

In Harmony with God
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
Halifax: 26 November, 10:30 AM

Introduction

In our sermon series in 1 Thessalonians, we have been looking at things that are the will of God for us as those who are in Jesus Christ.

- The Holy Spirit has given us this rich instruction about how we are to live as God's people in chapters 4 and 5.
 - As those who have been reconciled to God through Jesus, we are delighted to have this guidance about how we may please our gracious Father.
 - He has been so kind to us in redeeming us and restoring us and we are glad to have instruction about the things that please Him.

If you have been with us, you will remember how this section about doing what pleases God was introduced to us at the beginning of chapter 4. It says:

- **1 Thessalonians 4:1-3: Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; ² for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification...**
- After this, we are given a number of specific commandments telling us how we ought to walk and to please God.
 - 1 Thess 4:3-8 tells us to maintain strict sexual purity...
 - 1 Thess 4:9-12 tells us to abound in brotherly love...
 - 1 Thess 4:13-18 tells us rejoice in hope in the coming of Christ... and to comfort one another that those who have died in Christ will not miss a thing.
 - 1 Thess 5:1-11 exhorts us to be prepared for the return of Christ...
- And most recently we have been looking at how we are to live in harmony with others as Christians...
 - 1 Thess 5:12-13 speaks of living in harmony with the elders...
 - 1 Thess 5:14-15 speaks of living in harmony with each other...
 - And the passage we come to today (1 Thess 5:16-18) speaks of living in harmony with God Himself!

That's right!

- The commandments we are looking at today go right to very heart of our communion with God—
 - They speak to our intimate relationship with Him that nobody else can see...
 - Of how He wants us to relate Him day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute.

Please give me your careful attention as I read this passage to you... 1 Thess 5:16-18.

- This is the holy and infallible Word of God.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Thus far the reading of God's holy Word. May He bless it to our understanding.

I. You see here that there are three commandments tied together.

A. All three of them are said to be the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1. It is generally understood that all three of them—**rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks**—

- are connected to the words, “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
- In other words, these are things that God wants those who belong to Christ to be doing...

2. This ties them in directly with the introductory words to this whole section at the beginning of chapter four that I read earlier...

- These are part of the will of God that we are urged and exhorted to abound in more and more in our walk with Him...
- They are things that are pleasing to God and things that have to do with our sanctification...
 - Things that God gives us a heart for and things that He produces in us by His Spirit when we have come to Jesus Christ for salvation.

➤ When you know that they please God, you should greatly desire to have them!

B. Consider how they are all related to each other for us in Christ.

1. At the head of the list, you have *rejoicing in Christ*.

- What else can you do but rejoice when you have come to Him for salvation?

a. You have forgiveness of sins and your name is written down in heaven.

- God has graciously brought His gospel to you, an undeserving sinner.
- You are reconciled to Him forever through the merit of Christ.
- There is no condemnation for you in Christ.
- Now you are brought to God the Father to live with Him forever and soon you will be in glory before Him with Christ.
- And now you are eagerly waiting for Christ to return in His glory, to conquer Satan and all who oppose Him, and restore the whole creation.

b. And not only that, but now God is at work in you to transform you and renew you in holiness and purity.

- By His grace, you are growing in holiness—you are able to love others and to serve them in new ways.
- You are able to worship the Father, and you are given full access to Him in prayer as His son or daughter.

c. And not only that, but you have reason to rejoice because of others who are saved in Christ Jesus.

- You are not the only one that He has redeemed or the only one that He is working in—but there is the whole church of God in Christ Jesus.
- Remember how Paul began this letter with thanksgiving that there were these people at Thessalonica that were **in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**.
- Yours is a joy unspeakable and full of glory!

2. And if you have this rejoicing—you will also be given to prayer!

- It is very natural to ask for more of the things that you rejoice in!

