

## Do We See Ourselves As God Sees Us?

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We will begin this sermon in I Thessalonians 5. You will see as we go along here that I think God planned this whole thing out, because my split sermon here is going to weave in and out of Joe Baity's sermonette, and Mark Schindler's split sermon after me is also going to be weaving in and out of the same subject.

**I Thessalonians 5:16-18** Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

With this message I am going to give all of us an assignment. An assignment is a responsibility, a function given by a superior that one is obligated to carry out. I am not this superior, I am only the message bearer. I did not realize that this had the status of an assignment until just this week. I mean what God says here. It is an assignment for us.

I was reading recently from two vastly different themes on Biblical subjects in the context of each of these books, going through both of them at the same time. I would read one here and then an hour later I would read a little bit more, but in another book. Both authors wrote of the same specific aspect in an entirely different context but with the same specific purpose in mind, and both of them touched on I Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Verse 18 says, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Is it the will of God that we obey the Ten Commandments? Why? Because it is good for us and therefore good for God's purpose. Is it the will of God that we love one another? Is it the will of God that we pray? God is defining for us that His will is something that He wants us to do, and we will see how strongly He wants it in a second here.

In these three verses we are commanded to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and then He seems to intensify, in *everything* give thanks, and then adding, for this is the will of God. I think He meant it for all three, but being close to, "in everything give thanks," I think that it adds an emphasis to that particular one. To be thankful also can be said that we should be grateful; also that we should be appreciative, that we have a strong sense of indebtedness. All of those terms have a relationship with one another.

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I believe that the best way to take this is, first of all, that these things He is commanding here are not suggestions. "For this is the will of God" applies to all three, adding emphasis to all three.

I will be concentrating on, "In everything give thanks." With that added on there it tells me that we are required, we are obligated, to be grateful, obligated to be appreciative, we are required to pray without ceasing.

I read one time that when a person prays without giving thanks, without gratitude, he has clipped the wings of prayer so that it cannot rise. A fancy way of saying it, but it certainly adds emphasis to the need of those things.

God commands us here that we are to give thanks in every circumstance. That means in illness, in persecution, in anguish, in famine, in perils, in hunger.

**Romans 8:36-37** As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

I do not know whether you know what the word conquerors in that kind of a context means, with Jesus Christ as being part of our lives. It actually means, a great deal of encouragement. He is saying that we are invincible, we should have pleasure in being invincible if we do the right things. We have all seen the conclusion to some athletic event shown on television. Who is it that has their arms raised and huge smiles on their faces? It is the victors. God says in Jesus Christ, we are more than victors.

That term underlying the word conqueror in Romans 8:37, is actually only one word, but it took three English words to meet the meaning of that one word. That one word at its very root is derived from another Greek word that we are all familiar with, it is the word *nike*. The same word that those famous running shoes are named after and so many wear, because *nike* means victor, conqueror, winner.

We are more than victors, more than conquerors, more than winners, in Jesus Christ, unless we give up, and we *can* do that. I am giving this to you at the beginning to help us understand that we are in Christ, and He *never* loses. We are the weak link, and this is why the assignment is going to be given.

We have so much to be contented, to be happy, to feel victorious about, but the very

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fact that God has to *command* us to rejoice, to pray without ceasing, and to be thankful in everything—to do these things which are spiritual virtues, as a requirement—shows me that these things are not in us by nature. They do not come naturally, spiritual winning does not come naturally. These are qualities that we need to learn as we come to know Him.

The bottom line reason they must be commanded is because in this world, dominated by Satan and his spirit, our nature is to go in the opposite direction because that is the way he is and the way his demons are and their spirit pervades all the cultures of the world.

To put it more bluntly, to be depressed, fearful, worriers, apprehensive, timid, down in the dumps, constantly worrying and disheartened, is a function of carnality. They are functions of the spirit of this world. Remember we are ‘in Christ,’ and it is faith that is the source of our confidence—our faith in Him.

