

ECCLESIOLOGY 101

How the Local Church Lives and Breathes part 2

1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

In **verses 12-28** Paul is closing this amazing letter by addressing **NOT the leaders** of the church in Thessalonica — but the community of believers at large. In these verses Holy Spirit gives to us a clear picture of a living, breathing Community of Believers.

In **Verses 16-22** we have what one commentator called “the standing orders of the Christian Church”. A series of short exhortations that show how the individuals in the community of believers should live.

¹⁶**Rejoice always**

He has **reminded** these believers in the very beginning of this letter that Jesus has **delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thes. 1:10)**. He’s reminded them that Jesus is going to come and **catch them away** so that they might forever be with Him; that they will be reunited with their loved ones who have preceded them into the presence of the Lord (**1 Thes. 4**). ALL of that is the glorious hope of every Christian!

Our Bible Bus reading in Psalms this past Saturday fits this so beautifully — **Psalm 107** — It’s titled **Let the Redeemed of the Lord says so**

Psalm 107:1-2 Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! ² Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble

THAT should be the way we live and breathe as individual believers. But that seems to go out the window when the line at In N Out is long or slow! There’s a part of each of us that is prone to complain rather than rejoice! **If we believe HALF** the things we say we believe — we actually have NOTHING to complain about — but plenty to rejoice about!

THIS is so challenging to me — because it is my LIFE’S WORK to study and teach these very truths. I of all people I have the weakest excuses for **not** rejoicing.

DON'T MISS THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT —

Rejoice always — follows verse 15 —¹⁵*See that no one repays anyone evil for evil*

You might have slanderous reports about you being spread in the community of believers; or have someone in the community of believers accusing you of things you would never even dream of doing. You might be cut to the heart by the disloyalty or ingratitude of those in the community of believers who ought to have been your friends BUT — Paul says “**rejoice always.**”

QUOTE: Charles Spurgeon — *“There is no limit to the exhortation. It is ever in season. Through fire and through water, through life and through death, “rejoice evermore.”*

That does not mean that you should be phony! David was filled with the Holy Spirit when he wrote — *Why are you cast down O my soul?* It would appear that you can be filled with the Spirit and depressed. It doesn't say that we DON'T go through hard times or DON'T shed tears. It does say that joy and rejoicing should be a part of our lives. Because JOY is not rooted in happenings — HAPPINESS is rooted in happenings. Joy is rooted in Jesus!

¹⁷**pray without ceasing,**

QUOTE: Spurgeon — He preached from this text and **opened** his sermon by **setting the context...**

*The position of our text is very suggestive. Observe what it follows. It comes immediately after the precept, “Rejoice evermore;” as if that command had somewhat staggered the reader, and made him ask “How can I always rejoice?” and, therefore, the apostle appended as answer, “Always pray.” **The more praying the more rejoicing.** Prayer gives a channel to the pent-up sorrows of the soul, they flow away, and in their stead streams of sacred delight pour into the heart. **At the same time** the more rejoicing the more praying..... Holy joy and prayer act and react upon each other.*

pray without ceasing does not mean that you are to be closing your eyes and folding your hands while driving your car (*Sorry officer — just praying without ceasing!*)

It means that pray should be a RECURRENT and REGULAR part of your life.

INTERESTING — We have a funny take on prayer life and “devotions”.

Listen — There can be no devotions without DEVOTION! DEVOTION is NOT something that happens for 15 minutes in the morning. **Imagine** if I did that with my wife. *“Come on honey — it’s 6:00am — let’s get up and talk for 15 to 30 minutes.* She rolls in at 6:30 and I say — *SORRY — It’s 6:30 — devotions are over — see ya tomorrow morning.* But I wanted to ask you something. *No No — we have devotions in the morning — THAT’S when we talk.*

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING — means that we pray at any time or any place.

Lord — What do you want me to do here? Lord — what do I say? This person is asking me a question as if they really think I have the answer!

Our heavenly Father has His door OPEN ALL the time! Prayer should be one of the most notable EVIDENCES of the New Birth. It should be the most natural thing in the world for one of God’s children to do — like breathing. Prayer is like breathing in the sense that an oxygen deprived life is a marginalized life — the human brain deprived of oxygen is marginalized. Prayer is like breathing in the sense that you can do it while you do other things — Talking to God / Listening to God — Listening to God / Talking to God. When I am in this mode, the Holy Spirit continually prompts me to pray for people and situations.

HERE’S THE DEAL — PRAYER assumes the Lord’s presence — not His absence! He is ALWAYS present — ALWAYS present to speak — ALWAYS present to listen.

