

# Communion

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We had a rather fascinating discussion this morning at the 9 o'clock hour. We were talking about salvation provided through Jesus Christ and the sending of missionaries throughout the world to reach people who have never heard the name of Christ.

And what happens to these people who have not believed in the Lord Jesus? Most of them, many of them at least, because they've never heard of Him. So, if salvation is available only through believing on the Lord Jesus, what about the multitudes of people who have never heard the name of Christ, don't even know He was born, it's not possible for them to believe on Him.

What is their status? And we coupled with that salvation or the problem attending it in the Old Testament before Christ came.

Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. But what was it that he believed? We know the object of our faith today is in the person of Christ, death, burial, and resurrection applied to us on the basis of our faith in Him.

But before Christ came, what was the status of people? How did God deal with them? And then, right near the very end, someone injected a clinker.

[ 1 : 2 0 ] We're talking about election. So, we're going to pursue that a little bit next week and tie that in as well. That will be at the 9 o'clock hour. And in addition to considering the fate of the heathen who have never heard and coupling that with predestination, election, foreordination, something that we talked about several months ago, which I told you I had reversed my position.

Well, apparently we're going to revisit it at least for a session or two. So, if that is at all of interest to you, be here at 9 o'clock next morning, Sunday morning, and we will delve into that.

I think you will find it stimulating, to say the least. Gary Harple, chairman of our Board of Elders, who ordinarily reads scripture for us, is really laid aside.

He's got major problems with his knee and a great deal of pain and swelling up like a football.

And it's pretty obvious that he's likely going to be scheduled for some kind of surgery in the not-too-distant future. So, in his absence, we would ask you to turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 for our scripture portion this morning, relating to the message of thankful, always thankful.

[ 2 : 4 6 ] 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, and beginning with verse 12, if we will please.

Verse 12. But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Live in peace with one another. And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.

Now, here are a number of positives and a number of negative directives. And all of these in the list here just indicate one essential thing to me, and that is people are the same no matter what generation you're talking about or what century they live in.

All human beings are essentially the same in our fallenness, and thus we are targets for these things. The unruly need to be admonished, and the faint-hearted need to be encouraged, and the weak need to be helped, and all men need to have patience with them.

[ 4 : 16 ] See, verse 15, see that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.

Now, here are some directives upcoming, beginning in verse 16, that sound like they are just flat-out, downright difficult.

Some would even say perhaps impossible. But I can assure you, God, through His Word, never requires anything from us that we cannot accomplish.

God is not unreasonable in His demands. He does not expect you to perform in any way that He has not equipped you to perform. He is not a hard taskmaster.

His yoke is easy. His burden is light. Rejoice always. Don't know about you, but I would feel a whole lot better if the verse said, Rejoice most of the time.

[ 5 : 30 ] Or a lot of the time. Or just some of the time. But rejoice always? Are you kidding me?

Pray without ceasing. This does not mean that you walk around all day long muttering a prayer under your lips to the exclusion of everything else.

But it simply means that there is to be no situation enter our life but what it is not a subject and a matter of prayer.

It's kind of like saying, pray about everything. Pray about whatever comes up. Seek the mind and the will of the Lord regarding everything. The psalmist uses an expression that's quite curious.

I don't recall exactly where it is but he's talking about the heathen or the unbelievers. And the psalmist said that God is not in all their thoughts. And that is a curious expression.

[ 6 : 36 ] God is not in all their thoughts. What does that mean? You go around all day thinking God, God, God, God. You don't have time or ability to think of anything else.

No, it doesn't mean that at all. It just means that there is no area of serious thinking or doing in your life that is devoid of God. It means you pull him into every decision, into every transaction.

You always give consideration and thought to God, his nature and his character and his will in everything that you do.

It just becomes an automatic thing. For those who are unbelievers, God is distant from their thoughts. He hardly ever plays any part in the picture at all with whatever they're doing.

Unless they find themselves in a super life-threatening situation, then they cry out, Oh, God. But other than that, God is distant from them.

[ 7 : 37 ] He is not in their thoughts at all. That couples in with this prayer without ceasing. And then verse 18, In everything... Yeah, I would rewrite that one too.