Please turn to Psalms 73. I want to pick up a couple of verses from this, and tie that into what we are going through in our lives.

**Psalms 73:15-17** If I had said, “I will speak thus,” behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of your children. When I thought how to understand this, [understand the situation that he was in] it was too painful for me—until I went into sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.

**Psalms 73:21-23** Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. [Describing the way he was before.] I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. [Notice now the change of attitude as he is recovering his proper spiritual sense.] Nevertheless I am continually with You, You hold me by my right hand.

This is what gave him the confidence to break free of the carnality that was pulling him down. It finally dawned on him that he, as we would put it today, was in Jesus Christ. As the trial built, he forgot, he overlooked God, therefore he was allowing carnal, self-centered thoughts to flood his mind. He was getting that from the world. His vexation was the fruit of his carnality because his faith had broken down for a period of time.

God has to command us, to require this as an assignment, in order to get our co-operation, to alter our thinking process about life. What goes in must be pure, as pure

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as we can find, and something has to be used like that to alter the attitude.

Now here comes a more specific assignment to help us overcome. I spent a little time here to help us understand a bit of the challenge. The specific subject I began this message with was basically, how often do we think about what God has given us, and then literally thank Him, thoughtfully and specifically, for each and every gift that we can think of? I can guarantee you, if you do this, it is going to be an ever-growing list because there is no end!

In one sense this is the solution to our attitudes about everything. So often we go into prayer without gratitude, so often we go into prayer completely depressed, so often we feel that we are defeated in every way, by everybody. Is God still on His throne? Is God still with us? That is what the man who wrote Psalms 73 said, "You are still holding my hand." It finally dawned on him after he went through a fairly long period of depression and anger, because of all the blessings everyone else was getting, and he was not.

The psalmist was so wrapped up in himself, and we get that same way, wrapped up in what is going on in our life, that it is difficult to think about anything else. Is it possible that we need some kind of an exercise to go through to help trigger a turn in the other direction? That thinking process must be broken, this is part of the assignment.

When the psalmist went into the sanctuary it began to be broken, because when he went to the sanctuary he had to be thinking about God. There was help available. It took a while for him to learn it, to get it through his skull, but he did. This is the reason why the commands are given in I Thessalonians 5:16-18. It is not just a suggestion that we pray always, it is a command from God.

We will begin this process by beginning in James 1:17. He said, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." He is God and nothing has changed to alter the truth of that statement in the book of James, because He changes not. Every good gift still comes down from Him.

Hebrews 1 adds that God upholds all things by the word of His power. Are you thankful for that? He not only brought us into existence, but all existence continues because of God! Every single day is a gift. This awesome universe is created, organized, holds together, and keeps on functioning because He has willed it so, and that universe includes us. We are no accident, and our calling is no accident, therefore every breath of air we breathe and every beat of our heart—day in, day out, year in, year out, decade in, decade out, generation in, generation out—is a gift from God, because He has a

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purpose and a place for you, individually and personally.

Consider this illustration: If our heart beats seventy times a minute, that multiplies out to 4,200 times per hour, times twenty four hours a day, multiplies out to 100,800 beats of your heart every single day, 705,000 a week, times fifty two weeks per year, that comes out to 36,291,200 times you receive a gift from our Creator! And He *never* stops giving, not just to you, but to everyone who is living. Did you know that when you were conceived in your mother's womb, your heart formed and was beating before the assignment was ever given to the brain to be formed?

God had your heart beating! It was not taking signals from the brain, because the brain was not even there. God designed it that way. That means that your heart did not need the brain to start it, you needed the heart for the rest of us to be developed, as it pumped out nourishment that was being received through the placenta. What an amazing gift and He does that for everybody born even though they might be aborted.