- a. When you are rejoicing in your heavenly Father and in His kingdom that Jesus came to establish, you will pray for these things.
 - You want everyone to know about Him—so you will pray that His name would be hallowed.
 - You will want more people to be saved—so you will pray that His kingdom would come and that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven,
 - And that He would use you to bring to lead others to Christ.
 - You will pray that those who oppose Him and His kingdom would be defeated and that Christ would soon bring all under His feet.
 - b. And not only that, but you pray that you would grow in God’s grace.
 - That you would become more and more like Jesus.
 - That you would bring glory to His name in all of life.
 - And you look to Him to provide for you all that you need to serve Him.
- I tell you, if you are rejoicing in Him, you will also be praying to Him!
- But that is not all...
3. You will also give thanks to God—
- Thanksgiving will flow naturally out of your rejoicing and out of your praying.
- a. When you really are rejoicing in all of Christ’s benefits to you, how can you not give thanks for them as well? Joy and thanks go hand in hand.
 - You and others in the church and your children have been brought from darkness to light—by the grace of God who spared not His Son for you.
 - How can you refrain from thanking Him when you know that—and when you see the hope that He has promised you and when you see His work in your life from day to day.
- Thanksgiving will flow out of your rejoicing, but also out of your prayer.
- b. When you sincerely pray—
 - you will be found thanking God for all of the answers to your prayers.
 - As a praying person, you will be much quicker to notice when God works.
 - If you are short on thanksgiving, it indicates that you are not really praying as you should.
 - Think about it...
 - When you are begging for something and you know that only God can give it, then you overflow with thanksgiving when it comes!
 - If a man is starving and he is crying out to God for food—he will thank God when it is provided.
 - But if your prayers are only formal, you may not even think about that the blessing came from God.

TRANS> So you see how rejoicing, prayer, and thanksgiving go together for those who are in Christ.

- They certainly are tied together as God’s will for you—
 - You really can’t have one without the other two.

- C. Notice that these three injunctions are also tied together in another way...all three of them are to be constants in your life—a regular part of your life.
- They are not to be done in fits and starts, but are to characterise your walk with God through all of life—in all of your ways.
 - Do you see?
1. You are not just told to rejoice, but to **rejoice always!**
 - a. There is always a foundation for joy in Jesus Christ, so it never needs to stop.
 - Everyone rejoices when they get a pay raise or win a prize—
 - or when they succeed at school or at work...
 - or start getting along with other person.
 - But in Christ, there are those things I mentioned before...
 - That you are redeemed and that He is working in your life and that you know Him from whom we were cut off.
 - That He has saved both you and others.
 - These are things that do not change.
 - They call for constant rejoicing.
 - b. Jesus once warned His disciples not to rejoice that the demons were subject to them, but that their names were written down in heaven (Luke 10:20).
 - He did not mean that they shouldn't be glad that the demons were subject to them...
 - but He was warning them against letting the joy of that cause them to lose sight of the foundation of their joy.
 - The foundation of their joy was to be in their eternal salvation, because in this world, they would have much tribulation.
 - c. Christian joy is actually something that increases in times of trouble.
 - If you look up all the times that joy is mentioned in the New Testament (and it is mentioned a lot),
 - You will find that very often it is mentioned in the context of suffering and hardship.
 - Do you know why?
 - Because when every source of joy except for your salvation in Christ is stripped away, it causes you to focus on your salvation in Christ.
 - And when you do that, your joy goes through the roof.
 - It is not cluttered up by lesser joys.
 - Jesus instructs you to rejoice greatly when you are persecuted—because great is your reward in heaven (Mt 5:12).
 - James tells you to count it all joy when you fall into various temptations and trials.
 - As I have told you before, when you see a truckload of trouble coming your way, you can be sure that a truckload of grace is coming too.
- Because the foundation of your joy is always present, it is God's will for you to rejoice always.

- You can certainly have sorrows in this world like Jesus did—
 - but at the root of those sorrows ought to be joy unspeakable and full of glory because of all that you have in the Lord Jesus.
2. You are also told that prayer should be constant—as it says, **pray without ceasing**.
- a. That is part of your constant walk with God—
 - You are always completely dependent on Him, so you should always be looking to Him in prayer for help.
 - As Paul once expressed it, what do you have that you did not receive?
 - And as Jesus said, “without Me, you can do nothing.”
 - b. The more you come to see your dependence (along with delighting in God’s salvation)...the more prayer will be a constant part of your life.
 - You will have set times of prayer—like Daniel did—
 - He had three times of prayer per day.
 - The Jews had the morning and evening sacrifices at the temple, but at those times they would pray wherever they lived.
 - Morning and evening prayers were practiced in the early church as well.
 - You will also offer up prayer as you go through the day like Nehemiah did—
 - like he did when the king whom he served asked him why he was sad—and Nehemiah immediately instantly shot up prayer to God as he answered the king, asking God to grant him favour in the king’s eyes in behalf of His people.
 - And you will not give up in your prayers.
 - There is no place for giving up on prayer for things that God has promised.
 - We are told to persevere in prayer.
 - I have heard people abstain from prayer because ‘God will do what He has planned anyway.’
 - That is a foolish and twisted perversion of the Biblical doctrine of God’s sovereignty...
 - His sovereignty is much bigger than that—it includes stirring up peoples’ hearts to pray for the things that God purposes to do.
 - To neglect prayer is to disobey God who commands it.
 - And even worse, it is a mark of unbelief and indifference about the things that God has promised.
3. And like rejoicing and prayer, thanksgiving is also to be constant—as it says, **in everything give thanks**.
- not just in some things, but in *everything*.
- a. You should give thanks to God in everything because everything is from God’s hand...
 - Some people go wrong because they think that either God does things or we do things...

