

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**  
St. John's, December, 1996  
Good Shepherd, December, 2020

What do you want for Christmas? I'm dreaming big this year. Nancy and I want to go to Australia; I would like tickets to attend the Super Bowl; I would like to play golf at Pebble Beach in California; I would like 5 days in the 60's this month.

People enjoy receiving gifts. But Christmas means thanking God for His greatest gift: His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus is and will always be, the reason for the season.

If we have Jesus as 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 have saving faith as a gift from God, what is on **The Christian's Shopping List?**

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

Picture a Christian sitting at a table thinking of the blessings God has given him. Knowing that God loves him, the Christian prays, "Lord, You have done so much for me. I want to live for You. Lord, help me to be ....." And then what follows are the words of our text. Let's take a closer look at these words.

Rejoice always. It might seem to be impossible to be joyful all the time. But God's love in sending Jesus to us fills us with joy. In reminding us to be joyful, Paul is telling us to keep our focus where it belongs – on Jesus and what He did for us. It means thanking God for what He gives us instead of complaining about what we don't have.

Next on Paul's list is Pray without ceasing. It's not possible 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. Don't get discouraged when you don't get the results you want. Be persistent in prayer. God loves us very much and He makes Himself available to us any time. Share with God your hopes, your fears, and your worries. Pray when you need any kind of help. Pray. Pray more. Pray always.

Item three on the Christian's Shopping List is In everything give thanks. Here is one item we often forget because we like to complain and be negative. If we would count our blessings instead of our gripes we would never get to our gripes! God loves us and everything that God gives, even what we think is bad, is for our good. Life would be much happier if we gave thanks all the time. Do everything, everyday, for the glory of God and give thanks!

Number four is Do not extinguish the Spirit. The fire that burns in every Christian is the fire of faith. Our coming to faith was a miracle in which we had no part. When the Holy Spirit brings us to faith, we have the New Man in us who wants to fight the good fight of faith. To keep that faith burning brightly, God gives us the Word and Sacraments to create and strengthen our faith. If we don't use the Means of Grace faithfully, Satan might be able to put out the fire of faith in us! We could lose our faith.

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 truth. Don't neglect God's Word. Don't make excuses to not read or hear God's Word. 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 around us teaches. When we compare what the world says with what God says, what the world says doesn't pass the test so we should not listen. These are attitudes and actions that should be on everyone's Christmas list or our New Year's resolutions.

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 gospel. People outside the church are looking 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 - after all, we carry His name. We need to keep away from every kind of evil.

Whenever we make out a Christmas list we imagine how we would feel if we received everything on that list. We can imagine happy faces, satisfied tummies, and the "ooh's" and the "ahs." Listen to the promise that follows God's list: 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, and He will do it.

God will keep us blameless. We can't do it. God will! God has washed our sins away; we are made clean by the blood of Christ. His blood was shed for you and me, the Son of God dying for sinners, the Innocent One sacrificing Himself for the guilty. We are holy because of what Jesus did. He took the blame and gave us His holiness instead.

The devil, the world, and our sinful nature will try to tear us away from Jesus hoping to lead us back to our sinful ways. But the Holy Spirit strengthens us. He keep us in the faith until Jesus returns.

Do you have your Christmas gift list made out yet? Perhaps it would be good for us to think about the list of Christian actions and attitudes which Paul pointed out in our text. Then strengthened by the Spirit, we can pray,

Lord, let me -

- always be joyful
- pray regularly
- give thanks in every situation, and

help me to -

- use Word and Sacraments faithfully
- treat Your Word with respect
- test what I want to do with what Your Word says
- do what You want me to do and not what the world wants
- remember that I represent You in everything I do or say.

May our lives bring honor to our God who loves us all so very much! Amen

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