***The Basic Defense of the Christian Life

Colossians 2:18-19

COL-458***

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We are living in what the Bible calls the latter days. And we are living in the intensified stage of those latter days. That expression has to do with the time of the church from Pentecost to when we are taken out to be with the Lord in heaven at the rapture of the church. This is the latter days – the last times. The Bible tells us that it will grow worse as we come to the end.

For example, in 1 Timothy 4:1, the apostle Paul took the time writing these final letters to point this out to his associate, whom he would leave behind to conduct his work: "But the Spirit explicitly says that in the latter times (the church age), some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience (as with a branding iron) – men who forbid marriage, and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude, and is sanctified by means of the Word of God, and by prayer."

Also, in his second book to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:1, the latter times are expressed in greater detail, and we are in the intensified stage of the angelic conflict between the angels of God, the angels of Satan: "But realize this," Paul says, "that in the last days, difficult times will come. For men will be: lovers of self; lovers of money; boastful; arrogant; revilers; disobedient to parents; ungrateful; unholy; unloving; irreconcilable; malicious gossips; without self-control; brutal haters of good; treacherous; reckless; conceited; lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; and holding a form of godliness, although they have denied its power. Avoid such men as these.

So, we are living indeed in exactly this description on every level of human society, and in all areas: within the home; within business; and, within the nation. We are where corruption and the sin nature is running rampant – uncontrolled. This happened in the United States because of our abandonment of the Word of God as the authority, during the late 1960s. People since then have been on a downhill slide, because they have assumed that everything that the Bible has to say, and that the Christians have to say is all fable. It's all nonsense, and it's all restricting of their freedom.

We are living in serious times. You have to understand that to have a frame of reference for reading your newspaper each day, and for listening to the nightly news, this will give you the perspective as to what is going on. And it puts into even more emphasis, and into considerably more seriousness, the admonition of the apostle Paul in our study of Colossians.

Today, we are on "The Error of the Angelic Worship," number 15, in Colossians 2:18-19.

Paul says, "Said, don't let anybody keep defrauding you of your prize. Don't let anybody keep intimidating you about the prize that you have as a Christian; the grace way of life; and, the access to God as a member of the royal family of God. Christians are not to let anybody condemn them for living by grace, and not by the legalisms of the Mosaic Law, and to allow yourself to be dissuaded from grace living, to allow yourself to be dissuaded from the church-age spiritual power system by some legalists. That will result in you losing your prize." These are blessings on earth, and rewards in heaven. That would be a terrible loss.

The church-age believer has divine enablement, however, to live a Christlike lifestyle. This was never true of the Old Testament saints under the Mosaic Law way of life.

However, Satan constantly tries to entice the Christian into sinning, and into being enslaved to the sin nature, and to degenerate into religion. And that is the thing that Paul was talking the Timothy about. When it comes to the end, there will be religion galore. So, indeed it is here in the world. But it has degenerated from the Word and the Truth of God, to the religion created by Satan.

So, you and I, as Christians, need to be aware of the fact that we have to defend our heritage that we have as church-age believers. We do this through our study of the Word of God. That means that we attend church services. We do this to keep ourselves in a relationship of divine blessing, and the inner circle of temporal fellowship by confession of known sins. We do this by avoiding permitting Satan to have emotions dominating our souls – emotional domination of the soul is disastrous. We think the thoughts of God after Him on the basis of what we have learned from Scripture. This is done by guarding ourselves against reversionism, and going backwards in our spiritual maturity.

This is the explanation for some people, who at one time have walked with God hand in hand; have made a great impact in the Lord's work; and, have been highly esteemed among the believers of the local assembly. But along comes the Devil, and he is able to bring down that kind of a Christian. What has happened? Reversionism has set in. And the person didn't stop it by confession, and admitting of his wrong, and getting back on the track. And the thing got worse all the time.

For this reason, it is important that you have the highest esteem for spiritual maturity. You cannot esteem something you don't have. It is very rare to find a mature Christian. You have a lot of talk, and you have a lot of emoting. But to have mature Christians, who can stand in the spiritual battle of walking through the devil's world, and always being under the almighty capacity that God our Father is ready to give us. What He wants, above all else, for Christians to do, is not to be public personalities. What he wants a Christian to do, first and foremost, is to grow up.