Let’s revisit the concept that praying Without ceasing carries that idea of RECURRING prayer. It isn’t necessarily wrong to be asking God for something over and over again throughout a day — or a week — or a year — or over years.

The prophet **Daniel** is a great example of this. In **Daniel 10** we're told that Daniel was praying for **21 days** asking for insight before Gabriel appeared with the answer.

EXAMPLE: A great modern day illustration of this is Billy Graham's first evangelistic crusades in the former Soviet Union. (My experience at the Moscow Sports Center where the press was so great that I was moving but my feet weren't touching the ground — so great was the HUNGER to hear the Gospel). **One man was interviewed and he said — *We knew that he was coming— we prayed for him to come to our city for 18 years!*** I pray for 18 minutes and wonder why God hasn't answered!

CONSTANTLY RECURRING prayer is what **the life of the individual within the community of believers** should look like — and **then the community** is a **praying organism**.

QUOTE: E. M. Bounds; *Power Through Prayer* — *The little estimate we put on prayer is evident from the little time we give to it.*

¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Psalm 106:1 Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

NOTE — It does NOT say “FOR EVERYTHING” give thanks. It does say — IN everything – every circumstance. When Valerie got word from the pathologist that she had breast cancer — we did not thank God FOR her cancer. But we were able to thank Him **for his nearness** to us. We were able to thank God for **the string of tender mercies** He wrapped us in (Our two oldest children were in town on the very day we got the news. Deb had come into town because she had recently gotten a job with Donna Karen and just HAPPENED to have her VERY FIRST business trip and it was SACRAMENTO! Danny RARELY missed a Monday night — It just so happened that he was out of town on THAT Monday and Sean was in town leading worship on that Monday night! I was able to thank God for how my son — having just heard the news in my office — was carried along by God and went out and led Metro I in the worship of Jesus. I RARELY have guests

ministry on a Monday night when I am in town. But I was able to thank God that our dear friends Michael and Pam Rozell were at Metro THAT night and I was able to go straight home to be with Valerie after opening the evening in prayer — and they loved on Ashley and brought her home after the service.

EXAMPLE: When dating Valerie I closed my own right index finger in the car door when we got out of the car at McDonalds. I did not say — Thanks you SO MUCH LORD FOR me smashing my own finger. I did thank Him that Valerie didn't look at me and start to pray — *Lord, what was I thinking when I started to date this clown?*

For this is the will of God concerning you in Christ Jesus

FIRST — Isn't it great that God WANTS us to know His will? He is the God who speaks — The opening chapter of the first book of the Bible we find 10 times — *“God said...”*

SECOND — **THIS IS** the clearly revealed will of God for you and me as individual believers — and for the community of believers as a whole. We all find ourselves wondering — *Is it the will of the Lord for me to _____?*

But this is ONE area of our lives where we should NEVER be scratching our heads asking — *I wonder what the will of God is for me? THIS is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus!*

DON'T MISS THIS — we are told to do these things **because** it is the will of God. The idea here isn't so much *“this is God's will, so you must do it.”* The thought is rather *“this is God's will, so you can do it.”*

It isn't easy to *rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks* — but we **CAN** do it because it is **God's will** for you and me as **individual** believers — and **for the community of believers** as a whole. We **can** do it because He is the one at *work in us to WILL and to DO HIS good pleasure*. With His commands come His enablings.

¹⁹**Do not quench the Spirit.**

THIS IS SO HUGE — The Christian life is not a matter of forgiven sinners doing the best they can within the scope of their natural abilities to follow Jesus and live on mission with Jesus. The whole of the Christian life is something supernatural. It begins by the Holy Spirit.

It is carried along by the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It is led — directed — and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is carried out by the various gifts of the Holy Spirit — which are actually the various ways the Holy Spirit **manifests** Himself. Those spiritual gifts are the means whereby man is enabled by the Holy Spirit to do those things which are not humanly possible.

KEY QUESTION: How do we quench the Spirit?

First — This is not a free pass for people to be weird when the community gathers to worship and study God's Word. There are some spirits that NEED quenching. There are those people who act in extremely bizarre ways and when you try to address them they say — *Don't quench the Spirit brother. Or — The Lord told me to do that!*

Paul says — ***Don't put the fire of the Holy Spirit out.*** If you want to put out the fire of the Holy Spirit in a community of believers here is how you can do it!

Don't love one another — Don't be at peace with one another — Don't warn the unruly — Don't comfort the small-souled person — Don't lay hold of the weak — Repay evil for evil — Stop rejoicing — Stop praying — Stop giving thanks

THAT will quench the Spirit

If there is anything we **truly do need** — it is the fire of the Holy Spirit in our lives — the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives! WHAT does that look like?

