

PRAYER AND PRAISE
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Intro: We are again approaching Thanksgiving Day, the one day in the year which has been set aside for the people of our nation to give thanks to God. In these days when people are mostly God-less in their lives, we can really wonder how much thanksgiving God actually gets. I have noticed for the last several years that with many there seems to be some virtue just in being thankful, but they have no conception that our thanks should be directed to the God of heaven and earth, the Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Many of us are old enough to remember when there was at least an attempt on the part of people generally to give thanks to God. We were reminded of the Pilgrims, and what they did to thank God for His blessings. But we don't hear that anymore. In fact, I am not sure but it might even be illegal to mention God in our schools on Thanksgiving Day, just as we have practically ruled out our Lord in our observance of Christmas Day.

But I am not interested in getting unregenerate people to give thanks to the Lord--although it would be a pleasant relief to hear something about God in a respectful and thankful way in these days. But we need to remember what Solomon wrote long ago about the sacrifice of the wicked, that is, of people who do not know the Lord. This is what he said:

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight (Prov 15:8).

Praise and thanksgiving are spoken of in the Bible as sacrifices. It is an insult to the goodness of our God that we should be thankful for His material blessings if we ignore the greatest Gift He has ever given, the gift of His Son. If we are seeking to get unregenerate people to praise the Lord, it assumes also that all we have to do to approach God is to start talking in some form of prayer. We forget that no one can come to the Father "but by me," as our Lord said. True thanksgiving starts with any person when for the first time he or she can say from the heart, "Thank you, Father, for the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior and my Lord."

This is really a good time of the year for us to make people aware of this simple, but all-important truth--that the only thanksgiving that is acceptable to God is thanksgiving offered through Christ. And we need to make it clear that we can't offer thanksgiving through Christ until we know the Lord Jesus as our Savior.

So, what I am saying is that Thanksgiving Day is the day for Christians to offer thanks to God for all of His blessings--

the blessings of salvation, the blessings of having our families, the blessings of health, food, protection, and on down the line. Paul was not suggesting to the people of Thessalonica that they have a national thanks giving day, but he was saying to the church in Thessalonica, those who were believers in Christ,

Rejoice evermore.

Pray without ceasing.

In every thing give thanks:

for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

For many years I have felt that these three verses belonged together. They tell us that we ought to be thankful to God and to express that thanksgiving in a joyful manner--not just because we feel that we have to be happy and thankful to God. It is clear that everything we are told to do in Scripture, or told not to do, is the will of God, but we are not always told it in so many words. But here we are told, "For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." So while all obedience is pleasing to God if it comes from our hearts, yet it seems that there is a special sense in which, if we are happy, prayerful, and thankful, we are pleasing God as much as we can in any other way. Of course, when you think of all that these verses cover, you can see that they have to do with every part of our lives.

Before we think specifically about these verses, let me make:

I. SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

I am thinking about some general observations about these verses.

- A. These verses are directed to everyone who knows the Lord, all who were true believers in Christ.

The verbs are all plural in form, and the last word in verse 18, "you," is also plural. In English we say "you" whether we are talking to one person or to a group. The Southerners have tried to make it clear when they mean more than one when they say, "you," because they say, "You all," or abbreviated, "Y'all." But the Greeks had two different forms for you (singular) and you (plural). And they could do it in two ways:

- 1) A plural verb had a different ending from a singular verb.
- 2) The singular word for you, meaning one person was, and is, σέ, and the word for you, meaning more than one person is, ὑμᾶς.

There are three main verbs in these three verses: "rejoice," "pray," and "give thanks." And they are all in the plural form. And so they mean, all of you rejoice, all of you pray, and all of you give thanks.

And when we come to the end of verse 18 we could translate the last part of the verse, "for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for (all of) you."

Nobody among the people of God was to be excluded. Children who knew the Lord were to rejoice, to pray, and to give thanks. The same was true of the young people, and of the oldest members of the congregation. Nobody was excluded. They were to all rejoice, pray, and give thanks.

Now let me point out another important thing about these verses. They all are in the present, imperative tense. They were commands, not just good suggestions that they were to think about and to do them if they wanted to, or not to do them if they didn't want to. But, in addition, these verbs meant two more important things:

1) They were to be doing all of this right now. If they were not doing any or all of them, they were to start immediately.

But these verbs in the present tense also meant this:

2) They were never to stop rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks.

And so what Paul was saying here did not just apply to a thanksgiving day, but it applied to every day of every year throughout life.

But now let me point out another feature about these verses which is important for us to notice.

I have said that these verbs in the present tense mean that they were to be rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks now, and that they were never to stop! But when you read the verses Paul added to the word "Rejoice," "evermore." He added to the word, "Pray," "without ceasing." And he added to the word, "give thanks," "in everything." Why did he do this?