Are you thankful for your eyes that enable you to see? Having a tongue to enable speaking? To taste so that you can enjoy food? Ears to hear the beautiful sounds of a loved one's voice, and music? And being able to touch? Touch is the most sensitive of all senses.

The assignment is this: I believe we should think about what to be thankful for, what God has given us individually, and personally in the way of gifts, and not just think about it but actually write it down, so that it is always handy to begin prayers with. Not just think, I am thankful for this, but *why* are you thankful for it? Add a little more to it and I think that you will find that the list keeps getting longer and longer.

Why do I think it would be a good exercise for us to perform? Would you not want an endless list of things to be thankful to talk to God about in which you did not have in your prayers, give me this, give me that, give me the other thing? Where instead you are giving Him praise and thankfulness.

**Ezekiel 28:12-15** Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord God: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of you timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the

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midst of fiery stones, you were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

I think you are familiar enough with Ezekiel 28 to know what this book is expressing. God is talking, or describing two different personalities, one He calls prince of Tyre, and the other the king of Tyre. The king of Tyre undoubtedly is Satan the Devil.

**Ezekiel 28:17** Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you.

We will go over some of these terms; seal of perfection, wisdom, and beauty. A seal is a stamp of approval, and authority. It is the last word, the pinnacle, the peak. The king of Tyre was right in the midst of God's presence, the precious stones suggests both abounding beauty, and luxury. Pipes and timbrels suggest musical ability, a pleasant voice. He was an anointed cherub, which indicates a very high supervisory position with authority. The fiery stones seems to suggest that he rubbed shoulders with the highest power and knowledge.

In verse 16, the tone changes and he is declared profane and cast out from the presence of the glory he was given to share with others. In verse 17, the cause of the loss of praise and favor is given—pride arose in him and destroyed the relationship he had with the most high God.

The verse goes on to tell us where the pride was generated. It was generated in his mind, because he could not control his feelings about his beauty. The beauty should not be limited to that which was appealing to his eyes, which he of course was, but rather beauty represents totality, the full collection of all that God gave him, as well as his rank among his companions. We find then that he became a destroyer. We are going to learn something from this sequence of verses that we are going to list or read, here in the book of Proverbs.

**Proverbs 11:2** When pride comes then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom.

Is it possible God gives us all kinds of problems, or allows them to come into our lives in order to give us something that reminds us how weak and dependent we are?

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**Proverbs 13:10** By pride comes only contention [strife], but with the well-advised is wisdom.

When Satan became prideful he began fighting God.

**Proverbs 16:18** Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

*Pride is destructive to relationships because a person with pride is so self-concerned they can never be satisfied. (If you do not get anything other than that out of this sermon I will be happy.)* Pride can never be satisfied, no matter how much is done for them, it is never enough, they always want more, and more—they are insatiable.

When you begin thinking about what I am saying here you will understand what happened to the relationship between Satan and God. He could never be satisfied once the pride was ingrained within him and he had nothing to do but to turn to overcome that.

Please turn to II Corinthians 12. Paul is describing something that in a way was somewhat like Satan's experience there in Ezekiel 28. He is saying the things that God blessed him with in the first part of the chapter.

**II Corinthians 12:7-9** And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

I wanted this particularly because sometimes we get discouraged because we pray to God and it seems that He does not answer. You can be sure of this, that if He does not answer, it is because it would not be good for you to receive that answer. It is not that He does not want to give what you would very much like to have, and you think would pull you out of the depression that you are in. It is that He knows better and He says, no. Which tells us we are not going to have every prayer answered the way we want it to be answered. It would not be good for us because it might end up building pride in us.

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**I Corinthians 4:5-7** Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it? [You somehow generated it yourself.]

That really knocks the props out from us! We are dependent upon God totally for salvation. It is good to always have Him on your side, and to know where you stand. So the assignment is this: write down, make a list, of how much you already owe God, of how much He has already given to you, and pray to Him about how great He is, and that will begin to change the mind. We are totally dependent.