It is very tiresome how, even in the religious bible church world, people are being put forward who happen to have some fame, and some moment of importance. They're in the entertainment world. They're in the athletic world. And they become a Christian. Now they stand up and talk. And all they can do is bubble and verbalize. But they have nothing of substance, from the Spirit of God, to say. That is because they're babies; they're kids; and, they never grew up. They do not realize that that is nothing.

Have you noticed how people love to have their pictures taken with famous personalities? People are always trying to have their picture taken with Howard Gitchel. Kids don't come up in summer camps, and say that they want to have a picture with me. With him, they do. I saw one recently. There was a person I knew, and there he was, in the newspaper. It was a public relations act (a personality). And you can fall into that trap of exaltation in the devils world.

In ancient Rome, when a general came back from a campaign with great victory, they had a victory parade through the heart of Rome. He would ride in a chariot, and behind him would come a contingent of prisoners that had been taken in the campaign, and various accouterments demonstrating the great victory that he had achieved. The crowd is standing on both sides, cheering like crazy. Now, that's a heady thing to have. You would think that this is something really significant. How many of you would like that kind of a moment of public acclamation? But even in ancient Rome, they realized that this was a very foolish and dangerous thing. It is only a moment.

So, behind the general in his chariot, as he stood there, also stood a slave. And the slave was close enough to the general so he could be heard. And periodically (regularly), he would repeat, "And this too shall pass," hopefully, to give the general a perspective that what you have here now – "Yeah, you got your picture in the paper. Yeah, you have all these people cheering for you. Yeah, you have everybody wanting to see you, and wanting to have their picture taken with you. It's nothing." After a while, all you'll have is your picture on the wall: "I had my picture taken with Saddam Hussein." That's going to be history very quickly. What is this deciding to have the adulation of man? And we Christians should not be so immature.

That's what kids do. Children do that. What our Father wants is for us to grow up. Unfortunately, for the average Christian, the basic element is not available to him for maturity. He has to have, first and foremost, his right church. You can blow yourself off to a shallow Christian life if you're in the wrong church. If your right church is here, and you're at the other end of the country, you'll do the best you can, but you'll never rise to the greatness that God has for you in eternity. So, you have to have that.

Secondly, if you have that, you will have a pastor-teacher expositor in the pulpit. You will not have some yo-yo that's playing on your emotions, and helping you to practice emotional domination of the soul, so that you think that you can go out into the world and live your life. This what this is what most Christians. Like the line of the hymn says, "Christ liveth in me." But most Christians simply live their lives. They're not living them for the Lord's glory. They're not conscious of walking with Him; serving Him; and, keeping themselves fit for spiritual combat. The result is that they can easily be brought down by Satan. It takes spiritual maturity to compete with the devil's world in all of its allurements.

In 1 Peter 2:2, therefore, Peter says, "Like newborn babies (you brand new Christians – you immature Christians) long for the pure milk of the Word, that, by it, you may grow in respect to salvation." A baby longs for milk so that that child may grow to maturity. For the Christian, there is a milk bottle. It is essential for growing up spiritually. And if you're not on that milk bottle, as most Christians are not (most of them don't even have the bottle), you'll never be anything but a little, shriveled-up, old prune as a Christian. And you'll be running around, trying to have a happy life on the basis of your emotions at the moment. But if you're feeding on the Word of doctrine, the spiritual food, then there will be maturity that will develop day-by-day.

In 1 John, the apostle John deals with the same concept. In 1 John 2:12-14, John says, "I'm writing to you, little children (you brand new Christians), because your sins are forgiven you for His namesake. I'm writing to you fathers (you've grown-up Christians), because you know Him, who has been from the beginning. I'm writing to you young men: you youth; teenagers; and, young adults. I'm writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I've written to you children because you know the Father. And I have written to you fathers because you know Him (Christ), who has been from the beginning. And I have written to you young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

If you are a mature Christian, and have been in your right place of instruction, then you are capable of getting out there and fulfilling that great mission of Christian service while you have the capacity to do it. The time will come when your capacity will dwindle, and the opportunities will no longer be there.

