

**1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18; "In Everything Give Thanks",  
A Thanksgiving Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
in the Morning Worship Service, on November 23rd, 2008,  
the Sabbath before Thanksgiving Day.**

In looking at these three exhortations which Paul gives here, we can see that they build off of verse 15 which says, "See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all." It is good both for ourselves, and for all men, when we "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything." Conversely, it is not good for ourselves, or for others around us if we are sad always, if we do not remember to pray, and if we are constantly complaining over everything that happens to us. You will find, if you think about what is being said here, that these exhortations find their culmination, for the Christian, in God Himself who is both the source of all good and the One whom we ultimately are serving and glorifying in doing good; when we do not return evil for evil. So in order to live out these good commandments of the Lord we must learn to look, first of all, beyond what is being required of us, to God Himself who is the giver of every good and perfect gift. We must look to our God to be joyful, happy, and thankful. We must look to Him because He is the One, and the only One who can so fill our hearts with His grace, that we are keeping these commandments out of a pre-eminent love for Him. This is, actually, the means to keeping these commandments. We will keep them when we have come to love Him more than any other person or any other thing in our lives. Therefore, having Him, we have all things in Him, and thus we find that we are more and more enabled to keep these commandments because He is the reason and the end in our keeping them. He is also the means of our keeping them.

We want to look at them more closely from the standpoint of their being God's holy will for us. Doing God's will, for the one who is trusting in Him, leads to the only true and lasting happiness that we shall find in this world. But sometimes we do not believe this. Sometimes; dare I say it, many times, we are not rejoicing in His will; we are not thankful in everything. We are coming to the Day of our National Thanksgiving, the time when you will gather with your friends and family; when you will feast together and you will laugh together. You will enjoy being together and eating your meals together, you may even be praying and thanking God for what you have, and yet I wonder, if all the while you may not, in your heart, be confessing to God that He is your chief joy? You may be thankful for many things, and you may tell Him this. But are you really most thankful for God Himself? I am suggesting that it is all too possible to be thankful for many earthly blessings, and yet not to be thinking about the many spiritual blessings which you have because your fellowship is with the only true and living God; of having Him be with you, of having Him be for you, of having Christ be your constant companion and helper in your earthly journey on your way to the Eternal City. This is the greatest of blessings. Your table may be filled with food and your heart with earthly gladness. But these blessings pass all too

quickly. The blessings which I am speaking of here are really lasting, for both now and forever. It is God's will for you to be thankful in everything, and yet you say, "I can only be thankful when everything is going well with me." It is this mentality that I want to address this morning. This is something that is most definitely not true for the Christian. I want to assert to you today, that it for your highest good, and your greatest happiness that you come to the place where you see the value of keeping these commandments. The value of keeping them is to God, in that it glorifies Him, and the value to you is that you are truly happy. I would like us to think about the value of rejoicing always. The value of praying without ceasing. And then finally, the value of giving thanks in everything.

### **1st - The Value of Rejoicing always.**

There is a great value to the grace of Christ which brings stability to our mind and heart; when we realize that our God and our Christ has commanded and commended this grace of joy to us for all our time and all our situations in this life. Joy and rejoicing must be good in every way for God's dear people. True and abiding and lasting joy come from believing that God always has our welfare now, and our welfare forever in His heart, when He gave us Christ. When you first believed in Christ; when you first realized that He was risen from the dead and that it was His power and His life that had come to your sad, sin-worn heavy heart; were you not filled with joy when you first believed? Your many sins were taken away forever and cast into the deepest sea. You were immediately brought to see that God had your eternal happiness and you're your highest welfare in mind when He came to your soul when you first believed in Him. He gave you Christ, the gift of His Son at the cross and you were set free from the guilt of sin and the power of sin. An eternal inheritance was now yours in Him and He gave you the Holy Spirit to abide in your heart. Does it not give you joy to think of that time when you first believed in Christ? All the promises of God were 'Yes and Amen' to the glory of God to you. They were all seen and understood by you to be true. It was God who was "at work in you, both to will and to work according to His good pleasure." And it was His good pleasure to reveal His Son in you. But now there have come some sad providences into your life which make you think that Christianity is only learning to endure hardship and suffering and disappointment. You have come to think that all joy is going to be suspended until the last day when you see Jesus face to face. The church is not growing the way that you think that it should. There are family members who are not being converted. There are disappointments that you have concerning those who have professed to be Christians. They do not appear to be following the Lord or receiving and living out your Reformed faith. Perhaps you have been hurt or disappointed by other Christians and have come to think that Christ's cause and kingdom cannot go forward to do great things again. You once had joy and great hope and expectation once, but now this is gone. You know that God is Sovereign but you question why He has permitted these sad providences? I can assure you from this text, dearly beloved in Christ, that God would have you to rejoice. To rejoice is to re-joy again in your spirit. It is to deliberately, by faith, renew the joy that you

once had, which Christ gave to you. Joy came to your heart once because of the grace of Christ. That grace is still working in your heart. But you must stir it up. Even if everything around you in this life brings you sadness and disappointment, God intends you to have real and tangible joy and the ability to rejoicing always. Not just in the time of the New Heavens and the New Earth, when righteous living and breathing will be every man's eternal portion, but right now in this sin-cursed, fallen world.

