

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Good Shepherd, December, 2023

What do you want for Christmas? Go south where it is warm? Play golf at St. Andrews? Take the family to Disney World? I'm dreaming big this year; I want one day with 60 degree weather this month!

People enjoy presents. Every gift we open **should** remind us of the wonderful gift God gave us: His Son, born to die as our Savior. Jesus is and will always be, the reason for this season.

Since Jesus is our special gift from God, we don't need anything else. What can be better than having a Savior, forgiveness of sins, and the promise of heaven? Since we already have a Savior as a gift from God, what more could be on **The Christian's Christmas List**?

Paul's words are advice on how Christians can live in the last days. They read like a Christmas list of Christian actions and attitudes.

Picture a Christian thinking of the blessings God has given him/her. Knowing that God loves him/her dearly, the Christian prays, "Lord, You have been so good to me, I want to live for You. Please help me to be" And then what follows are the words of our text. Let's take a closer look at Paul's Christian's Christmas list.

Rejoice always. It is hard to be joyful all the time. But when we think of God's gift in the manger, we are happy! In reminding us to be joyful, Paul tells us to keep our focus where it belongs – on Jesus and what He did for us. When we do that, we are happy.

Next on Paul's list is Pray without ceasing. It's impossible to sit with head bowed, eyes closed, and hands folded all the time at work, school, playing sports, or driving on 151. But God wants us to make praying our regular habit. God loves us. He is waiting to hear from us about our needs. Share your hopes, your fears, and your worries with God. Pray when you need help. Don't get discouraged when you don't get the results **you** want. Pray. Pray more. Pray often.

Item three on the Christian's Christmas List is give thanks. If we think about our blessings we would never grumble or complain! God loves us and everything that God gives, even what we think is bad, is best for us. Life is happier when we give thanks for God's blessings. Do everything, everyday, for the glory of God and give thanks!

Next Paul writes Do not extinguish the Spirit. The fire that burns in every Christian is the fire of faith. When the Holy Spirit brings us to faith, the New Man in us wants to fight the good fight of faith. To keep our faith burning brightly, God gives us His Word and Sacraments to strengthen our faith. If we don't use the Means of Grace faithfully, Satan might put out the fire of our faith! We could lose this gift.

Next on the list is a group of three, Do not treat prophecies with contempt, Test everything and Hold on to the good. The word "prophecies" refers to the Word of God. God wants Christians to treat His Word with respect and as the truth. Don't neglect God's Word. Don't make excuses for not being in God's House. Hold on to the truth of the gospel so that Satan can't pry our hands off of it.

We should also test God's Word against what the world teaches. When we compare what the world says with what God's Word says, what the world says fails the test so we should not listen. These are attitudes and actions that should

be on everyone's Christmas list.

The final item on Paul's list is: Keep away from every kind of evil. We live in a world that is hostile to the Lord Jesus and His Word. People outside the church look for reasons to say, "Those Christians think they are better than everyone else; but see, they act like a bunch of hypocrites." God wants us to put as much distance between ourselves and whatever brings shame to God. We represent Christ in the world! We need to keep away from every kind of evil.

How would you feel if you received everything on your Christmas list? Smiley faces, right! The blessing God gives in the final verses of our text puts a smiley face on our often worried and grumpy faces. May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, He will do it.

God has washed our sins away with the blood of Jesus; the stink of sin is gone! God's Son died for sinners, the Innocent One sacrificed for the guilty. We are at peace! We can smile! This prayer simply asks God, from whom all blessings flow, to bless us as we grow in holy living.

We are to be like Jesus. The devil will try to lead us back to sinful ways. But the Holy Spirit strengthens us. God is faithful. He will keep us in faith until Jesus returns.

Maybe we should think about what Paul says concerning Christian actions and attitudes today and in the days to come!

Then strengthened by the Spirit, we can pray,

Lord, let me -

- always be joyful
- pray regularly
- give thanks, and

help me to -

- use Word and Sacraments faithfully
- treat Your Word with respect
- test what I want to do with what You want me to do
- remember that I represent You everyday.

Jesus is the reason for the Christmas season. Christ is still in Christmas! He never left. Our priority, our privilege and purpose in life is to worship and praise Christ, our Savior born for us!

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