the hindering the operations of the Holy Spirit. The Bible portrays the Holy Spirit as both heat and light. As heat, He impresses the reality of God upon the believer. As light, He reveals who God is to the believer. By refusing to live for God in his directives, the believer quenches the Holy Spirit with a life of carnality. Character follows us wherever we go. Without the right character, we are unable to even stay in fellowship for an extended period of time. The believer who lives a life quenching the Spirit is going to have great difficulty seeing God, understanding God, trusting God, hoping in God, let alone loving God more than anything else.

We will look at a few more things about the next four virtues in our passage in the next lesson

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.

In closing, consider the importance of virtue in the context of our 1st and 2nd order wills. Our 1st order will is related to our current character with its attitudes. Our 2nd order will is the will and character we wished we had. Now, consider the four virtues: abundant joy in God, abundant prayer life with God, abundant thanksgiving, and abundant life of the Spirit. For someone to wish that they had more joy, more prayerfulness, more thanksgiving, and more transforming power of the Holy Spirit than they currently possess means that this is their 2nd order will. The problem is that one has to have at least a modicum of virtue to even want (2nd order will) to be the kind of person who is by nature more joyful and thankful in all things. The only way to advance in these virtues is to start doing these virtues, which is only possible by meaningful and consistent fellowship with God. The wonderful prospect is that anyone can look forward to becoming more joyful and thankful and spiritual as they live with, before, and after God. All one has to do is really desire it with a desire that is strong enough to make virtuous choices with, before, and after the Lord.

*In 'Ehyeh,
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Genesis 17:1 Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless [develop spiritual virtue].