

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Ingredients for Triumph"

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Introduction

1. This closing chapter of the epistle is filled with practical pointers. There is the care of leaders (vv. 12, 13) and then the ministry of leaders (v. 14). A severe warning is given about retaliation among all men (v. 15). What a pile up of final words!

2. Now Paul drops some very precious diamonds. They are a virtual outline of Christian experience lived on its highest plane. No one can attain unto these, save by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). His control is absolutely necessary (v. 19; cf. Eph. 5:18). Obviously the injunctions here are for believers only.

3. There is spiritual triumph when the items here are experienced. As imperatival forms, they are therefore expressions of God's mind to the minds of believers. Heed them carefully:

1. REJOICE v. 16

a. Its meaning This is a common verb. It is often used for a salutation or greeting (Matt. 26:49; 27:29; 28:9). It is used to bid farewell (2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 3:1; 4:4). The underlying thought is "joy" (3:9). Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (1:6; Luke 10:21; Acts 15:32; Gal. 5:22). Joy is totally independent of circumstances.

b. Its timing The adverb employed means "at all times." It refers to an uninterrupted succession of rejoicing. It cannot, therefore, be dependent upon events of life. When trials come, a child of God is to rejoice (James 1:2). He takes adversity as a school in which the mind of God is learned (Psa. 119:71). He sees that all ultimately will be for his good (Rom. 8:28).

NOTE: Joy is associated in the Bible with the incarnation (Luke 2:10), the resurrection (Matt. 28:8), second coming (John 16:22), hearing the Gospel (Acts 13:48), suffering (1 Pet. 4:13), conversions (Acts 15:3), godly order (Col. 2:5), and the triumph of truth (1 Cor. 13:6).

2. PRAY v. 17

a. Its meaning The verb for pray here is used only of requests addressed to God (3:10; 5:25; 2 Thess. 1:11; 3:1). It relates to the notion of worship. Prayer was important in the life of our Lord: He prayed for Himself (Luke 22:41-44) and for others (Luke 22:32). He now prays in heaven for believers (Heb. 7:25). The Lord's Prayer is found in John

17. Believers properly pray to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit (Eph. 2:18), although the Son is addressed in prayer (Acts 7:59 and possibly 2 Cor. 12:9). Prayer is to be offered in the Name of Christ (John 14:13). That means in His merit and character. Prayer is only possible through the Spirit's help (Rom. 8:26).

b. Its timing The adverb "without ceasing" means to pray assiduously, incessantly, unintermitted (1:3; 2:13; Rom. 1:9, cf. Rom. 9:2; 2 Tim. 1:3 for similar root). Since we depend upon the Lord for everything, it is important to pray at all seasons and upon all matters. This adverb speaks of an interrupting cough. In the Bible, prayer is made in the morning (Psa. 5:3), at noon (Dan. 6:10), evening (Acts 3:1; 10:30), midnight (Psa. 119:62; Acts 16:25), and day and night (1 Tim. 5:5). It is urged to pray in every season (Eph. 6:18) and always (Luke 18:1; Col. 4:12).

3. THANKS v. 18

a. Its meaning Here is the common word for thanks. It is urged upon believers (1:2; 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13). We are bound to do it (Col. 2:7; 3:15, 17). The Ephesians are told the same (5:20). Not to do this shows an alienation from God (Rom. 1:21). Our Lord gave thanks (Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 22:19, 42).

b. Its timing The phrase "in everything" suggests that no time is inconvenient in which to give thanks. A similar phrase is given in Acts 10:2. Literally there it means "through every circumstance." Only one who is controlled by the Spirit will be enabled to do this.

Conclusion Paul concludes that "this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Four sections are involved.

1. It is specified. The demonstrative pronoun "this" refers to all three injunctions. God intends for us as part of His will to rejoice, pray, and give thanks. 2. It is selected. The word for "will" here means gracious desire. It is not that God resolves to effect it. To do His will is to yield to His design for us. It is true that we don't have either the desire or the power to effect His will (Ph. 2:13), but this does not relieve us from our personal responsibility. We are told to understand what the will of the Lord is (Eph. 5:17) and do it from the heart (Eph. 6:6). 3. It is secured. The position for it all is the Lord Jesus Christ. God's "will" finds expression in Him. As His life is lived out through us, God's "will" will be demonstrated. 4. It is serviced. By this it is understood that the will of God will be effectual in His own by His power. Literally the Greek preposition means "into" or "towards." May His will be our delight even as it was for our Lord (Psa. 40:8; Heb. 10:7).