QUOTE: An early Church Father speaking of the power of the Holy Spirit in a service — *The power of the Holy Spirit was present to melt the heart of the most hardened sinner with the love of Jesus Christ!*

²⁰**Do not despise prophecies**

Rev. 19:10 For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

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PROPHECY is not merely predictive in nature. **prophecies** — is from a compound Greek word

Prefix **pró** = **before or forth**

Suffix+ **phemí** = **tell**

Has the literal meaning of *speaking forth*.

QUOTE: Vine — *Though much of the Old Testament prophecy was purely predictive — prophecy is not necessarily, nor even primarily, foretelling. It is the declaration of that which cannot be known by natural means,*

DON'T MISS THIS — They were not to **despise** or **hold in contempt** someone coming to them and saying — *I think that the Lord is putting this on my heart for you.*

Think of the context.

If you are going to **warn** or **exhort** or **comfort** someone — Surely the ministry of the Spirit and the testimony of Jesus is going to be a part of it. So, if someone comes up to you and says — *I think you should pray about THIS* — you **DON'T START** by despising them or their word. You start with the next words of Paul

²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good.

despise = *treat prophecy as if it's worthless*

²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good.

examine carefully implies a working knowledge of the Word of God

2 Tim 2:15 ¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

The “prophecy” is **first tested** against the standard of God's Word — and **then we hold fast to what is good.**

We never want to confuse the New Testament GIFT of prophecy with the Old Testament OFFICE of the prophet. The New Testament gift of prophecy is different from Old Testament office of prophet. Time and again we read the Old Testament prophets saying, “Thus says the Lord.” The Old Testament prophets spoke the very words of God. In that, they had absolute authority in what they said. In the Old Testament to disobey a prophet of God was to disobey God.

The New Testament gift of prophecy is not reporting the very words of God which must be obeyed in their nuance and in their minutiae. Rather, the New Testament gift of prophesy is reporting in merely human words what God has brought to mind.

When a Christian exercises the gift of prophecy that utterance is not to be judged on the basis of “*I like the sound of that*” or, “*That sounds so exciting — so spiritual!*” By inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul said that a prophetic message was to be carefully evaluated

1 Cor 14:29*let the others weigh what is said.*

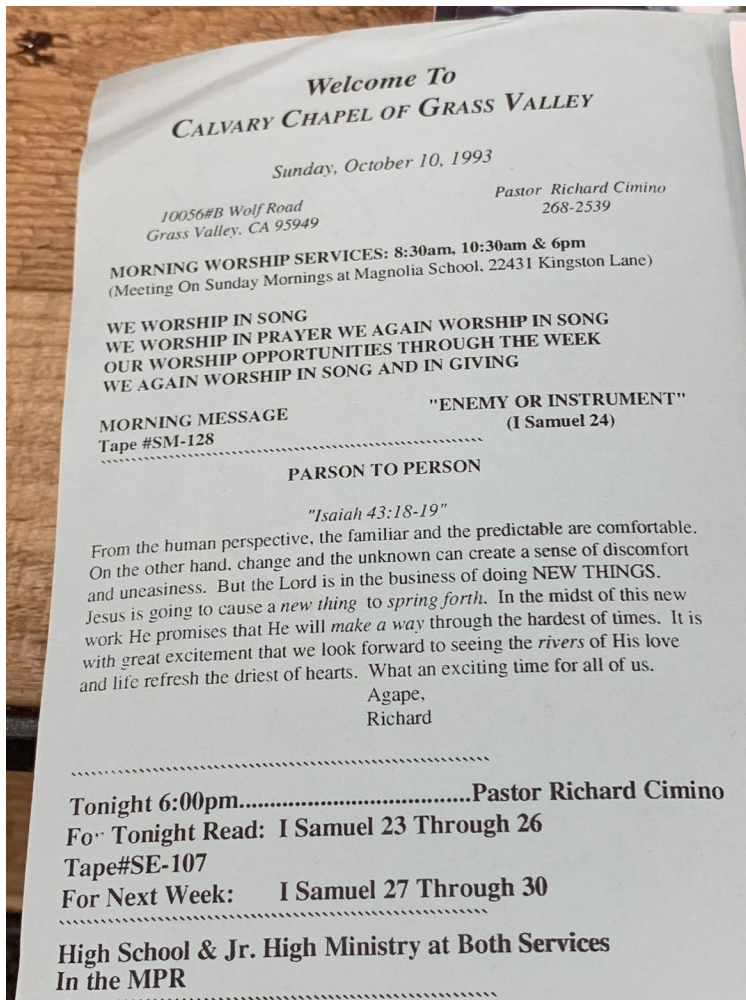
Paul’s command **presupposes** the message may contain a mixture of the valuable and the worthless.¹ AGAIN — that sets apart the New Testament GIFT of prophecy from the Old Testament OFFICE of prophet.

