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# “Rejoice in the Lord always”

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— Keith R. Blades

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A quick check of just about any commentary on Paul’s epistle to the Philippians will show that it is commonly acknowledged that *rejoicing* is the prevailing theme in the epistle. The words “joy” and “rejoice” occur numerous times, not only as Paul describes his own rejoicing, but also as he exhorts the Philippians to do so as well. Indeed, Paul’s charge to them in chapter 4 seems to be the tenor of the epistle:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

(*Philippians 4:4*)

However, it needs to be noted that when Paul talks about rejoicing in this verse, he does not do so without qualification. In fact Paul imposes two important qualifications in this verse that specify both the nature and condition of the joy and rejoicing he is talking about.

By the first qualification Paul makes it evident that he is not simply saying, “Don’t worry. Be happy.” He is not exhorting us to be optimists and to find a silver lining in every cloud. Nor is the rejoicing he is talking about the product of some other humanistic psychological gimmick, like the power of positive thinking, or depression-recovery therapy. And, needless to say, neither is it the work of mood-altering drugs, anti-depressants, or alcohol. Instead, by the qualifying words “*in the Lord*,” Paul’s theme is for us to be rejoicing “*in the Lord*.” And that kind of rejoicing is the unique product of the effectual working of God’s word in our inner man. In particular, it is the unique product of some very specific doctrines that God has given to us in this dispensation that are especially designed to provide for such rejoicing of our

inner man. As such the primary reason for our rejoicing is to be found “in the Lord,” as the excellency of the power of God’s word effectually works in our inner man.

By means of the second qualification Paul also makes it clear that he is not just talking about us rejoicing in the Lord in general, as if he had no particular trying situations or adverse conditions in mind. On the contrary, Paul’s exhortation has some very specific situations in view, situations in which the natural tendency would be to do anything but rejoice. Paul makes this evident with the qualification he imposes by saying, “Rejoice in the Lord *always*,” and not, Rejoice in the Lord *always*. “Always” and “always” may look the same, but they do not mean the same. The exact difference in meaning, which will be noted later on in this article, is important to understand. However, by saying “always” Paul denotes the limitless capacity of God’s word to produce rejoicing, even in the face of the most extreme circumstances.

Now it is in this dispensation of grace that God, like never before, is making known the full excellency of the power of His word when it comes to operating in the inner man. Hence it is we, the members of the church the body of Christ, who have the gracious privilege of experiencing this, appreciating it, and so should be “Rejoicing in the Lord always” because of it. Being privileged by God in such a manner is one of the riches of His grace unto us “in Christ,” and it is a privilege associated with God dealing with us today as “sons” and fulfilling His purpose in “the mystery of godliness.”

Obviously, therefore, “Rejoice in the Lord always” is a very meaningful and important

exhortation. Though containing only 5 words, the Philippians knew how much doctrinal content and power was packed into those few words. They understood and appreciated the excellency of the power of God’s word as the true source of a Christian’s rejoicing in this dispensation and also the limitless capacity of that source to provide for rejoicing regardless of circumstances. Without a doubt, we need to understand and appreciate these same things ourselves. For we too ought to “Rejoice in the Lord always.” And indeed the provision is there for us to do so.

### Excellency of Power

God’s word, both by virtue of what it is and what man is, is naturally designed by God to operate in our inner man. This fundamental reality is set forth, for example, in the Lord’s reply to the devil when He said,...

**4** ...It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

(Matthew 4:4)

Man, therefore, was created not only to possess physical life, but functional life unto God. And that functional life is to be the result of “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” operating within man.

In addition, God’s word being what it is it also naturally has the necessary power to effectually work and operate in the inner man, and so produce the results God desires. The fundamental reality of this is cited, for example, in Hebrews 4:12.

**12** For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

(Hebrews 4:12)

In like manner, Paul declares this same basic thing to the Thessalonians, saying,...

**13** For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

(1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Now even though God’s word has always been designed to function as such, as previously stated it is to us in this dispensation that God has granted the high privilege of experiencing and appreciating the full *excellency of the power* that His word has to operate in our inner man. Excellency of power, that is, to fully equip our inner man not only to successfully cope with any circumstance or situation whatsoever, (whether of this world or of Satan’s policy of evil against us); but to also do so with the understanding and appreciation for the fact that it actually ends up redounding to the glory of God. Putting the excellency of the power of His word on display is one of God’s main operations in this dispensation, and as such it is a high privilege of God’s grace unto us to be a part of it. Naturally enough, therefore, when a Christian understands this, appreciates it, and desires to be a part of it, he has every reason to “Rejoice in the Lord always.”

Now it is the doctrinal design and purpose of II Corinthians to initially educate us in the reality of this. Hence, for example, in that epistle Paul teaches...

