

# Learn to Discern

LESSON 5 – DISCERNING THE WILL OF GOD  
1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18  
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# 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

- ▶ As we learn to discern and walk in peace with fellow believers in the community of faith, as we see the difference between good and evil and respond instead of react to evil around us, we have been given a series of short specific commands that will help us along in our pursuit of holiness and pleasing God.
- ▶ Those commands are given in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, which we will be examining over the next few weeks. So what are these commands?

# Rejoice Always

- ▶ **Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**
- ▶ *Rejoice Always*
- ▶ As followers of Jesus Christ, we have every reason to be full of joy all the time! It truly should not be a difficult thing for us to obey this command. We should always be rejoicing.
- ▶ Think about it – our sins have been forgiven, we have been given new life and a right standing with God, we have been adopted as His child, He promises to provide for every need, and He is in complete control of all of creation. What have we got to fear or worry about? Nothing. Nothing at all! And yet it seems so hard to rejoice always. Why is that?

# Rejoice Always

- ▶ It is often hard to rejoice always because in the church today we have confused happiness and joy. We all want to be happy.
- ▶ Let us call to mind all the titles of self-help books that are on the market today. All these books filling book shelves and filling minds promising lasting happiness and therefore fulfillment, because we have all been told that happiness is the chief end of man! If only we can be happy. You know, dream the dream and live happily ever after.

# Rejoice Always

- ▶ But happiness does not last. Why? Because happiness is an emotional response to happenings and given time both emotions and circumstances will change.
- ▶ Joy is not an emotion. It is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). It is a spiritual satisfaction accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit that lifts us up and holds us up even in the midst of hard times, trials, and tests. We learn as we walk in the Spirit that we are even able to grieve and have joy at the same time, because joy is not an emotional response to our surroundings.

# Rejoice Always

- ▶ Joy at times needs to be renewed as we lose it, subdue it, or quench it. But it is certainly more lasting than happiness – and more fulfilling too.
- ▶ So seeing all that we have been given by God, what is stopping us today from rejoicing? For the Bible tells us that we are to rejoice always. To be full and overflowing with joy at all times. And only as we walk in the Spirit are we able to maintain this attitude of real and lasting joy.

# Pray without Ceasing

- ▶ *Pray Without Ceasing*
- ▶ Now it really gets hard. It can become routine to be full of joy! Really. We can get used to the joy of the Lord. It is after all, our strength, but now we are told to pray without ceasing.
- ▶ That means first of all that prayer must be more than an “every eye bowed every head closed” folded hands King Jameth Speaketh communication heavenward! “O Lord, we Thou humble servants doth beseech Thee in Thy mercy.....”
- ▶ We we are told to pray without ceasing and that means pray without stopping. Without interruption. Without distraction. How on earth is that even possible?

# Pray without Ceasing

- ▶ Well it is possible, just as rejoicing always is possible, through the power of the Holy Spirit in a yielded life. As we submit to the Lordship of Christ and walk in the Spirit, being filled and controlled by Him, He lives through us – giving us the power, ability, and desire to do what would normally be impossible.
- ▶ We must also realize what prayer is. It is communication with God. It is not just taking God a list of wants and needs, asking Him to bless the people we love, or blessing a meal. No. It is talking, listening, meditating, communing with God.
- ▶ We talk. We listen through the Word. We ask, request, intercede, praise, adore, worship, exalt, and glorify. In fact, prayer is very much an act of worship you know, that is why we are not to pray to anyone but to God – for He alone is God and He alone is to be worshipped.



# Pray without Ceasing

- ▶ So we can pray without ceasing when we learn what prayer is and what interrupts prayer. Often interruptions come from distractions, desires of the flesh to stop praying. Sin. Anything that causes us to cease communing with God is an enemy of prayer.
- ▶ And let's be clear – we have all heard the phrase “Prayer changes things”, but prayer does not change anything – GOD CHANGES THINGS!

# Pray without Ceasing

- ▶ Prayer is such a neglected topic these days and yet we are told to do it without ceasing. The hardest thing to do is spend just an hour praying. The flesh does not want to pray, it wants to play! Can't sleep? Pray – your flesh will be more than willing to get tired and go to sleep then!!
- ▶ Prayer, communing with God, means death to self. You cannot talk to God rightly and be proud and self centered.

# Pray without Ceasing

- ▶ And let us be clear too, while there is a place for public prayer, more often than not the Bible teaches us to pray in private – we see in the Scriptures the command to pray in our closet! Away from public view. Just us and God.
- ▶ Humbling isn't it? Of course – because public prayer all too often allows us to show off our supposed spirituality. Study what the Bible says about prayer and as we do we should ask why prayer is not more emphasized in our preaching and teaching. After all, how many other things does the Bible command us to do without stopping?

# In Everything Give Thanks

- ▶ *In Everything Give Thanks*
- ▶ Next, we see the command to give thanks in everything. In every circumstance, in every hardship, in every victory, in everything give thanks. We must have an attitude of gratitude.
- ▶ Everything we have is a gift from God by His grace. Every blessing, every provision, everything. Even the hard times and the bad times – they are a gift from His hand. And He promises it will ALL work together for our good and His glory.
- ▶ So what happens in our lives that we should not be thankful to God for?

# In Everything Give Thanks

- ▶ And yet just as prayer is so hard, it is also difficult to thank God as we ought. Often thanking God is the last thing we do. Even when He answers a direct prayer request, we are usually quick to tell our friends and family and those who were praying with us – but then we forget to thank God for the answer He has sent.
- ▶ Thankfulness must come from a humble and dependent heart. Thankfulness also must come from sincerity. We must be truly grateful to God for who He is and all that He has done on our behalf for His own glory. I mean, if everything that happens is within His control and used for His glory then what could happen that we could not thank Him for?

# In Everything Give Thanks

- ▶ Ingratitude flows from a self-centered heart. A lack of thankfulness is carried by pride and envy, jealousy and hatred. It is a hard, sinful, rebellious heart that refuses to be thankful to God for His grace and goodness.
- ▶ Beyond the command, we must see that we have every reason to give thanks in everything! The goodness of God toward us in Christ Jesus is in itself reason enough to thank God forever and always.

# This is the Will of God

- ▶ *This Is the Will of God*
- ▶ Notice then that as we hear and obey the Word of God, re-adjusting our attitude so that we might rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything, we are told that these things are the will of God for us.
- ▶ Now how often does someone say that they are looking for the will of God? They are trying to make a decision and begin to hope that a voice will come booming out of heaven telling them what to do or where to go. That would sure make it easy wouldn't it?

# This is the Will of God

- ▶ So many people work so hard at finding the will of God, and look – here it is. It is given to us in black and white right on the printed page of our Bibles.
- ▶ God's will for us is that we rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything. Sounds simple and yet it is so hard. But there it is. Want God's will? Do these things and you are IN HIS WILL!
- ▶ Often we focus on the decision making process and we worry about making the right decision, but if we learn to discern then we can make those decisions easily. How? Well, when we are doing the will of God – rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, and giving thanks in everything – then it really is not that difficult to make good decisions.



# Decisions, Decisions

- ▶ Do you have a hard decision to make today? Then let me tell you what to do – rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything, and more than likely the decision you need to make will be so clear that you wonder how you missed it in the first place.
- ▶ We miss it when we look so hard at the decision that we forget about trusting God and relying on Him. If we are rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, and giving thanks in everything, then we will see that the Spirit will make decision making easy! For if we are doing these things then His will is not nearly so difficult to discern.

# Next Week

- ▶ Lesson 6 – Do Not Quench the Spirit – 1 Thess. 5:19-22