- Maybe you are a student taking an exam—and because you studied really hard, you don't think about thanking God because you did it.
 - But if you did not get to study and you prayed and you did well, then you will thank God.
 - But no, you should thank God just as much, if not more, for giving you the grace to study and prepare and that He enabled you to do well on the test itself.
 - We should be giving thanks in everything.
 - I come woefully short in this, but that is what should be.
- b. But what about the bad things that happen? Should you give thanks for these too?
- Yes you should.
 - If you are in Christ, there are no bad things that happen—not in an ultimate sense—because God is at work in everything.
 - What about the horrible things that happened to you in your past?
 - If you are in Christ today, you can thank God that He used those things to lead you to Himself.
 - Just think, if you had not been abused, you might easily have gone along happily ignoring God—never seeing your need of His salvation.
 - Whether before or after we became Christians,
 - our troubles are designed by the Lord to draw us to Him—we need them.
 - I already talked about how when everything but the foundation of our joy is stripped away, it actually increases our joy...that is something to be thankful for.

TRANS> So you see that all three of these injunctions are God's will for you constantly...rejoicing, praying, and thanking the Lord.

- This is at the very heart of the new relationship that God gives to you as a believer.
 - These are the features of your intimacy with the Lord.

II. And now I would like to show you how rejoicing, prayer, and thanksgiving factor into the everyday affairs of our lives.

A. First, suppose someone accuses you of doing something wrong.

1. If your family is like mine, I am sure that many of the quarrels that arise in your home have to do with people defending themselves.
 - Nobody likes to be accused of things!
 - I spoke to some of you just this week about this problem and that is probably the reason it comes to my mind now.
 - Maybe one of your siblings didn't take out the garbage, so you say something to them about it...
 - And then they get angry with you and accuse you for not finishing the dishes or something—and you start defending yourself and then you both get in trouble for quarrelling.
 - You all know how you want to defend yourself...
 - Maybe you are a stay at home mom and somebody says, “Well you don't have all the pressures that I have because you don't have to go to work. You are just at home with your kids.”

2. But let's apply our passage to these circumstances.
 - a. If someone accuses you and it is true—maybe you did forget to take out the garbage...
 - Then, instead of being angry and starting a quarrel, you can rejoice before God that He used this person to show you how you have not shown love to your family...
 - You can thank God that you were reminded, and thank Him that He loves you enough to bring it to your attention, and you can thank your sibling who told you, even if she did it in irritation.
 - And you can pray that in the future you will remember.
 - b. And if you are in a situation like the falsely accused mother...
 - If you obey 1 Thess 5:16-18, you can go to prayer when an unjust and insensitive comment like that has been made...
 - You can ask the Lord to help you respond in a way that honours Him.
 - You can pray for the person who made the comment...they are having a hard time with their work—you don't have to prove anything to them.
 - Instead of getting defensive, you can thank God for what they said because it likely exposed your pride about what you are doing and your self-pity and ingratitude...
 - Now you can deal with the self-pity—and start rejoicing that you have the privilege to stay at home and look after your children...
 - And that God has given you work where, indeed, you don't have to deal with people that are not very special to you...
 - And you can thank Him that He has given you strength and grace to endure your work so that you are not frazzled—as the person who made the comment seems to be.
 - And maybe there was a little guilt too that you have been slack in your responsibilities at home—and that is why it bothered you so much.
 - You can ask God to help you to be more faithful.
 - And most of all, you can rejoice that your name is written down in heaven—that God has accepted you in Christ even though you are a sinner and that He will reward your work for Him even if you don't get much recognition about it from others.
 - c. Truly, an awful lot of our quarrels with others come from the fact that we are not rejoicing in the Lord, praying, and giving thanks!

TRANS> Let's take another example.

B. Suppose things go wrong for you at work.

1. Maybe you were cooking supper and you put the casserole dish on the stove and accidentally turned on the wrong burner—the one under the casserole dish—instead of the one under the tea pot...
 - and when you realise it, you grab the oven mitts and move the casserole dish, only to have it shatter in your hands and make a terrible mess in your kitchen.
 - This happened to my daughter Elizabeth recently...