I would change verse 16 to rejoice most of the time. And I would change 18 to in most things give thanks. But who is writing this?

The Apostle Paul is writing it. But who is behind it? It is the God who inspired Paul to write what he wrote that is behind it.

And even though there is a purely human instrument that is being used to record this, I've often wondered, in connection with Paul being the author here, did he always practice what he preached?

Did Paul rejoice always or did he just write it? this may be a step aside, but I think he just wrote it.

[ 8 : 57 ] I don't think he rejoiced all the time. And I don't know that in everything he gave thanks. Why would I say that? I have to say it.

Because Paul, inspired as he was, was a human being. He didn't live a perfect life. In fact, we can go so far, I think, as to say that Paul did not always live what he preached.

Neither do I. Neither has anyone who ever lived apart from Jesus Christ. He's the only one who was utterly, totally, consistent in that.

In our fallenness, we can look at these verses and we can obey them and respond to them. Not perfectly and not consistently. But we are called to do this.

We have to make room and allowance for our humanity and for our fallenness. And I'm not saying that to give anybody, what shall I say, liberty to deny these things or the validity of them.

[ 10 : 07 ] I think this is the ideal. I think this is what we are called to. I think this is what is expected of us knowing that in our fallenness, we're not going to do this perfectly.

So we don't rejoice always. It's a concept that it's a concept that we embrace and we know it is the right thing to do.

But we all have the capability of getting out of walking in the spirit and we end up walking in the flesh. So what are we to do about it?

We are to acknowledge it as what we've been doing and we get right back with the program. And you know what you call that? You call that growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks. And then, look at what he adds to it. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

[ 11 : 22 ] What? To rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. That's what is in the will of God for us. Now let me ask you a question.

And it's a nasty kind of question. Okay? I'm setting you up for something. If this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you and for me and for Paul, what happens when you don't do these things?

what happens when you don't rejoice always? What happens when you don't give thanks in all things?

For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. What happens if you don't do that? The only logical conclusion is this. You are out of God's will.

If this is God's will, then the failure or the refusal to do these things puts you outside of God's will. It doesn't put you outside of God's love or God's care or God's salvation or God's eternity for you, but it puts you outside of God's will.

[ 12 : 41 ] In other words, you are not where you are supposed to be with the Lord. And I speak from experience because I've been there a number of times. I kind of cycle back and forth in and out of God's will.

Anytime I do something, think a thought, express an attitude, whatever, that is contrary to the character and nature of God, I've stepped out of that sphere. And the only way to get back in it is to acknowledge that I've stepped out of it.

Some people never acknowledge it. When you acknowledge it, you repent. That's the meaning of the word. You change your mind.

Have you ever found yourself in just a foul, rotten mood about something? Whether it's the weather or your aches and pains or your relatives or your mate or circumstances at work or something, you're just in a foul mood.

You're really rejoicing then, aren't you? Now, the tendency is to come back and say, but you've already said that we live as a fallen person in a fallen world.

[ 13 : 56 ] How can we be this happy thing all the time and rejoice all the time? And why should we? Life deals some pretty dirty blows sometimes. I've got a right to get my nose out of joint about this or that or something else or those stupid in Washington support that kind of nonsense.

rejoice. But you know what? That doesn't qualify for rejoicing always. But how can you rejoice when some idiots make it so impossible for any normal person to rejoice?

You've got grounds for rejoicing there that you're not one of them. Doesn't that make you feel better? That's a cause for rejoicing. See what the Lord has delivered you from?

Is it easy to do this? Rejoice always in everything. Give thanks for... No. It isn't easy. It's terribly difficult. Someone said, I think it was A.W. Tozer who said, living the Christian life is not hard.

It's impossible. And he's on the right track. But texts like this keep calling us back to where we're supposed to be.

[ 15 : 23 ] And when we read them, they remind us that we are not there. So what do you do? You just acknowledge that. And you say, Lord, I'm into slippage again.

I know I'm not following your directive. And in this matter, I am out of your will. And I want back in it. Thank you for forgiving me for departing from the way I want to get back in step.