Here’s the deal — The evaluation of the prophecy doesn’t rest with the one giving the prophecy. Those hearing the prophecy are to judge as to whether or not it agrees with what the Holy Spirit has said in the pages of Scripture. It is the responsibility of those hearing it in a corporate gathering, to approve it and receive it. Here’s why it’s so important to be involved in a community of men and women who are living out their lives in Jesus together. Those on the receiving end may not bear witness to it — they might discern that what the person said was their own thoughts and their own inclinations — they were voicing their own desires and claiming that it was revelation from God!

¹ Carson, D. A. (1987). *Showing the Spirit: a theological exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (pp. 119–120). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

If you believe the Lord is using you in the gift of prophecy I think it's crucial that you're doing life with people — and you have developed trust and reputation.

EXAMPLE: The sister who came up to me and handed me an old weekly bulletin — she said that she kept the Sunday bulletins for the “Parson to Person” and to keep track of what we’ve studied — She handed me this bulletin that was dated 1993 — and she said: *You wrote this for us — I believe that God has told me that it's for YOU!*



I had no reason to doubt her integrity. She wasn't one running around claiming she had the gift of prophecy.

Finally — if the prophecy is foretelling something yet future — if it is Divine in origin then it WILL come to pass.

Again — A prophecy might sound weird — it might even come from someone who looks weird. But that does not mean it is not the Lord — that is why we are not to DESPISE prophecy or hold it in contempt — instead we're to be open — *weigh it out — put it to the test of Scripture — hold fast to what is good.*

One of the most needful and common forms of prophecy in a community of believers is TELLING FORTH the mind of the Lord.

EXAMPLE: Ric Brennan — clueless as to what had happened in our day *The Lord told me to come and give you this verse — I have no idea what it's about — but here I am and here's the word. Simon — Satan has desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat — but I have prayed for you that your faith might not fail.*

We are **so glad** that ^{1.} He spent time in the Word of God that day.

Isaiah 50:4 (ESV) The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.

^{2.} We were a part of a community of believers who were very at home talking about their relationship with the Lord, what they were learning from the Lord and what God was doing in their lives. It's how we lived and breathed.

^{3.} We are **so glad** that he obeyed the Lord and stepped out in faith and shared it with us in humility and love.

It's important to know that it's possible to be used by the Holy Spirit in a prophetic way without knowing it — you're just sharing what the Lord has been doing in your life, or what you've been reading — and the Holy Spirit uses your words to reveal the mind of the Lord to the person you're talking to.

EXAMPLE: John Wickham — Valerie and I were in the process of seeking the Lord as to whether or not He was sending us to Grass Valley. The church was really small, really old, smelled old and musty. It was NOTHING like the campus of

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa. I kept thinking “Why would I leave CCCM to go to THAT! One morning I was sitting with John Wickham in his old blue Mazda and he was just telling me how he had read that morning in the book of Haggai — chapter 2 — where it says that after they had finished rebuilding the Temple that it was nothing close to the magnificent temple Solomon had built. But the Lord said — *The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. And in this place I will bring peace.* [Haggai 2:9 \(NLT\)](#)

John had no idea how that revealed to me the mind of the Lord about the work that HE was going to do in that not so magnificent building. What John was sharing made it clear that God was moving us to Grass Valley — and ultimately to Roseville.

Do not despise prophecies — It is understandable why some people **treat prophecy** as if it’s **worthless**. Valerie and I took a lot of our baby steps as Christians in the Catholic Charismatic movement. We “cut our teeth” so-to-speak in an environment where people exercised the gift of prophecy, the word of knowledge, the gift of tongues, etc. As a result, we are probably more comfortable around such things than those who have never been exposed to such things. But that same background has also provided us with a fairly keen sense of what is contrived

Some of you might have a low view of prophecy — or the exercise of spiritual gifts — because you have seen the abuses and contrivances of the gifts in certain nationally known “ministries.” Perhaps you grew up in a church culture that was a microcosm of those ministries. Perhaps you grew up in a church where everyone had a “word from the Lord” for you — and as a result you have a LOW view of prophecy. But the Holy Spirit instructs us here to NOT despise such utterances.