- And suppose that on top of that, you were cooking supper for the neighbours that you had invited over for the first time—
 - neighbours you have invited to church a couple of times.
 - It could be trouble like that—or it could be trouble with your math homework.
 - That can be very frustrating.
 - Or it could be a much bigger matter—maybe you just found out that you have cancer.
2. If you are rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, and giving thanks in everything,
- What will that look like when trouble comes?
 - a. Perhaps something like this—you will begin with rejoicing that God is in control—that He has brought this all about.
 - You will pray that you will honour God in this trouble.
 - If it is the ruined supper, you will pray as you clean up, that you will trust Him and honour Him in this situation—and that He will help you to come up with a good alternative plan for supper.
 - And you will thank Him that He is in control and that He will help you to honour Him and rest in His love.
 - b. And maybe you will end up (by the time you clean everything up) making peanut butter sandwiches for your guests.
 - Perhaps they will see your joy and peace in your Lord and will be amazed and end up wanting to learn about the Lord from you...
 - But in any case, you will certainly do more to honour Him than you would apart from rejoicing, praying, and thanking Him.
 - c. The same thing applies to the math homework and the cancer.
 - Rejoice that God is in control and that He sent it in loving wisdom to you in order to lead you to a deeper trust in Him and love for Him and joy in your salvation.
 - Pray that you will know Him through this trial and that you will honour Him in the way you respond to it—pointing others to Him.
 - And thank Him for sending it and for His promises to help you and strengthen you through it.
 - And for giving you a chance to honour Him.

TRANS> Now let's look at a very different scenario

- C. Suppose you just got a large sum of money that you were not expecting—
- Maybe your brother got a really great job and sends you \$35,000 just to help you out.
1. You can start with rejoicing.
- That is pretty easy to do, I suppose, but remember what Jesus said—rejoice (in this case) not that you got \$35,000, but that your name is written in heaven.
 - As I mentioned before, this does not mean that you should not rejoice in the \$35,000, but that you need to keep in perspective what matters most.

2. And of course you need to pray.
 - Pray that you will use this \$35,000 in ways that please the Lord.
 - Perhaps you were praying about specific needs in your life, or maybe for someone else who was having a hard time—now you meet those needs.
 - Ask the Lord to help you honor Him with this money.
 - You might even use part of it to go on a vacation with your family—if you do, pray that you will do it with gratitude to God.
3. And that is third thing—that you give thanks for it.
 - Give thanks that you have the ability to help others, to enjoy something special, to meet a need in your family...whatever...
 - And above all, thank God that you have an inheritance that far surpasses this \$35,000 awaiting for you in heaven.
 - Let this be a pointer to you of the kindness and love of your heavenly Father.

TRANS> And now let's do one more situation...

- D. Suppose you receive a news report that our lawmakers are looking at legalising sex with minors as long as it is consensual.
1. Unless things turn around, we will very likely see that day in the next generation.
 - We have no moral foundation and it is just a matter of time before this will be as legal as abortion and sex between consensual adults.
 - What is the Christian response before God?
 - Let me tell you, it is not panic, it is not anger, it is not worry...
 2. But this is hardly something to rejoice about, is it?
 - a. Certainly the thing itself is not something to rejoice about, but you can rejoice that your God is on His throne!
 - Instead of being angry, you can rejoice that the Lord will wipe out all injustice when He comes.
 - Instead of being afraid and anxious, you can rejoice that God will continue to build His kingdom, and that He will preserve us as His people.
 - b. And you can pray—
 - Pray that God will turn the hearts of our leaders back to Him.
 - Pray that He will use this to bring glory to His name.
 - Pray that you will have boldness and wisdom to know how you ought to respond to this wickedness, and that the Lord will preserve His church from embracing it and forgive us for the wickedness that we have already embraced and deliver us from it.
 - c. And then you can thank Him—for His promise to preserve us in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation...
 - For the promises of His coming kingdom that you are rejoicing in.
 - Your nation may be falling apart, but God's kingdom is as safe and secure as ever—because Jesus is our King!
 - And thank Him for saving you and calling you and others into His glorious kingdom.

Conclusion

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 is a very simple passage—**rejoice, pray, and thank the Lord.**

- But it is not so easy to apply—so what should you do?
 - The very same thing that we have been talking about!
 - Rejoice that God has given you this wonderful instruction that makes you like Jesus, and that with His instruction He provides grace to enable you to obey.
 - Pray that indeed you and others will be able to live this way—more and more—to the glory of God.
 - And thank Him that He has called you into such an intimate accessible relationship with Him when you deserve to be cut off.