

*1 Thessalonians 5:16-18***PREFACE**

We have considered our appropriate behavior towards the shepherds of the church.
 We have considered our appropriate behavior towards each other.
 Now we consider our appropriate behavior. Period.

Last week, in the context of how we should be behaving toward each other, we read a passage from Romans 14 about those whose faith is strong, and those whose faith is weak.

Read Romans 14:1-3.

Then Paul expounds on this at length, but look at his conclusion, beginning at v16.

Read vv16-18.

What is the source of this joy? Where does it come from? David in Psalm 16 tells us

You [i.e., God] will make known to me the path of life;
 In Your presence is fullness of joy;
 In Your right hand there are pleasures forever. (Psalms 16:11)

How do we know the presence of God? Through the Holy Spirit—which we just read in Romans 14, and Paul states early on in this letter.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

So, when Paul tells us in our passage today to “rejoice always,” we know where that joy comes from, how it is manifested in our life: Not from pleasant surroundings or pleasant company; not from an easy, pain-free life, but from *the Lord*.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.**v16**

Be joyful always. (NIV)

The typical response to this—even from Christians—is “Yeah. Right.”

rejoice, be joyful = *chairo* = a primary verb; to be “cheer”ful, i.e. **calmly happy or well-off**; impersonal especially as salutation (on meeting or parting),
 be well :- farewell, be glad, God speed, greeting, hail, joy (-fully), rejoice.
always, evermore = same as last week: “every when”

For the last two sessions we have emphasized how the church, especially in its members dealings with each other, is to be different from the world-system in which it dwells. The church is to be other-worldly, to see things from a different—and better—perspective, to have a different—and better—set of values. In *this* session we emphasize how each Christian, as an individual, is to be the same.

We can trace this back to Christ Himself, in His sermon on the mount.

Read Matthew 5:10-12.

That's about as other-worldly as one can get: rejoicing in persecution. The key to this seemingly insurmountable behavior is found in our Thessalonian passage. We make a mistake when we treat these three verses as a bullet-pointed do-list:

- Rejoice always
- pray without ceasing
- in everything give thanks

Interpreting it thus is a recipe for failure. Instead we are to read it as one contiguous thought that includes both the goal *and* the means to that goal. That is, *How are we able to rejoice always?*
By praying without ceasing and giving thanks in everything.

How many times have we wondered, *What is God's will?* Well, here we have it in v18.

this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

What *is* God's will? His will is that our life be marked by incessant joy because we are always praying and giving thanks [to Him]. On a number of occasions, both in writing and in this class, I have described this sort of life as one that "vibrates to the pitch of heaven."

v17

pray without ceasing

The first way to have a life filled with joy is to pray without ceasing, or "continually" in the NIV. This, of course, does not mean prayer in full-flower—head bowed, eyes closed, down on our knees—24/7.

At its root this kind of devotion means that we do not pray as if it is an afterthought, or as something performed halfheartedly, or (worse) by rote. We are earnest about it, and we are persistent—we do not give up when the answer is not received in the first five minutes after our "Amen."

But it also means that we nurture a life of prayer. This sort of prayer life must be practiced and nurtured because it is not natural to us; it is a skill that must be developed. But it can be developed; it can become as natural to us as drawing our next breath.

I have likened it to a vibration: all day, every day we go about our lives vibrating to the pitch of heaven, which makes our communion with God—if not literally constant—at least second nature to us. The Quaker, Thomas Kelly, from the first half of the twentieth century put it this way:

There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we can be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings. (emphasis added)

Kelly speaks of a spirit that is always multi-tasking, which is part of this life of prayer. In this way we never permit the affairs of this world to isolate us from the affairs of the Spirit. But perhaps easier to develop—though still requiring practice—is a habit of *response*—or, as Paul states in v18, "in everything giv[ing] thanks."

in everything give thanks

More than just a verbal “thank you,” this is an habitual mindset that acknowledges the lordship and generosity of God over all created things, all circumstances, all—*everything*. The NASB captures this idea in its translation of Colossians 4:2.

Read Colossians 4:2-3. [NASB]

Again, not just saying “thank you,” but cultivating a *habit* of thanksgiving, where, our life vibrating to the pitch of heaven, we see God all around us and are grateful for His presence.

This is so far beyond just “going to church every Sunday” that most people—including many Christians—reject such a lifestyle, or just deem it unnecessary. But this is just another way to describe “walking by the Spirit,” which is prescribed throughout God’s word.

Read Romans 8:5-6.

But many miss the full ramifications of this; they think it stops there. They think “walking (or living) by the Spirit” just means to be spiritually minded or, a little better, to be in-tune with the Spirit within. But that is just the beginning.

If we “walk by the Spirit” this means we are nurturing a direct connection to the mind of God!

Read 1 Corinthians 2:7-13, 16.

See the progression here? In Christ believers are given the Holy Spirit to dwell within them permanently. The Spirit comes in to fill our God-space, but we can choose to disregard Him, continuing to walk by the flesh. If, however, we walk by the Spirit—nurturing the relationship God’s Spirit has with ours—then we are tapping into *the very mind of God!*

What does all this have to do with our passage in Thessalonians?

More than just a three-point do-list, Paul tells the Thessalonians, and us, in these three succinct verses that if we are in Christ it is God’s will that we give ourselves over completely to Him. Every day, in any situation, our lives are to vibrate to *His* pitch, tuned to *His* frequency.

By establishing and nurturing a relationship with God so intimate and deep that we credit and thank Him for everything around us, everything that happens—which acknowledges His lordship—and speaking with Him as easily and frequently as we draw breath—audibly, silently, wordlessly; from formal worship and praise, to wordless groanings. By living this way we will have a life so filled with Him and His Spirit that we will “rejoice always” without second thought or effort.

That is “God’s will for [us] in Christ Jesus.”

[NO CLASS NEXT WEEK]