I think that this is something that the Lord Jesus must teach each and every Christian experientially. Whatever joy Jesus had in His time upon the earth; and the joy that He presently now has in heaven, the Father has purposed to give a full portion of this joy to all of His saints as well. Jesus had a joy with His Father at the creation of the world, when His Father created it all through Him in six literal days. He still has that joy even now. Turn with me to Proverbs 8, verse 27. It says here, "When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world and my delight was with the sons of men." Now this is not simply wisdom in the abstract that is being spoken of here. It is wisdom personified. And wisdom personified is Jesus Christ our Lord, the second Person of the Divine Trinity. He always rejoiced before the Father and He especially rejoiced in the Father's inhabited world. His joy and delight was in the sons of men. Well, we have to think about this in terms of the joy which came to Jesus in regard to the holy purposes for which God created man in the first place; apart from the Fall. There was a joy and there was a delight in Jesus which caused him to rejoice always in God's good work in creating all the children of men. We too ought to have this joy which was in Him because He gives it to us by grace. I am talking about the ability by grace to rejoice in the Lord, to rejoice in what He has made and how He has made it; to rejoice in seeing God's handiwork in making men; fallen though they are now, apart from the grace of Christ. His work is always good even if Adam's sin and ours has marred it. Rejoice in His work always.

Jesus, further, had a joy which was set before Him that caused Him to endure the cross and despise the shame which would come to Him when He suffered for our sins. (Hebrews 12: 2) He had a joy in realizing what His holy life and His sacrificial death would mean for each one who would believe in Him. Turn with me to John chapter 16. Jesus is telling His disciples that He must go away for a time from them, so that He could accomplish the work of redemption, making payment for the sin of the world. In verse 19 it says, "Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said them, 'Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see me?'" "Most assuredly I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." "A woman, when she

is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that human being has been born into the world." "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." This truth, of Christ's resurrection from the dead establishes for a certainty every believer's having the grace of joy being communicated to his or her soul by the power of the Holy Spirit. But the verse we are looking at this morning is in the form of a command. This does not mean that grace comes through the works of the law, but it does mean that joy is something that you and I must most deliberately pursue. It means that because we have received grace, that we must learn to obey the command to rejoice by faith in Christ.

Will you let any person or any situation rob you of what God has so tangibly done for your soul? I would hope not, but some Christian people let this happen. They may falsely think that there are some things which have come up in their life since they became a Christian that will cause them to imagine that they shall never be joyful or happy again. They forget what it says in Nehemiah 8: 10, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." They forget that a Christian is commanded to "rejoice always." But turn over there to that passage with me. Here we see that the children of Israel had, for some hours been listening to Ezra preach to them concerning the law of God. The people realized that there were many commandments of God's that they had not kept. They were greatly affected by their guiltiness in regard to having not done what the Lord expected them to do. But Nehemiah and Ezra said to the people in verse 9b, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep." "For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law." "Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to the Lord' "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." They were to realize that joy is not only consistent with holiness, but it is a necessary part of it. The question to all of us is, "Do we realize this?" Verse 11 says, "So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, 'Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.'" "And all the people went their way to eat and drink to send portions and to rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them."

Do you understand them, as well? Think of what the Lord Jesus died to bring to you. He died to bring to you, all things. "If God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; how will He not also, with Him, freely give us all things?" God gives all good things to those who know Him. He does not leave the grace of joy out. "The Lord God is a Sun and Shield." "The Lord gives grace and glory." "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." "How blessed is the man who trusts in You, O Lord of Hosts." Will you not trust in Him, dear sad, anxious, fretful, and discouraged saint? Will you not believe that God is full of good things to give to you; full of good things to show to you; and the greatest of these is Himself? Is this not the basis, the ground, and the warrant for rejoicing always? The Lord is full of goodness; He is good and doeth good to everyone who comes to Him

and keeps coming to Him looking for a blessing. Sadness and care and a fretful spirit wear a person down to the point where he is burden to himself and everyone around him. What is the remedy for this? It is to remember to rejoice always.