The Greek word "rejoice" really means to rejoice always, "evermore." The Greek word for "pray" actually means that they were to be praying all of the time. And the Greek verb "give thanks" meant that they were always to be giving thanks, and so this would be understood to mean "in everything." Was Paul just multiplying words, or is there something here that he wanted us to notice in particular?

The Apostle Paul declared in 1 Cor. 2:12, 13 that divine

revelation extends to the very words of Scripture. Listen to what he wrote:

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor 2:12-13).

So Paul was not just multiplying words. He was not trying to impress the Corinthians with his knowledge of their language. He was saying something that was especially important, and he was using the distinctives of the language to impress upon the believers that this is what they needed to be doing, doing right now, and that they must never stop. And so he doubled his emphasis by using the present imperative (which would have been enough), but then by adding to "rejoice," "evermore," to "pray" he added "without ceasing," and to "giving thanks" he added "in all things." I don't know how he could have said it any stronger than he did.

Every Thessalonian believer who heard these words would have been forced to ask himself, or herself, "Is this what I am doing? If not, I must start today." Or maybe somebody would say, "Oh, I used to do all of that, but I don't do it anymore. I can see that if I am to please God I must get back to it right away." Perhaps there were others who would have to say, "I have known that I should be doing this, but I just keep putting it off. I am going to ask the Lord to help me to do it, and by His grace I am going to start today."

How do "you all" respond to this? Does this describe the way you live. Are you a happy Christian? Do you pray? Are you faithful in praying? Do you look forward to being able to pray? And what about thanksgiving? It may be hard to be thankful when we are carrying a lot of burdens. But when we stop to think that even when the Lord seems to leave us in our trials, it is not because He has forgotten us, but as E. M. Bounds says in his book, The Necessity of Prayer, that God has other things that He has to do with us before He answers our prayers.

But what a difference it would make in all of our lives if we were to be faithful in doing what He wants us to do. What a difference it would make in Trinity Bible Church, and to our testimony here where the Lord has placed us.

But let us look for a moment at what we are to do. These words are meant just as much for us as they were meant for

the people of God in the Thessalonica in the first century. Let me call this, as Paul did,

II. "THE WILL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS CONCERNING YOU."

First,

A. "Rejoice evermore" (1 Thess. 5:16).

I like the translation of "rejoice" which says that we are to be calmly happy (Strong). Paul was not speaking of the kind of frivolous joy that people try to whip up in a meeting, or a put-on joy so that others will think well of us. He was thinking of that kind of a person who recognizes the hand of God in all of the circumstances of his or her life, and he is just happy in the Lord, and with the Lord. This is a person who is enjoying the peace of God in his heart, and it makes him happy down deep in his soul.

I think that it was George Mueller who used to say that he felt that his first task when he got up in the morning was to make himself happy in the Lord.

"Evermore" is sometimes given the quaint translation, every when, that is, at all times (Strong). And if the Lord tells us to do this, it means that such a life is possible.

B. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

This verse suggests that we are to come to God without interruption, and to come, not just to bring our petitions, but to come in a humble, submissive, and worshipful manner. The main idea in this verse seems to be fellowship with the Lord. Nothing must interrupt the communion that is our privilege to have with the living God because we are His children through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. "In every thing give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18).

This is easy to do sometimes, but it is almost impossible, or actually impossible, at other times. And Paul seems to lay special emphasis on the word "in." It is easy to thank the Lord when we get "out," but a different story when we are "in." And Paul said, "in."

How can we be thankful when we are "in" some trial (because that is where we are most of the time). Things are never exactly in every respect the way we would like for them to be. We all would like to make some changes if we could. But Paul said by the Holy Spirit, "In every thing give thanks..."

Concl: I think that we might all feel that the Apostle Paul was not being very realistic when he wrote these words because such a life is above and beyond all of us. It is! The life we live is a life of faith in Jesus Christ. It is to be a godly life, and God never intended that we would be able to live such a life "on our own." The demands of Scripture upon us are to make us realize how much we need the Lord's presence, His help and His blessing, if we are to do His will. But before Paul closed this epistle, he gave us the very word that we need.

Please look with me at verses 23 and 24 of this fifth chapter of 1 Thessalonians.

23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

This does not mean that we just sit around and do nothing. The very words of this text suggest that there is plenty for us to do every day that we live. No, they do not exclude us from responsibility, but they assure us that what God has asked us to do, and what God requires that we be, He will work in us to make sure that the work is done, that He is glorified, and that we are satisfied.

And, finally, Paul added, "Brethren, pray for us." It would be a great privilege to be prayed for by people who were seeking by God's grace to "rejoice evermore, ..." May the Lord cause us to desire such a life, and then to trust Him to enable us to make it a blessed reality!