

DCF:

Have you ever felt as if you just didn't fit in? Maybe you're a Viking fan living in Green Bay. Maybe you like to read and all your friends like to hunt. Maybe you like classical music and your friends like country or rock. Maybe your friends wear designer clothes and you wear Walmart specials. Maybe your friends all drive foreign luxury cars and you drive a Chevy. Whether we are in high school or in the work place, there are times when we feel as if we just don't fit in.

If you're a believer, you know exactly what I mean. You have friends that don't believe in Jesus. You know people who don't care about breaking a commandment or three. You see friends making choices that go against everything that God commands us. You are different. You are a believer. So what do you do? Change your life? Or not, and keep on feeling as if you just don't fit in? It's not easy being different, is it?

Don't apologize. Rejoice! We have been chosen by God to inherit eternal life and to live for His glory and honor. We are treasured. We are priceless in His eyes. We can say with pride “**BELIEVERS ARE DIFFERENT.**” That's the truth and we're proud of what God has made us. You see, the Holy Spirit changes our attitude and our actions. And that's something to rejoice in!

Paul certainly did in our text for today. Come with me, and see how the Holy Spirit has made you into someone very, very special.

### ***Part One: The Holy Spirit changes our attitude***

God had used Paul to gather a small group of believers in the city of Thessalonica. He blessed them with an amazing appreciation of what Jesus had done. Paul didn't stay long. The Holy Spirit had other souls to save and gather in other places, so Paul moved on. But this group was never far from his heart. He knew the problems that would come their way. He knew how hard Satan would work to wreck their faith.

So, the Holy Spirit had Paul write them this encouraging letter. He praised God that they still had that amazing zeal for the Gospel. He praised God that they continued to strive to live for the Lord. And, as part of his encouragement, he reminded them of what Jesus had done for them. His suffering, death and resurrection were a gift. He reminded them of what they already knew. He reminded them of Judgment Day when they would go home to be with the Lord forever. Wonderful words. Strengthening words. The Holy Spirit's words.

Paul ends his letter with some words of encouragement. Now, the unique thing about the verses we are looking at today is that they are all commands. “***Be joyful...pray continually...give thanks in all circumstances.***” These are not suggestions. These are things that Christians must do.

How is that possible, you might ask. We live in a sinful world. We are tempted every day to sin. We are confronted by pain and things that cause us to cry. We have all sorts of things going on in our lives that take our focus off the Lord and our eternal destination. We have to work at our jobs. We have to battle with the insurance company. We worry about our physical health and the well-being of our children. We look at the insanity of life in this world and are concerned about our safety. How can we be joyful? How can we pray continually? How can we give thanks in all circumstances?

We can't. The Holy Spirit can. He comes to us through the Word and refocuses us on the joyful gifts that Jesus won for us. Even as we prepare for Christmas, it's not us doing all the work. It's the Holy Spirit. He is the One who moves us to read God's Word. He is the One who moves us to worship with our fellow believers. He's the One who moves us to click on that Bible class on YouTube. He is the One who moves us to pray, to praise and to give thanks. In the midst of our Christmas preparations, may we never forget to give the glory and the praise to the One who motivates us to prepare our hearts for Christmas. It's all His doing, isn't it?

He is the One who through the Word changes our attitude towards life. He causes us to “***Be joyful...pray continually...give thanks in all circumstances.***” Let's take a look at these three commands, ok?

First, be joyful. As we look at this world through the eyes of God's grace, we can be joyful, no matter what happens. It all depends on how we look at things. It depends on our God-given attitude. So, we can be joyful at the death of a loved one, knowing that they are home with the Lord. We can be joyful in the midst of this pandemic, knowing we have more time to grow in our faith as we hear and study His Word. We can be joyful even when we are separated from our loved ones during Thanksgiving and Christmas, knowing we will be with them forever in heaven. We can be joyful, even when our health and our finances are failing. Jesus is always with us, using all

events of this world to bring His chosen ones to paradise.

Secondly, we are commanded to pray continually. This doesn't mean that we walk around all day with our heads down and our hands folded. It means being aware of God's presence at all times and willing to talk to Him at any moment. It's an attitude, isn't it? And it's the Holy Spirit who gives us this prayerful attitude, knowing Jesus is with us and ready to engage in a conversation with us.

The third one - giving thanks in all circumstances - is a result of the first two. Because we are joyful, because we are aware of God's presence, we can give thanks in all circumstances. It doesn't matter if the circumstances cause pain or pleasure. We can give thanks. It all depends on how you look at things. It all depends on our attitude.

That attitude makes us different from unbelievers. That attitude is a gift of the Holy Spirit. That attitude will show in the way we live. You see, the Holy Spirit not only changes our attitude. He changes our actions.

### ***Part Two: The Holy Spirit changes our actions***

It seems as if Paul in verses 19-22 is giving believers some tips as they gather for worship and in the way they approach the Word of God. ***“<sup>19</sup> Do not put out the Spirit's fire; <sup>20</sup> do not treat prophecies with contempt. <sup>21</sup> Test everything. Hold on to the good. <sup>22</sup> Avoid every kind of evil.”***

The Holy Spirit changes our attitude towards the Word of God and it shows in the way we react to it. Believers don't treat the Word with contempt, or treat it as dirt. We don't ignore it. We don't treat it as the last option on our to do list. We dig into it. We treat it as a wonderful treasure and go to it often. We know the Holy Spirit is working through it to give us strength and comfort as we live in this sinful world. We value it as the source of truth.

We use it to test our actions in life. When making decisions on what to do with the time God has given us here on earth, we ask the question “Does this glorify God or hide Him?” We look forward to our time in the Word, knowing that God will bless us as we come closer to Him. When it comes to the Word of God, believers are different. To believers, the Bible isn't just another book on the shelf. It is THE book!

This testing, this holding on to the good, is something believers do with everything in life. We want to eliminate anything that would cause us to dishonor the name of our Lord. We eliminate the coarse words, the dirty jokes, the questionable media that so often try to sneak into our lives. We strive to eliminate greed, envy and self-pride in all our actions. We look to build up Christ and our fellow believers, not ourselves. We strive to live more like Christ.

This is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who by the Word is molding us ever more closely to the image of God. He moves us to grow in our Christian faith, modeling for the world God's love for them. That's what the Holy Spirit wants for each one of us. That's what Paul was praying for when he says - ***“<sup>23</sup> May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ..”***

The word “sanctify” means to make holy, or perfect. While we are here on earth, the Holy Spirit is hard at work moving us to live more closely to God's will. His job will be complete on the Last Day, when He will make us completely blameless in God's presence. On the Last Day, the Holy Spirit will make you into what God sees you right now in faith. Perfect.

It will happen. ***“<sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”*** God will bring us home. God will perfect us. The Holy Spirit will change us into what God originally created us to be. Look forward to that day. Look forward with joy to the time when you will be what the Holy Spirit is working to make you be. His perfect children. Jesus came once. He will come again.

Do you feel as if you don't fit in? Maybe you're a Viking fan, a lover of classical music, and drive a Chevy. Maybe you don't fit in with your friends group. But as a believer, you do fit in with the family of God. You are a believer. ***“BELIEVERS ARE DIFFERENT.”*** And that's a good thing! Thank you, Holy Spirit, for changing my attitude and my actions.

AMEN