**2ndly- We need to see the value of praying without ceasing.**

The value of always being able to come and draw near to God, to make requests of Him that He really answers, is one of the greatest privileges of a Christian. I would suggest to you that many Christians do not avail themselves enough of this great privilege. They come to him when they are in trouble, but they do not come to Him enough when things are going well. They have a wrong conception of prayer. Prayer is positive. It is part of our communion and fellowship with God. Prayer ought to begin, and it ought to be continued, and it ought never to cease because a good part of prayer is praise. Ask yourself, do I praise God as often as I should? "I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever." "Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever." "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; His greatness is unsearchable." (Psalm 145: 1-3) "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." (Psalm 34: 1) Having begun with praise, we then should continue on in supplication. Supplication for every good thing that is righteous and holy to be seen in my life. And supplication for every good thing to be able to do good to men. But it is always good to supplicate God with thanksgiving. You are thankful for all that He has already done for you and for others who know Him, and you are thankful and express that thanks because you believe and you know that God is faithful. He will hear and answer your prayers in accordance with His holy and wise purposes for you and for others you pray for. When we learn to pray without ceasing, we come to know God better. We come to see Him by faith, as He really is. He is good and He is gracious. But I will speak more of this in the last point.

It is not wrong to come to God in prayer frequently, when you are in trouble. In fact I would like you to turn with me to Psalm 86 and we will find a good example of it. I wonder if ever in your life you have prayed to God in the way that the psalmist David does here. Do you see yourself as a poor and needy sinner as David did, and do you seek the Lord in order to make progress in holiness? "Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me; for I am poor and needy." "Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; save Your servant who trusts in You!" "Be merciful to me, O Lord, For I cry to You all day long." "Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul." "For You are ready to forgive and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You." "Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications." "In the day of trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me." Sometimes people have the conception of prayer that God is to be prayed to only when we are in trouble. This is not true, but how good it is to know that when we are in trouble that we can draw near and through Jesus Christ our Lord, know that God will answer us. Men ought always to pray and not lose heart, Jesus says in Luke 18: 1. It is because men do not pray unceasingly that they do lose heart. Come and present your case to the Lord. Tell him of your woes and problems, tell Him of your

sins and failures, confess that you are poor and needy. Don't be always looking at yourself as though you have the answers for everything; you don't. And yet, when you are praying, do not deny the Lord's good work in you, and concerning you, which has already taken place, if you are a Christian. Ask him to preserve your life, for you are holy. Are you holy? Are you set apart for God's purposes? Do you pursue them? Do you pursue Him? Are you in a situation of great difficulty because of your own lack of wisdom in the way that you have lived? Or are you being persecuted because you have taken your stand to live a moral, an upright, and a decent life? Either way, or both, you should be praying without ceasing, seeing the value of praying in this way in order that you might know God better and walk with Him more closely. When you begin to pray without ceasing, you begin to be less dependent upon men to see the answers to your prayers. You begin to see that all things concerning your life are in His holy hands. He is ordering all things for your good. You begin to see that you need His mercy every day in order that things might go well for you. You cry to Him for that mercy. "Save Your servant who trusts in You!" "Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You all day long." All day long? This is praying without ceasing! How is it possible? Verse 5 says, "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You." You say, "But I am so down about the way that things are going in my life." "I can hardly look up." Then cry to God about it. Verse 4 says, "Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul." You are not to let your moods and your emotions, O Christian, so control you that you do not see Who is your crown of rejoicing or the strength of your soul. You learn to pray and cry out to God, and He answers you and ministers unto you. But often even a Christian can be paralyzed by self-pity and doubt. Let it not be. If you are trusting in Christ, He will lift you up. He will not leave you to yourself. The truth is, you do not see and understand the power and glory and grace of Jesus Christ. You remember holy Job; how he questioned God's letting him pass through that great trial he passed through. But at the end of it, by faith and patience in prayer God came to him and showed him Himself. And Job said in Job 42: 2, "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You." No, it is good for us to learn to pray without ceasing. You must come to prove that God is real to you. You must come to prove that His help is there for you every day. Unbelieving people are not going to help you with this. They will bring you down. Turn to Psalm 3 and you will see this. David says, "Lord how they have increased who trouble me!" "Many are they who rise up against me." "Many are they who say of me, 'There is no help for him in God.'" This is how our lives are as well. We are surrounded by unbelief in this society. "But You, O Lord, are a shield about me (around me, or for me), My glory and the One who lifts up my head." "I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill." O how much we need to see and to know that God is there for us. But will we come to learn to pray without ceasing?

I would like to suggest to you that it would be the holy and wise thing for you to do, to take a good look at your prayer life. Are you learning to pray without ceasing?

