

# Abiding Fruit

*John 15:16*



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## Thanksgiving & God's Will 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Thanksgiving means exactly what it says – to give thanks. The question to ask is - what are we to give thanks for? There are many legitimate reasons, ideas and things for which we can give thanks. We can give thanks for family and friends. We can give thanks for our church. We give thanks for every meal (at least we should). We can give thanks for salvation – the gift that God has given to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We can give thanks for each other. We can give thanks for what we have, and so we can go on thanking God for all his blessings upon us revealed in so many different ways.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, the Apostle Paul asks us to give thanks for something, that for many of us, depending on the particular circumstance(s), we might not feel inclined to give thanks. Paul says we are, “*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*” For those who question what the will of God is for them, or who say, I don’t know what the will of God is for my life, right here in 1 Thessalonians, Paul says, I can tell you what God’s will for your life is. It is to give thanks in all circumstances. This is a staggering assertion by the Apostle Paul. Is it not true that we probably fail to do this, at least with some semblance of regularity? It is certainly no easy thing to give thanks in all circumstances. Notice that Paul, does not say, “*some circumstances,*” meaning just the good ones where God is blessing us and everything (according to experience and appearance) is going well for us. We are inclined to give thanks when we experience the goodness of God as some visible or tangible benefit from God. We are less inclined (if at all) to thank God for every other circumstance that we would generally call bad or not good.

Circumstances are the humdrum of daily life. They change like the seasons at present. There is a fickleness associated with the variety of circumstances that spring upon us. Why can they not be more consistent or reliable? Then I could respond because I would have some sort of warning or measuring stick of what was coming. But life is not like that. Circumstances, by definition, refer to variety of occurrences, any external conditions, occasions, incidents and the general state of affairs. From a negative point of view, we might say, “*under no circumstances*” meaning “*not at all or never.*” The word that Paul uses is an indefinite adjective meaning “*every, all or all things.*” The KJV translates the word literally as “*every thing.*” All things covers, I think, *everything*. Nothing is left out. In all things, in all the good and the bad, Paul says, we should give thanks. Thankful people tend to be powerful communicators, both in their words and actions. Everything they do is flavored by the attitude of thankfulness. It is impossible to imagine our Lord Jesus Christ as anything but this way, so we have Him as our prime example. The Christian is to be a thankful person because we have much to be thankful for.

Paul’s use of the word for “*give thanks*” means to respond with thanksgiving, to be thankful, and to express our thanks. In this verse, he uses it as an imperative. It is a command. It is not an option for the Christian as to whether I should or should not give thanks in all circumstances. Scripture is commanding us to give thanks in every thing. If Paul had used another form of grammar, we might be inclined to say, well, I can give thanks for something if I want to or not. There is no room for that option here in Paul’s words. Talk about pressure for us. If I had the option, I probably would not give thanks for everything. If I

had to choose, I would rather not be thankful for some things. Paul closes the door on this escape route, which we all would be inclined to take which makes “*giving thanks*” then, something radically different for the believer. The Moral Law of God is not an option for the Christian – it is required. In fact, we call the Moral Law, by its more familiar designation, the Ten Commandments. We recognize the word, “commandments”. No options other than what is stipulated. In human relationships we might refer to this as inflexibility and being rigid, and it can have a negative connotation attached to it. Not so with God. Some things, of course, are principles, which we must hold to unbendingly and unwaveringly. But why does God command certain things of us and from us? The answer to that question is, because it is good for us. God knows what is best for us. His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). When we resist obedience to the Lord, we are saying to God, my way is better than yours. We know that cannot be true, therefore, God’s ways are always right for us.

It is interesting that Paul links the giving of thanks as part of a triumvirate in 1 Thessalonians 5. In verse 16, we are to “*rejoice always,*” and in verse 17 we are to “*pray without ceasing.*” Both rejoicing and praying are also imperatives – we are commanded to do these things. Notice the adverbs that are associated with rejoicing and praying – *always* and *without ceasing*. Talk about even more pressure. Now if these things are commandments (and they are), then I am required to do them (and I am), and if the commandments of God are always good and for my benefit (and they are), then what Paul is saying here, gives us an amazing insight into the life of a Christian. The Christian is a different person from everybody else. He is different because of Jesus Christ.

In verse 18, Paul uses the term “*will of God*”. The will of God carries the idea of obligation with it. I believe that the phrase, “*for this is the will of God...*” covers all three imperatives beginning in verse 16 through 18. It is God’s will to rejoice always. It is God’s will to pray without ceasing, and it is God’s will to give thanks in all circumstances. We are to be a joyful, praying, thankful people. How can such a person be resisted? Spiritually, there is a dynamic here that is profound. If every Christian gave him or herself to the pursuit of these three imperatives, can you imagine the difference that would make? We have no right to be miserable, to not pray and to not be thankful. We are debtors to Christ and bond-slaves of Christ. We are under obligation to Jesus.

This is why in verse 18 Paul encapsulates the will of God as being “*in Christ Jesus.*” These three imperatives are not outside of Christ. The expression of rejoicing, praying and giving thanks is a reflection of Christ Jesus. What does “*in Christ Jesus*” mean? It means that the will of God is set forth or displayed by means of the redemption accomplished by Jesus for us and the revelation of Jesus to us, and this is expressed when we *rejoice, pray and give thanks*. But let us not forget the associated activities – *always, with out ceasing and in all circumstances*. The will of God is accomplished only in this way because our Lord Jesus never failed in these things at all, and we are in Him, and God’s will is for us.

At this point we might be tempted to say, no one can live like that, but that is not true. If this is God’s will for us, then it follows that it must be possible for us to live like this. So how do I do this? Whenever you have the opportunity or it comes to mind to respond in some way or other, you can rejoice, pray and give thanks. Praying without ceasing simply means that the attitude and spirit of prayer encompasses your life. It does not mean you are always 24/7 praying literally. Whenever circumstances and whatever circumstances come our way, God’s will *for us* is to be expressed in our rejoicing, praying and giving thanks. This is Thanksgiving season – soon it will be Christmas. What a season to rejoice in, pray over, and give thanks for, and what a holy ambition to seek to live our lives in this way. The call to be like Jesus is never easy – the way is narrow and hard and few are on that road, but those who are on it, are rejoicing, praying and thanking God for every thing. The will of God – our thanksgiving!