That's why the proverb says, "Give of your youth to the Lord. Serve him in the days of your youth."

**Full Knowledge ("Epignosis")**

Colossians 1:9-12 also points out: "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it (that is, of their love, here in this church), we have not ceased to pray for you, and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will." This word "knowledge" is the word that you have heard before in the Greek: "epignosis." It is the ordinary word for knowledge is "gnosis." That's what you learn in school: reading; writing; and, arithmetic. This is what you are learning now, here in the church service, from these Scriptures. You're getting information.

Now, when you get that information, you will respond to it in one of two ways. You will reject it (you will be indifferent to it); or, you will accept it, and incorporate it into your faith life. The moment you accept and believe what you hear from the Word of God, that information is converted from "gnosis" to "Epignosis," and that information slides down into your human spirit, into a category of information. And it resides there. It is there. And at some critical point in time, when you're up against some temptation of Satan, and you wonder what to do. And what is stored in your human spirit will kick up to your mentality. And you will say, "Yes. I remember. I know what the right thing to do is." Therefore, you know the way to go. He is not praying for them here to get information. He said, "I'm praying that you'll be filled with positive volition knowledge – knowledge that you accept.

You might say, "Well, why would anybody do that?" Believe me, folks. There are people in this congregation from time-to-time, and over the years, who have had great mental reservations about what they hear, because if they took it seriously, and said, "Well, yeah, that is what Scripture says, He's right," it would blow apart their lifestyle. And all of a sudden, they would say: "I can't do that. I don't want God to butt-in and bug-up my lifestyle." So, they say, "Well, I'll have to think about that. And they put mental reservations on it.

"For this reason, since the day we heard of your great love, we have not ceased to pray for you, and ask that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord; to please Him in all respects; bearing fruit in every good work for eternal rewards; and, increasing in the knowledge." And here again, the Greek has "full knowledge" – the "epignosis:" "strength and with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience."

This is a mature Christian that we're talking about: "Joyously giving thanks to the Father Who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light." That's great. Now, that's a grown-up Christian. That's the kind of Christian such that, if you're going to go into a spiritual service enterprise, you're going to say, "I'd like to have you. I want you on the combat team." Whereas you look at somebody else, and you say, "I don't want that person. He's a yo-yo. He's an off-wall-guy. I can't afford to go into facing Satan and his angelic forces with a person like that." What I have to have is someone that Paul describes" – who walks in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all respects; who is producing divine good works; who is increasing in his full knowledge of God and his human spirit, because he's positive to the reception (to what he is taught; and, who has strength with all power, according to the glorious, almighty power of God, obtaining steadfastness and patience, and joyously giving thanks.

Oh yeah. We can give thanks when things are nice. But when you get the little bad news, now we're not quite so sure that we want to be very happy about that – that we want to joyously give Him thanks. For what? To share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

Let's go back to Colossians 2:18: "Don't let anybody rob you of your inheritance" – your grace-age inheritance. But if you are an immature Christian, you will do that.

Now any Christian can become spiritually mature. It does not depend upon your IQ. A believer is called to spiritual maturity which is described in Scripture as a structure (a building) (Colossians 2:6-7.) And I think it is an appropriate time in history, and in our lives, to review some basics on spiritual maturity. If you're not mature, you'll lose it.

In Colossians 2:6-7 Paul says, "As you have, therefore, received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." Let him lead your life: "Having been firmly rooted, and now built up in Him (maturity), establish in your faith just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. It's one of the signs of a mature Christian. He is thankful to God. He keeps remembering to thank God. He does not take things in stride in his life, whatever it is – even the tough things, without saying, "I walk this valley, and this shadow, and You are with me. And I thank You for that experience.