The reason these things are so difficult is because we are all from time to time overwhelmed with our circumstances.

As I've said, life can deal some pretty dirty blows. Just bowl you over. And you may feel anything but thankful.

And you are not in the mood to rejoice. And you might even snap at someone who suggests you should rejoice. I know many of you here know Mike Maddox.

[ 16 : 30 ] He was my boss for several years when I was with radio station WEEC. And we always referred to him. Never to his face but often behind his back. automatic Mike we called him.

And you say, Hey Mike, how you doing today? Terrific! That was his standard answer all the time. Terrific! And it just got to be a matter of humor among all the staff and everything.

Anytime you ask Mike how he is he's going to say terrific. And you know you look behind that and you know what's involved there? Now I don't know that he's always got it together under the surface but on the surface it's an expression of rejoicing and giving thanks.

Terrific! And I happen to know that there were some times in his life when things weren't all that terrific but that was still the answer you were going to get.

It's terrific no matter what. You rejoice no matter what. Yes but you don't know what I'm going through. Well the one who told us to do this through his humanity by way of inspiration rejoice always was one who knew what it meant to be beaten within an inch of his life.

[ 17 : 56 ] To have had his back laid bare and open with lashes from those who mercilessly applied them. he knew what it meant to be in great deprivation not having any idea where his next meal was coming from or if it was coming.

He knew what it meant to be weary in body and mind. Many times it is spoken of him that he labored and it means to toil to the point of exhaustion where you have worked so long and so hard you're just ready to drop and someone living under those circumstances says rejoice always this is the will of God concerning you you know if we could get a handle on this and I'm not suggesting that either you or that myself is going to practice this perfectly have no illusions about that we will not arrive but if we can just familiarize ourselves enough with the principles so that they come to mind when we know we are not in a rejoicing mood maybe remembering this will help to bring us back there and why should we do this the writer is not suggesting that there won't be anything come into your life that you shouldn't rejoice for you know we have periods of great bereavement great sadness great grief can you rejoice in the midst of that yes you can yes you can can you give thanks in everything including some of life's most painful losses can you give thanks in that and rather than spending all of our time asking why why why why are you allowing this why aren't you preventing that why don't you stop this why don't you do that if we just turned it around and we're thankful this is not a pollyannish thing

Paul isn't saying give thanks for everything I know you can build too much on Greek prepositions but there's a huge difference between saying giving thanks in everything and giving thanks for everything I don't think God expects us to give thanks for significant painful losses I don't think God expects us to say oh I'm so thankful that I lost my job I'm so thankful that I lost my health I'm so thankful that I lost my mate that's morbid that's not what he's saying at all but he's saying in all of these really painful difficult circumstances we are to give thanks in them not for them and that means in the midst of this thing you have a buffer you have something to hang on to something to lean on that you are aware that it's there aren't you you are aware that you're not all alone in this thing aren't you you are aware that it's just you you are aware of that aren't you sure you are but you know what you do same thing

I do you forget it you forget you forget he that spared not his own son but freely gave him up for us all how shall he not with him also freely give us all things the basis for our being thankful in all things and the basis for our rejoicing evermore is because we know we absolutely know what it is that has already been accomplished for us and that is intended to outweigh every negative every hurt every pain every loss that ever comes into your life because the greatest thing that matters the most has already been accomplished for you and it's in the bank in your name don't lose sight of that but when negative circumstances come and we are overwhelmed with them we lose sight of it we forget we forget what

God has done for us in Christ and all we can do is think of the present pain and the present difficulty and it prevents us from giving thanks it prevents us from rejoicing you see it's all a matter of perspective God in his word has provided us with his perspective about everything and anything and that passage in Romans 8 28 God works all things together for good for those who love him who are the called according to his purpose is absolute gold but we forget it oh we know it it's there in our psyche but we don't pull it out and bring it up front so we can really work with it and remember that it's really true it's because we're so circumstances life is so much with us we just forget and why does