Are you learning to be anxious for nothing? Are you learning to commit everything in prayer and supplication to God? Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice," Paul says in Philippians 4: 4. But then immediately on the heels of it we find the words, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication make your requests known unto God. " Are you doing this? "When my anxious thoughts multiply within me," it says in Psalm 94: 19, "Thy consolations delight my soul". Why? Because I am learning to commit everything in my life in prayer to God. He will help me. He will console me through His word and by His Spirit, and those consolations will delight my soul. O, beloved, the reason that you worry so much is because you pray so little. Are you casting all your cares upon Jesus? You should know that He cares for you. If He loved you enough to die for your sins; loved you enough to give His life for your soul's welfare eternally, will He not come to you and bring you comfort and strength? Yes, beloved, He will. If He has done the greater, will He fail to do the littler thing? That is why Paul could call his troubles "momentary light afflictions" which were producing "an eternal weight of glory". (2 Corinthians 4: 17) "The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him," it says in Psalm 25: 14, "and He will show them His covenant." How is this secret learned? "My eyes are ever toward the Lord", "for He shall pluck my feet out of the net." There is his faith. But his is a faith which has also learned to pray. "Turn Yourself to me, and mercy on me, for am desolate and afflicted." "The troubles of my heart have enlarge; bring me out of my distresses!" "Look on my affliction and pain, and forgive all my sins." This is the prayer of the believing King David. And are you also praying for other believers? Colossians 1: 9 says, "For this reason we also, since the day that we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." You say to me, "It seems like nothing is happening in the church." "It doesn't seem like people are growing and becoming more useful and fruitful in the work of the Lord." "It doesn't seem like the Holy Spirit's power and presence are with us to the degree that I would like to see." Yes, all of that may true; but do you pray for the people of the church unceasingly? When you can commit every person, including yourself, and every situation, both good and bad to the Lord, in your heart and in your spirit, you are learning to pray without ceasing. "I will pray with my spirit, and I will pray with understanding", it says in 1 Corinthians 14: 15. To pray with your spirit is to be learning to pray without ceasing. How needful it is to exhort you to this, becomes all the more apparent whenever deficiencies are seen in ourselves and others. Do not be looking to assign blame to the pastor or the people. Be learning to pray that good things might be given to us. There is a great value to praying without ceasing.

**Then Finally, there is a value to giving Thanks in everything.**

The giving of thanks is not something in God's mind that should be perfunctory. Do you know what this word perfunctory means? It means something performed in a slight, careless, or negligent way. Perhaps you have heard of perfunctory prayer.

It is the kind of prayer that you do quickly and carelessly to get over the duty. Christians know that they are commanded to pray. They know that it is their duty. But often they do not delight in it as they should. They are only praying so they can get their duty over with. This is not the kind of praying or the kind of giving of thanks that God is looking for. He would have us to give thanks in everything. Prayer is composed of more than just making supplication; making requests of God. It is the giving of thanks. Do you give thanks in a perfunctory way before God and men? 1 Corinthians 14: 16 speaks about public prayer in the church and in speaking about the subject of tongues and praying in a way that people can understand you, Paul says, "Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say." "For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified." Making public prayer to God here, is called "giving thanks". But what God is calling you and I to, on a much more regular basis, is in everything to give thanks. In all situations of joy, in all situations of grief, in all situations of pleasure and pain, in all situations of success and disappointment, in all situations where things go well or whether we are frustrated; we are to see and believe that God has wisely ordered them all because He good. And we are to acknowledge with a thankful mind that they are given in the order and sequence that they are given because He is doing good to me, one of His children, one of His dear saints. This is the will of God for you. It is His preceptive will, yes, but it is also His providential will that we should give thanks for as well. His preceptive will is what governs us. It is ours to give thanks in everything. That is our duty. But it must not be perfunctory. We must really think about the things that God providentially orders for us and give thanks in every one of them, praying for wisdom to learn from them, and to learn from Him in them, and to have a right attitude and spirit as they come to us. A Thankful spirit will manifest itself as a right spirit toward God and men. That comes from truly being thankful to God for the way that He leads and guides us. A Thankful heart does not ever have to fight God. It may need, as the occasion arises, to resist men and to fight against their sins and their sinning against us. But we need never resist God. We resist the Devil, but we submit to God.

Sometimes we are not thankful in everything because we love the world too much and God too little. And God knows this and He is faithful to see to it that we are weaned from the world as time goes on, in our Christian journey to the Celestial City. To be thankful in everything, we must be content with our God and our Christ alone in everything. We must be content to let Him lead, to let Him teach us what is good, and what will make for our greatest happiness. There is a true rejoicing which is found in God and Christ and there is a false joy which comes from the world. There is a true praying without ceasing which will bring us ever closer to God. And there is a true giving of thanks which is content to be close to Christ's cross. "I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place: I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of His face; content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss; my sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross." (Beneath the cross of Jesus, Hymn 177 in the

Trinity Hymnal) Psalm 140, verse 12 says, "I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor." "Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; the upright shall dwell in Your presence." Let us learn to give thanks in everything.