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

8 *We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair;

9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

(II Corinthians 4:7-10)

As Paul says, though he and Timothy were "troubled on every side," "perplexed," "persecuted," and "cast down," they were not "distressed," "in despair," "forsaken," or "destroyed." Why? Because an *excellency of power* was effectually operating within them which exceeded in power the natural tendency that there was for them to be "distressed" and the like. Hence, instead of them being distressed, they were actually encouraged and were even rejoicing. And as Paul says, the excellency of power that was producing this was "of God." However, it wasn't the issue of God powerfully intervening in their circumstances and preventing them from so suffering, as is clearly evident from what Paul says. Instead, it was the issue of God powerfully working *within them through His word*, and thereby comforting them, sustaining them, and giving them reasons for rejoicing. It was God's word effectually working in them as they believed it that was the excellency of God's power that they experienced and rejoiced in. Hence, Paul goes on to say,...

13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;

(II Corinthians 4:13)

Paul and Timothy possessed a "spirit of faith" in some very particular doctrines that God, as "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort," has given to us today. These doctrines, (the

majority of which are set forth by Paul in II Corinthians), are specifically designed by God to powerfully work in our inner man and so produce, as Paul says in chapter 1, "consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings" which he and Timothy suffered. (II Corinthians 1:6)

Therefore through the effectual working of God's word in them, through the excellency of its power, Paul and Timothy were both strong *in the Lord* and were rejoicing *in the Lord*. And this is what God has designed and provided to be so for each of us in this dispensation.

### Limitless Capacity

The power of God's word operating in our inner man is indeed completely capable of comforting us, sustaining us, and giving us reason to rejoice, regardless of our circumstances. Even when those circumstances are of the most extreme kind. God's word is limitless in its ability to effectually work within, which is something Paul himself extols when he prays for the inner fortification of the Ephesian saints.

20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,...

(Ephesians 3:20)

It is important to note that when Paul extols this superlative virtue of God's word, he does so in view of the fact that the Ephesians were beginning to experience the more intense aspects of opposition from Satan's policy of evil against us. Intense opposition designed to terrify them, and so destroy any rejoicing in the Lord that they had been doing. These saints, like the Philippians, had stood fast and rejoiced in the Lord when the policy of evil had worked its initial tactics and wiles against them. But having done so, they were now experiencing more intense tactics, which were designed to seriously intimidate them and cause great turmoil for their inner man.

Hence, Paul prefaced his prayer for them by saying,...

**13** Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

(Ephesians 3:13)

The goal of the particular phase of Satan’s policy of evil that they were now facing was to get them to faint in their minds. And in connection with this they were going to experience a series of intensifying “wiles of the devil” specifically designed to achieve the collapse of their inner man.<sup>1</sup>

However what the Ephesians were beginning to experience from the policy of evil, the Philippians had been undergoing for quite some time. Hence when Paul writes to the Philippians he not only deals with them about the issue of not being “terrified” by their adversaries, but he does so in the context of them suffering for Christ’s sake in an extreme manner. As he says to them, they were now “having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” (Philippians 1:28-30)

Now it is in view of the progressively intensifying tactics of opposition involved in Satan’s policy of evil that Paul charges the Philippians not only to “Rejoice in the Lord” but to do so “*always*.” And as noted earlier, by saying “*always*” and not “*alway*” Paul is denoting and commending the limitless capacity of the power of God’s word within them to handle even the most extreme trial.

### “Alway” not “Always”

“Alway,” though similar in appearance to the word “always,” does not mean the exact same thing. “Alway” is short for the expression ‘*all the way*.’ It is the opposite of ‘some of the way,’ as “always” is the opposite of ‘some of the time.’ As such “alway” refers not so much to doing something at all times, but to doing it all the way to the end of a specified or prescribed course.

Hence when something is done “alway” it is done from the beginning to the end of some identified course.<sup>2</sup>

The identified course Paul has been dealing with in II Corinthians, Ephesians, and Philippians is the particular course of progressively intensifying intimidating tactics from Satan’s policy of evil. Hence, as Paul said to the Corinthians,...

**11** For we which live are ALWAYS delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake,...

(II Corinthians 4:11a)

That course of intimidating tactics begins with comparatively mild tactics, but goes *all the way* to the extreme tactic of being “delivered unto death.” Nevertheless, the excellency of the power of God’s word remains throughout, and it is fully able to comfort, console, and produce rejoicing “alway”; i.e. all the way to the end of what the policy of evil can do. Hence, Paul exhorted the Philippians to “Rejoice in the Lord always,” in view of the fact that they too were now being “delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake.”

Once again, it is a high privilege of God’s grace to be granted the opportunity to experience and appreciate the full excellency of the power of His word operating within our inner man. The Apostle Paul knew it to be the case, reveled in it, and rejoiced in the Lord always. May it be that each of us also learns the vital fundamental doctrines about this set forth in II Corinthians, so that we too understand the excellency of the power of God’s word, appreciate it, operate upon it ourselves, and likewise are ones who can “Rejoice in the Lord always.” — *Keith R. Blades*

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed description of Satan’s policy of evil in this dispensation, see the author’s work *Satan and His Plan of Evil*.

<sup>2</sup> For a further examination of this distinction in vocabulary, along with others like it, see the author’s video series *An Introduction to the Excellency of Older English: Section # 1 – Vocabulary*.