[ 23 : 45 ] God even allow these negative circumstances we're his children we're committed to him we love him he loves us why doesn't he give us a free ride why doesn't he make the pathway rosy why doesn't he do that well let's come back to something else that Paul wrote in chapter five and I'm confident that he's taking his own advice Romans chapter five Paul said therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand and we exult exult you know what a good synonym for that word exult is rejoice good synonym we exult or we rejoice in hope that is in the absolute confidence of the glory of God what is all of that stuff in verses one and two that's all past that's all accomplished that's all done and over with that's in your name in

God's bank to your account it's a done deal that too is something that we tend to forget so why this business of suffering and pain and deprivation and look at verse three not only this but we also exult rejoice in our tribulations tribulations someone may well say now you've just gone too far that's just plain nuts you're some kind of a psycho case if you rejoice in tribulations how can you say that how can you do that well let me tell you something if you are not in Christ you can't do that you can't even think about doing that that's completely out of the question don't entertain the thought for a moment rejoice in tribulations that's crazy what are you a masochist are you somebody who volunteers for pain and heartache and trouble not only this but we also exalt in our tribulations knowing knowing knowing not thinking not suspecting not hoping knowing knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance perseverance means staying power it means the ability and the willingness to hang in there and never give up when the going really gets tough you don't cave that is not natural that's supernatural and that's the whole point why do you think among other reasons the spirit of God indwells you it is to empower you and enable you to do this and as we are yielded to him rather than yielded to the flesh with the boo-hoo why me mentality we are able to do that tribulation brings about perseverance now let me ask you this question staying power stability steadfastness hunkering down and you will not cave in is there any other way to get there and realize that apart from tribulation no there just isn't this is the only way you can't reach it any other way it's like saying isn't there some way that you can get to compete in the

Olympics without training no can't be done impossible no other way you've got to go through the rigors the discipline the difficulty the deprivation the stick-to-itiveness that's what the training demands who wants that well if you want the prize badly enough you'll discipline yourself to do it but you've already got the prize you've already got it think of that because of what God has done for you in Christ Jesus he is asking us to accommodate the situation that is a reality with what he is trying to do in our life and when he allows tribulation and difficulty come into the average Christian life do you know what he gets in return he gets a whole lot of belly aching and complaining and griping why me why now what did

I do to deserve this oh woe is me nobody knows the trouble I've seen and that's what he gets from most of us and he's gotten a fair share from me and I'm not proud of it but I'm just as human as anybody else come back with this kind of negative stuff all I'm doing is forgetting who I am and what has been provided for me we have this ongoing thing called a temporal lapse of memory we forget who we are in Christ we forget what was done for us to put us in Christ and we just moan and groan and complain and gripe can I get an amen yeah you've all been there haven't you know and you know despite all of this God still loves us with an incredible love and perseverance proven character proven character that means tested character

God and others are going to find out what we're made of and what we really believe when it comes down to this as I've said before so say I know again problems and suffering and tribulation and disappointment and all the negative things that can come into a believer's life from living as a fallen individual in a fallen world all of those things will just reveal what you really believe and when the time gets really difficult it's an opportunity for you to find out if you really believe what you say you do so what has God done to remind us what has

[ 31 : 44 ] God provided to remind us lots of things in his word and one other thing he's done to remind us is what's right here in front of us see that little strip across the front says this do in remembrance of me if it were not for what these elements the bread and the cup if it were not for what they represent rejoicing evermore and giving thanks and everything would be absolutely out of the question and you know what that would make you like it would make you just like an unbeliever who has no reason to rejoice and doesn't have any idea what he ought to be thankful for and these elements mean nothing to him but for you who are in Christ what these represent mean everything because what lies behind these is the reality of the death burial and resurrection of

Christ coupled with his promise of a return and what these things stand for that's what enables you to rejoice evermore that's what enables you to give thanks for everything I've often said that if you lose all of your health so you're about five breaths away from entering those pearly gates and you've lost all of your wealth because you've been driven into bankruptcy or whatever you have every reason in the world to rejoice and to give thanks just because of what God has already done for you in Christ wow amazing amazing love amazing grace thankful always thankful well let's open our hymnal please the number 790 and we'll sing just a second verse number 790 verse 2 appreciate it if you'd stand please be mean a time a day which

In the future of the world, O God, O God. We've lost our sound.