The flip side of this — Some people say — *Why are there no spiritual gifts in operation at Metro?* Well — on one level — I would differ with them. Week after week the gift of prophecy is in operation. Week after week the mind of God for individual men and women is made known during worship and in the teaching of the Word.

We are so conditioned by the course of this world to measure the supernatural in terms of the SPECTACULAR. This is not at all a broad stroke dismissal of the

SPECTACULAR in God’s ability. But we must not confuse the spectacular with the supernatural. God can use any of us to foretell or tell forth the mind of the Lord

That said — I desire **ALL** of what the Holy Spirit would want to do in the realm of prophecy and spiritual gifts

1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

²²Abstain from every form of evil.

“refuse to do anything which is evil,” or “refuse to act in any way which even seems bad.”

THE WAY to *abstain from every form of evil* is to **HOLD FAST to that which is good**

Paul has given to them a picture of the living breathing community of believers — The local church **as it ought to be** — **as it is waiting** for the coming of the Lord

But Paul understood the utter futility of his instructions if the Thessalonians were left to themselves to live them out! The church is not a bunch of good people trying to do good things for Jesus. In fact — the un-aided human efforts to live the Christian life are worse than futile.

THIS IS SO HUGE — The Christian life is not a matter of forgiven sinners doing the best they can within the scope of their natural abilities to follow Jesus and live on mission with Jesus. **The whole of the Christian life is something supernatural.** Spiritual gifts are the means whereby man is enabled by the Holy Spirit to do those things which are not humanly possible.

We can never forget that life in the Kingdom of God, and the work of the Kingdom of God, are outside of mere human capacity. **Because** the work of the Kingdom of God is eternal in scope and consequence — it is a work that can only be accomplished in and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

For a community of believers to live and breathe as it should — engage in the mission of Jesus is a supernatural thing! It is no less supernatural today than it was in the Book of Acts. God alone can convict a person of sin, turn them from serving idols to serving the true and living God, forgive their sin, cause them to be born again, make them love holiness and cause them live for Jesus and His glory! The birth of the church and the advance of the Gospel in the Book of Acts was a work utterly outside of mere human capacity

The death of the last apostle and the completion of the Canon of Scripture hasn't changed any of that! Nearly 2,000 years later it is still a mission that is divine in nature, eternal in scope and consequence.

To attempt to do the work of the Kingdom of God WITHOUT spiritual gifts is pointless and ultimately fruitless.

By the way — the fact that spiritual gifts are not tied to man's ability means that any Christian can effectively serve God. Spiritual gifts mean that God can use normal old ME.

Knowing the supernatural nature of the Christian life — he instinctively turned to the Lord in prayer for them

²³Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely,

He asks God to completely set their lives aside for Himself and for His purposes. We should not fight against that work of God. When you and I were in the world — the god of this world set you and me apart completely for his purposes. Before we were saved we served a different master. SIN was our master. NOW — we have a NEW master! NOW we have the RIGHT master. Sensual pleasure was a cruel task master. Money was a cruel taskmaster (Money's a great servant but a cruel master). NOW we have the RIGHT master! The ultimate pursuit of life is to find the RIGHT master!

And Jesus is THAT master! Jesus is the master who **hung on a cross** in our place and **poured His own blood into the ground** so that we could be set free from the taskmasters never loved us — always lied to us and always failed us Isn't THAT the master you want? Why would you NOT want to have as your master the King of

the universe who died to save the traitors in His universe? And isn't it GREAT to be used by Jesus? There is NOTHING in the universe that can touch the joys of being set aside for the master's use.

²³and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The ONLY way to be kept blameless is to be IN Christ and WASHED by His blood.

Eph. 1:4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Jude v.24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,

²³ your whole spirit and soul and body

QUOTE: F.F. Bruce — *Paul's theology of the human being is definitely as a trichotomy.*

We have been created in the image of the Triune God. You are a spirit. You live in this body. You possess a consciousness — your soul — that relates to this world through your body.

When Adam sinned, he died spiritually. He was alive physically. His consciousness was still alive. But he was no longer in fellowship with God who was his life. Before being born again — the body and the soul are alive but because we are spiritually dead, we are incapable of fellowship with God who is spirit.

THAT is why prior to being born again we are driven by our bodies and our emotions.

Eph. 2:3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

THAT is why Jesus said — You **must** be born again.

Born again is not a cliché — It is a reality in which you are spiritually made alive to God, thus enabling you to participate in the very **life** — the very **power** — the very peace of God. And as a result you are no longer driven by *the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.... like the rest of mankind.*

²⁴He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

It really is ALL ABOUT JESUS!

²⁵Brothers, pray for us.²⁶Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.²⁷I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.