The foundation of this life is this maturity structure which is built. In the Bible, we can think of it as five basic ideas that constitute the spiritual maturity. It is really a pentagon that we build in the soul. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ. But the knowledge that we have from the Word of God, when it is received, becomes the "epignosis" full knowledge, and that is the basis of building spiritual maturity. It's not just what you know of Scripture. A lot of Christians have that. But it is what you obey. It's not devotional thoughts. It's not inspirational challenges. That goes nowhere. It does fill your chairs. But you want to become a mature Christian, so that you'll stand before the Lord at Judgment Seat of Christ and you'll not be ashamed. I mean, in heaven's name, the apostle Paul said, "I'm very much concerned about standing up there before Christ, and being ashamed of having failed Him, and being ashamed of what I did with my calling. Now, if that kind of a gutsy soldier could be concerned, most of the rest of us probably should too.

The goal of the Christian life, then, is to build maturity inside the soul. God wants to build something in our soul that glorifies Him. When you are a spiritually mature Christian, that's when you glorify the Lord. That's when you worship Him. That's when you praise Him.

Ephesians 1:12 says, "To the end that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, should be to the praise of His glory." Paul says, "I want those of us who have been in the Christian life for a long time, to have develop a spiritual maturity such that we are an honor to our Heavenly Father. And God wants to build this system of spiritual maturity within our souls.

One place that we can have some idea of what's involved in this is in 2 Corinthians 12:10. We will not go into this in great detail, but just as a frame of reference. Here the apostle Paul, who has, in the context, been reviewing that God has given him a physical ailment that he has borne for many years, and it has been a very great distress, and he's been asking God, "Please heal me of this. Please remove me from this." But the Lord does not want to remove this from Paul. Therefore, in verse 9, God the Father says to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected and weakness." It is when you come to the end of your rope, that you're going to go someplace with God, because you quit depending upon your cleverness, and your efforts, and what you can do. When you come to the bottom of the barrel, then you're going to start looking up, because there's no place to go now. Then there will be hope for you not to play the fool in the Christian life, but to play the victor.

**The Basic Defense of the Christian Life**

So, Paul says, "Most gladly, therefore, I would rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Then he mentions five things that constitute strength. These are things that a Christian does not look for, for confidence in himself. That's what he means by weaknesses. He says, "These five things are what I want God to be able to build in my life. Here they are – the basic defense of the Christian life.

**Five Facets**

First of all, he says, "I want to deal with weaknesses. We call this capacity to orient to the grace of God, His capacity with our weakness. Secondly, with insults. We're going to look at these a little more details as we go. Then there is a relaxed mental attitude as we go through life, not an off-ramp, but instability with an attitude of Christian affection toward one another. Then he speaks of the distresses – the pressures of life. This deals with the details of life – the mastery of the details of life. Then we have persecutions – the capacity for the love of God to carry us through when people want us to deny who we are, and who our Lord is. Then finally, we have the word "difficulties." These are the problems that pop up in our lives. And we're able to take those difficulties. We call that inner happiness – the happiness which is within our soul. This is what our Heavenly Father wants to prepare for us. So, let's look at it.

1. **Grace Orientation**

First of all, he speaks about weaknesses. There is grace orientation. This is under this word weaknesses. I'm not depending upon my hot dog capacity. Look at 2 Peter 3:18. It says, "But grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Grow in grace. Grace orientation is the capacity to know how to live by the freedoms of letting the Holy Spirit carry us through. Grace gives God the credit for what we, do not to ourselves. We are carried along by His capacity. And as grace-oriented Christians, we respect the priesthood of other believers. We are there for their assistance. We do not. But our butt our nose into that which is the privacy of other believers. The grace of God is always there to carry us through the most crucial moments of our lives.

In Hebrews 13:9, the writer says, "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited." Don't get a bunch of kids together in a big room for a praise and prayer service, which means wild guitar strumming; drum beating; and, loud singing of repetitious words, music with repetitious words and very little melody, and get everybody souped-up emotionally, and then have a pizza party afterwards: "not by food through which those who are thus occupied are not benefited. You do not depend upon the sensual if you want to walk with God. Grace means that you are dependent upon Him entirely.

Very often you say, Father, I'm in this situation in life. If You don't carry me through as your gift to me, I won't make it. And I'm dependent upon the kindness of your grace." That's what he means by "weakness."

