



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
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April 2015

Rejoice Always! Are You Kidding Me?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

- ★ There is bad news everywhere.
- ★ There is corruption at every level of government in the nation.
- ★ There are threats to our personal well-being almost everywhere.
- ★ There are physical ailments that we, our families, and our friends have.
- ★ There are multiple problems among the churches of God, causing deep concern.
- ★ There are brethren making shipwreck of their faith.
- ★ There are those who misrepresent another's words, motives, and actions.
- ★ There are false teachers, claiming to be Christians, popping up everywhere.
- ★ There are preachers that are having to work for a living rather than receiving adequate wages from the churches.
- ★ There are even some brethren who call out other brethren, even by name, for their sins.
- ★ There are those brethren who refuse to stand with those who are defending the faith.
- ★ There are indications that things will get even worse.

Does this not pretty well describe the times in which we live? Do you say, "Yes?" But, we are really describing the conditions under which the apostles and early Christians lived. Yet, they were told: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4 NKJV)

How could they rejoice? It almost seems like

only a fool could rejoice in that environment. The context of this verse gives us a pretty good clue how it can be.

1. *Verse 5a: Maintain a gentle spirit (NAS95) before all.* The word (epieikes) translated "moderation" in the KJV, "gentleness" in the NKJV, and "gentle spirit" in the NAS95 is hard to translate into English. It has been defined by some as "sweet reasonableness."
2. *Verse 5b: Keep in mind that the Lord is "at hand" or "near."* Then there is the promise of God: "I will never leave you nor forsake you". (Hebrews 13:5 NKJV)
3. *Verse 6: Rather than anxiety, solicit the Lord's help through prayer and at the same time giving thanks for all that He does for you and for all that He has given you.*
4. *Verse 7: Understand that the peace of God is not external peace, but peace in heart and mind.* It is a peace that comes not from external circumstances but in spite of them. Paul indicates that it took some learning, but that he was able to be content in whatever external state that he was in (v. 11) We can never have peace with evil, either in or out of the church, but we can be at peace with God, with ourselves, and those of like precious faith.
5. *Verse 8: Don't allow the mind to dwell on the problems and negative things, but on the positive.* The "think on these things" of the KJV does not do justice to the idea. The tense is that

of continually thinking on these things. The idea is that of letting the mind *dwell* on them. It does not mean that one is to be pollyannaish and refusing to ever think negative thoughts or about one's problems. It is nor about hearing, seeing, nor speaking no evil (negatives). One has to think of the negatives to deal with them, but just do not let them dominate the thinking. Rather let positive things be where the mind *dwells*.

6. *Verse 9: Always follow what the apostles said and did with divine approval.* Yes, apostolic approved examples. Not only did Paul, as an apostle, urge them to do what they had heard and learned (commands/statements) from him but what they had seen (example) in him. He promises that the "God of peace" would be with them. As we have already noticed this is a promise of internal peace of mind and heart and not external peace. Of course, there will be peace between all who follow this advice. If the day ever were to come that all who profess to be Christians were to follow the injunction of this verse, there would be perfect external peace (unity) among us. It would be a peace acquired through following the apostles' doctrine and behavior not a negotiated peace.

Yes, it is possible to rejoice always even in the midst of all the problems around by following Paul's instructions. He puts it even more succinctly: "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;" (Romans 12:12 NKJV)

One other word of caution. The rejoicing, spoken of, is not the kind of rejoicing that causes one to run, jump, turn cartwheels, yell, and generally imitate a sports pep-rally. It is a serenity and calmness of mind within that projects itself to others as one at peace with himself and God. As Strong puts it: "*a primary verb; to be 'cheer'ful, i.e. **calmly** happy or well-off; impersonally, especially as salutation (on meeting or parting),*

be well:—farewell, be glad, God speed, greeting, hall, joy(-fully), rejoice." (Ephesis mine - eob.) It is a mind set that allows one to rejoice even in the midst of severe hardship (Acts 5:41) and even "take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses *for Christ's sake*" (2 Corinthians 12:10). ■

Is Only One Church Right?

Sewell Hall

Probably no charge creates more prejudice against a group of people than the charge that they think there is only one church that is right. This fact clearly indicates that most Americans consider all churches right. Is it possible that only one church is right?

At least three other questions must be answered before this one can be answered intelligently.

1. Is there such a thing as right and wrong? Many who complain so bitterly about such a claim do not believe that anything is absolutely right or wrong. If there is no right and wrong, then obviously any claim to be the only right church would be ridiculous. However, if there is a God and if He created us, then He is the standard of right and wrong (Romans 3:4). His word is truth (John 17:17).