Well, that's okay. I'll just speak up. I've got to go to the bell. Beautiful, sunshiny day.

You see the sunshine? Think of the faithfulness of God. Give thanks. When it's pouring down rain, think of the faithfulness of God. Give thanks.

[ 35 : 48 ] When it's snow, I see. Give thanks.

In everything give thanks. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. So we come to this table today.

And this is all about remembering. You know, that was such a monumental thing that happened on Calvary 2,000 years ago.

In our heart of hearts, we're likely to think, Well, who in the world could forget that or its significance? I'll tell you who could. All God's people could.

And we all do. And we all do from time to time. The world, of course, knows nothing of it. Yet we remember it as a mark of history. And we log it as a fact.

[ 36 : 48 ] But we don't remember it so as to apply it to the present situations that we're facing. And that's what robs us of a thankful spirit and of giving thanks.

Because we don't keep the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in the mix of our experience. And it's supposed to color everything. And the more we recall it, the more it will color everything.

And the more our attitude will gravitate toward a more consistent, thankful, rejoicing spirit. So we just need to condition ourselves to think along that vein.

And it is so easy to just dismiss it. And as I said, to be overwhelmed by our present circumstances. We forget the background. I trust that these thoughts will help us to remember.

The bread of which we are going to partake symbolizes the body of our Lord. And these are just small little pieces of bread.

[ 37 : 59 ] And they are designed to help us to remember that it was the physical body of Christ. And these elements are physical. And other than that, there's no other similarity.

They're just reminders of what was taking place on that day 2,000 years ago or that night. And Christ said, as he passed this common loaf and each one pulled a piece off of it.

And Christ said, this is my body which is given for you. And you are so much the main wanting to identify. It's kind of a secret.

I feel pretty much appreciated. I'm sure that the apostles must have been completely puzzled by what Jesus said.

For they had no idea of what was really going to transpire the next day. That he who came writing in the town to the triumphant shouts of Hosanna to the son of David would be turned into an angry mob that would be saying crucify him, crucify him.

[ 39 : 40 ] Yet after the fact they could look back on that night that he spent with them. And they would acquire a whole new understanding as to what he meant when he said, Take him, this is my body which is given for you.

Take our hymnals again. Same together, verse 2. Beside us to guide us. Number 790. Number 790. We'll be right back when we talk to In the same manner, he took the cup.

After eating the bread, he took the cup, and he said to his apostles, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

And as often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you show forth the Lord's death until he comes. Sing together that last verse, please, number 790.

Sing together that last verse, please, number 790. Let's pray. Sing together that last verse, please, number 790.

[ 41 : 59 ] I noted with real curiosity that line, Let thy congregation escape tribulation.

What do you make of that? Sounds contradictory to what we've been saying, doesn't it? In deference to the hymn writer, we will presume that he's talking about ho eclipsis, tribulation the great one, in which case, he was a pre-rapture believer.

Congregations do not grow, and individuals do not grow by escaping tribulation, but by bearing up under it.

That's where the patience comes from. In connection with the message, I want to share this passage with you from Habakkuk.

Many of you are familiar with it, but it's a passage that seldom gets read, because most Christians couldn't even find Habakkuk without using the index of their Bible.

[ 43 : 34 ] But listen to what the verses say. Though the fruit tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the skulls, yet I will exalt in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

It says it all, doesn't it? We're going to wait upon you now to receive the elders' benevolent offering. A number of people have been aided throughout the year.

Many of them not from Grace Bible Church, but they were what we deem to be legitimate cases through the year that have arisen. People are facing a lot of real hardships economically, and when we are in a position to help alleviate some of that, we want to do so, and that is part of what the church is all about.

So we're going to ask the elders to receive a benevolent offering, and we do that in conjunction with our communion service each time. If you are not prepared to give, don't feel badly about it.

You can always, if you wish, drop something in the offering box, mark it benevolent fund, and it will be channeled to that particular cause.

[ 45 : 12 ] So you can do that any time of the year. It doesn't make any difference, and if you label it benevolent fund, we'll see that that's where it gets to. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.