1. **Relaxed Mental Attitude**

Secondly. He talks about insults. The insult is a relaxed mental attitude. The relaxed mental attitude is having that "philos" love, which is emotional. People insult me, and yet I choose to let my heart go out to them. It's different than "agape" love. This is a really emotional attachment to someone, who is in misery or in need, or who has offended you. And yet you take that insult with kindness and grace.

In Matthew 10:37, Jesus says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of me. He who love son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of me." He is talking about emotional attitudes here. This is "phileo" love. He is talking about people who are more emotional toward their parents or toward their children than they are toward the Lord. They are not worthy of Jesus Christ. That's pretty tough, isn't it? It's making it very clear that the God-Man, Jesus Christ, comes number one on your hit parade of enthusiasm. Yes, you have loved ones, and. you have concerns – all of those emotional things that have to be dealt with. But number one (emotion) goes to God. Therefore, no matter what insults come to us, we still deal with people on the fact that they need our information, and guidance, and our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice John 15:19: "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. There's the same word, the "philos" word. If you were part of living the world's way of life, boy, would they be excited over you! They'd be emotionally high over you. That's what it's saying here. If you were living Satan's lifestyle in the world, the world would be emoting over you. But because you're not of the world, and you're not living his lifestyle, because I chose you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you. It doesn't get excited over you.

So, who wants the world? Who wants to be exalted by the world system? Who wants the people of the world to blubber and babble all over you? What good is it? These are the devil's people. And they're emoting because they think you're their kind. And if the world receives you to its bosom, it's not a compliment.

1. **The Mastery of the Details of Life**

Then there is the next one. That is a bug problem: the mastery of the details of life. To the spiritual Christian, this is being grace oriented. He takes things not on the Mosaic Law (trying harder), but he looks to God, and he walks that stride. He has a relaxed mental attitude. He extends out in the emotional contact of concern and affection for those before him. He has a mastery of the details of life. This is by the word "distresses." What is that? Well, they're dealing with your money: they're dealing with cleaning your house; they're dealing with your business; they're dealing with getting a good grade at school; and, they're dealing with many important things, which should not be number one. Anybody who isn't in this auditorium this morning, who could have been, has chosen a lesser thing, and has now denied himself a great blessing at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That person is enslaved to the details of life. This is the easiest thing in the world for a Christian to do.

Luke 12:15 illustrates this, Distresses are one thing and another that distresses, and you should say, "Wait a minute. This won't be worth a hill of beans 100 years from now. Luke 12:15: "And he said to them, beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed, for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." People think that if they've got a lot of money, then they have it all. You have nothing. If you have nothing but money, and are not rich toward Christ in heaven, and divine, good service works, you have nothing. And don't be given excuse: "I intended. I intended. I meant to. This is what I wanted, I just didn't get around to it." If someone is dying, and they need immediate help, that's not going to help them. And the world *is* dying, and it needs our immediate attention.

Luke 12:29-31: "Do not seek what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things that the gentiles of the world eagerly seek, but your Father knows that you have need of these things." He knows you need to have food. He knows you need to have clothing. He knows you need to have shelter. His logistical grace is not going to let you down, unless you're a bummer and don't work. Then you're going to have a bit of a problem.

However, verse 31 says, "Get your perspective." It's where you're mastering the details of your life: "Seek the kingdom, and these things will be added to you." Do the Lord's work, and these things will be added to you.

A lot of Christians know that that's true, but they cannot rise to it. And there's no use kidding themselves. They have not matured in controlling the things of life. These are details.

In 1 Timothy 6:6-10, Paul deals with the same thing – the mastery of the details of life: "But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. That's one good way to have a perspective on the details of life: "And if we have food and covering, with these, we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some, by longing for it, have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang."

This is not a condemnation of becoming rich. This is not a condemnation of legitimate means to become prosperous. The condemnation is that it takes precedence, when you do get it, over what you could do with it in fulfilling your Christian service. That's the problem. You have shown that you have not matured to have prosperity. Many Christians can handle with great grace, their poverty. But when it comes to their prosperity, the mastery of the details of life gets very tricky.