2. Is there a right and wrong in religion? Some who accept the concept of right and wrong in the realm of morals exclude it from religion. They seem to think that God is so loving and good that He will accept anything man may do and dedicate to Him. But Jesus warned of false teachers who would come in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). He stated that worship was made vain by teaching the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:9). Paul informed the Galatians that anyone who preached any other gospel than what he had preached would be accursed (Galatians 1:8), and Peter predicted that there would be false teachers among us (2 Peter 2:1). So religious teachings can be false and religious practice can be

wrong. Jesus also said, “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted” (Matthew 15:13). This is equal to saying that churches not planted by the Lord will be rejected.

3. Has God designated any exclusives in religion? Consider Ephesians 4:4-6. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” The “one” in these verses obviously means “one and only one.”

These verses do not allow for our modern broad-mindedness. Such broad-mindedness, however, is not really new; it existed in the first century among the Ephesians to whom this was written. Paul became the focus of a riot because he insisted “that there are no gods made with hands” (Acts 19:26). To put it another way, he preached there was “one and only one” God. The Ephesians were tolerant of many gods, but intolerant of anyone who said there was only one. Most of us would agree that there is one and only one God. But the same verses say, “there is one body.” What is this one body? The same writer says in Ephesians 1:22-23 that God has given Christ “to be head of all things to the church which is His body.” So if there is one body and that body is the church, this is saying there is one church. If one God means only one God, then one body means one body or only one church.

What is the one church? Without doubt, the one body (church) referred to in Ephesians 4:4-6, was the church than Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:18). It was to be founded on the fact that He was the Christ, the Son of God. That church began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when Jesus was first publicly proclaimed to be the Christ, based upon the facts of His resurrection from the dead. Those who believed asked, “What shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you

shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’...Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:37-38, 41, 47).

Please note that all who were saved were added to the church. It includes all who were saved, for the Lord added all who were saved to it. But if it included all who were saved it was not a denomination, for a denomination by definition is only one part of a whole. Neither was it a combination of all denominations, nor even an association of local churches known as “churches of Christ.” The one body was made up of individual members, not of local churches. It was the one true church to which all who were saved were added. It was that one body described in Ephesians.

How can this church be identified? Jesus said that the gates of Hades would not prevail against His church (Matt. 16:18). It must be in existence today. If it is, it has Jesus Christ as its only Lord and the gospel as its only faith. It is entered by the one baptism, it still includes all who are saved, and it is not one of many. It is the body of Christ (Colossians 1:18), Christ's church (Matthew 16:18), the church of God (Galatians 1:13), the house of God (1 Timothy 3:15). It is the one and only church that is right. ■

**“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”
(Ephesians 4:4-6 NKJV)**

A Great Evangelistic Tool

Scott Smelser

I think it works better than radio, better than auto-dialers, better than showings of Jule Miller filmstrips, better than mailing out a bulletin, better than Dial-a-Bible-Reading, better than debates, better than cable TV.

What is it? It's brethren not being conformed to the world.

If a church is made up of people who understand 184 current and past issues correctly, but their lives do not show superior conduct, servitude, and holiness, don't expect an auto dialer, computer, printer, broadcast antenna, or cable outlet to compensate for the failure.

When church members think like the world, dress like the world, talk like the world, and chase money and status symbols like the world, it is the world that is winning them, not the other way around.

When church members are selfish, egotistical, arrogant, and shallow, then they are not in a position to help the world to a higher plane.

If our families are splitting up, our children are dropping out, and our homes are little different from our neighbors then our "light" gets rather difficult to notice.

But if people learn self-denial (Lk. 9:23), learn submission to God and care for our neighbor (Matt. 22), learn to be servants (Jn. 13), learn to be content (1 Tim. 6:8), learn to invest in family (Titus 2:5; Eph. 6:4; Prov. 22:6), and learn to clean out the inside of the cup, not just the outside (Matt. 23), then bright lights will shine.

"Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles; that...they may glorify God" (1 Pet. 2:9-12).

"Present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy,

acceptable to God...and be not fashioned according to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:1,2).

We are not called simply to know some things different from the world -- we are called to rise above the world, and to "be holy" (1 Pet. 1:15). And when people become that kind of light in the world, they become great evangelistic tools in God's service.

And it will far exceed the effect of debates, radio, TV, and mail outs. ■

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16 NKJV)

A Pretty Good Deal, Wouldn't You Say?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:29-31 NKJV)

Yes, being a faithful Christian costs a lot – *all* in fact (See verse 28). But, look at the dividends! All over the world we have, as a result of our fellowship with other disciples, spiritual kinfolks a hundredfold along with their houses and lands at our disposal as if they were our own. Yes, with all of it comes persecutions. But, we have the Lord and these spiritual kinfolks to help us bear it. Then to cap it all off, we have in the world to come eternal life. ■