

Safford Church of Christ

3888 S Hwy 191, Safford, AZ 85546

20 September 2015

Topics

A.M. Bible Class:

I will be a unifying church member
(Pete Waller)

A.M. Lesson:

Our righteous acts (Isaiah 64:6)

P.M. Lesson:

Seek first the kingdom (Matthew 6:19-34)

Wednesday:

James 1:25f

Pulpit Evangelist

Ken Knowlton: 428-3494

Elders

Greg Briggs: 428-8756

John Cunningham: 428-0895

Sunday Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Sunday Morning Worship	11:00 A.M.
Sunday Evening Worship	6:30 P.M.
Wednesday Evening Class	6:30 P.M.
Thursday Ladies Bible Class	10:00 A.M.

***Great are the works of the Lord,
studied by all who delight in them. Psalm 111:2
Please silence your cell phones and other electronic devices.***

Standing orders for the church

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-19, NRSV

Stuart Briscoe

We all know that feelings cannot be commanded. Telling your spouse not to feel angry or your child not to feel badly seldom leads to a happy evening at home. But behaviors can be called for. And that's what Paul is doing.

"Rejoice always." This is not the same as commanding one to feel happy at all times. Feeling happy is the natural response to experiences that bring us rewards. Please don't ask me to feel happy when I've just smashed my thumb with the hammer or even when I've just lost the tennis match. But neither smashing my thumb nor losing my tennis match need have anything to do with my joy and rejoicing in life.

Thus, throughout the Bible, we are called to joy and rejoicing in our sufferings. I can't make any

sense of this without distinguishing between joy and happiness. I've long since accepted the fact that I cannot be happy at all times. But I'm satisfied that there can always be a basic joy in my life.

The basis of that joy is Jesus Himself. For in Him, I am able to distinguish between appearances and reality. Joy is tied to reality, not merely to appearances. This is so clear when I am with a family at the time of the death of a loved one. I was called by the sheriff in the middle of the night, informing me that the son of one of our families had just been killed in an automobile wreck. To them, at 3:00 A.M., the appearances were stark. The loss of a son. The shattering of the family. The grief. The remorse. It was not a time to call for happiness. But as the months have gone by, reality has transcended appearances. The reality of life eternal in Jesus Christ is central in their minds and hearts. The reality of God's love and presence through their grief is more than a slogan. The appearances were all very real, but the ultimate reality is Jesus Himself. And in this, they rejoice.

Even in the little things that make up most of our lives, the same truth is our hope. For a time, the smashed thumb and the lost tennis match appear to be terrible things. But the reality shines through in

the light of God's love. The thumb will heal, and if not, I still have all my other fingers. The tennis match remains lost, but I have the health and the leisure to play again, win or lose.

There is a perspective on life in Jesus Christ that enables us to rejoice always, even when we are unhappy. And this is something we can choose to do, whatever the tone of our feelings. It really becomes a matter of obedience.

"Pray without ceasing." As with the first command, we need to untangle some definitions and assumptions. Obviously, to pray without ceasing means something other than saying prayers, or the command is an impossibility. J. B. Lightfoot clarifies this point in his oft-quoted [statement that unceasing prayer] "is not in the moving of the lips, but in the elevation of the heart to God, that the essence of prayer consists."

But having made the distinction between saying prayers and praying with the heart, the question of unceasing prayer demands deeper reflection. To pray without ceasing establishes prayer, not as a part of the Christian life, but as all of it. To pray day and night, in good times and in bad, without cessation or interruption, is not the experience of most people I know. Is this just a high ideal to be achieved by a few spiritual super athletes, or is it within the reach of ordinary folks like us?

I think of the analogy of love. When one is truly in love with another, there is an unceasing awareness of the other. This does not mean that one is consciously engaged in thinking of the other, but the "presence" of the other is constant. All decisions are made with the beloved in mind. All of life is oriented around this great love.

And so it can become in our lives with God. Such a constant awareness will require certain disciplines of prayer. Universal experience makes it quite clear that daily periods of intentional prayer, reflection, and meditation are essential to establish the climate of unceasing prayer for the rest of the day. The place of daily Scripture reading also is well established as an essential discipline. I find it helpful to begin each day with some statement of Jesus to be reflected upon consciously during the day.

It is long past time for us to issue an urgent call for unceasing prayer as an object for our attention and discipline. Such prayer means nothing less than

practicing the presence of God in everything that we do.

"In everything give thanks." This is the third command, and it certainly grows out of the first two. Joy and unceasing prayer flow forth in a constant stream of gratitude. I can't imagine God being thankful for everything that happens. Things that happen because of the selfishness or sinfulness of ourselves or others need to be changed, not accepted. I prefer to thank God for being God and to focus on Him rather than on the things that happen.

While I may not be able to give thanks for all of the things that happen, I can give thanks in everything for the confidence that God is always present and is always at work for good.

Obedience to these three commands is difficult. But Christ calls us to a life of joy, prayer, and gratitude. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy, but the rewards of obedience to these commands are rich and full.

Stuart Briscoe, *The Preacher's Commentary*.

News:

Fellowship meal is today after A.M. services.

Jacey, Pete and Cindy Waller's granddaughter, is scheduled for back surgery on September 21.

Richard Tuey has cancer.

The Cunninghams are on the road again.

Extended prayer list:

Tatyana Knowlton—macular degeneration

Ken Cocke—back and shoulder pains. Infection

Janet Radar—nursing home

H.L. Boling—general health and complications from leukemia

Mike Cavasos—chronic pain, foot issues, sinus issues

Sandy Cavasos—degenerative disk disease

Nic and Ani Self—health and personal needs

Neil Short, editor. neshort@yahoo.com. <http://saffordchurchofchrist.org>