I have to warn people, from time to time, when things come their way. I say to them, "Be on your guard. Life has become easier. You become prosperous. Boy, are you going to be tempted to now walk a different road." That's what the mastery of the details of life is to prevent you from doing.

1. **Persecutions**

Then "persecutions" is the word. And that calls for "agape" love. This is the capacity to love. You cannot produce "agape". Only God can give you that. But the other love, "phileo," is your emotional love. You can produce that.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus say to His disciples, "A new commandment I give to you" that you love ("agape") one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men shall know that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another." This is the love that the book of Galatians says is part of the fruit of the Spirit. You can't produce "agape" love. You can't produce this love which is sacrificial. This love is non-bitter, sacrificial love. You can't produce that. You can fake it for a while, but it will always break down.

So, people say, "Look at that. That's a kind of a love that only God could give that person. I don't deserve this kind of love. What I've done should be very offensive. Yet this person has the capacity to love me with the love of God?

Luke 6:35: "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great. You'll be sons of the Most High, for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." God can give you the capacity to love the enemy.

In Ephesians 4:2, this gets a great deal of prominence – this particular phase of maturity: "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love." Christians need to treat each other with patient forbearance. In Philippians 1:9-11, Paul says, "In this I pray that your love me about still more and more in real knowledge ('epignosis')." You're not going to have mature knowledge without having been taught doctrine and you've been positive to it. There is no way that you're going to have the love of God: "I pray that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and plainness until the day of Christ." The day of Christ is the rapture. You're going to prove the things that are excellent. You're not going to be going out for compassion, that the world system goes for, spewing it out of its sin nature. You're going to have a love for what deserves your love because it is the love of God.

Verse 11: "Having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

Then we have one more in 3 Colossians 3:12-13: "So, as those who have been chosen as God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other. Whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so you should (it takes 'agape' love to be willing to do this), beyond all these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" ("agape love"). That is a tough facet of maturity. You don't often find it among Christians.

1. **Inner Happiness**

Then there's one more: inner happiness. Difficulties is the word in 2 Corinthians 12:10. Whatever hits you, there's a millennium in your soul. You don't go berserk. It's all in the providential hands of your Heavenly Father. Disappointing, distressing, and unbelievable – take it to the Lord, and leave it there. John 15:11 says, "These things I've spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." It is the will of God that we be happy. When we are not joyful, and when we are sad, then we are showing that we have lacked a maturity in our soul. It is His purpose that there should be the joy of the Lord within our maturity.

Philippians 4 makes it even clearer. Philippians 4:4-6: Rejoice in the Lord always." And I want to tell you right up front, that this word "rejoice" is a command. It's not an invitation. The Greek is a command: "I am commanding," God the Holy Spirit says, "as Christians, you be happy. Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say 'rejoice.' Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. He's about ready to come and us to heaven. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God (temporal fellowship, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus. When you have temporal fellowship, you're a happy warrior. When you do not have temporal fellowship, you are a very unhappy warrior, because there's nothing to carry you through.

1 Peter 1:8 says. "Though we have not seen Him (Christ), we love Him ('agape' love). And though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible, and full of glory." How do you get that kind of joy? Because God gives it to you. You've grown up enough where this kind of love can take root in your soul.

In 1 Peter 4:13, we add: "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory, you shall rejoice in exaltation." You're not going to experience the suffering with Christ on the cross for your sins. That's what these idiots do at religious, times when they go through parades with whips, and they beat their backs. The Muslims do that, and the Catholics do that, because they're going to share the sufferings of Christ. No, you share the sufferings of Christ by what the world system does to you, and that you don't deserve. But because you have inner happiness, there is peace within the soul.

Now, spiritual maturity, as we said, is an edification. It is very fascinating when you start looking in the Word of God about building this structure. It is a structure. It talks about building it. It talks about the builder, and it talks about the administration of this building. It's not only that you have this building, but it's how you go about developing this building, because at the heart of this, when you have it, you have the one thing that will carry you through everything in life. You have edification – you have the mind of Christ. Tonight we will go into building the structure.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)