

Kind Invitations

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Please turn in your Bible to Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians chapter 5. And our attention this morning is going to be devoted to the three commands that appear in verses 16 through 16. If you're not familiar with the website, the Babylon Bee, and it appears you are, they describe themselves this way.

Quote, the Babylon Bee is your trusted source for Christian news, and this is critical, satire. So the Babylon Bee is a Christian website, publishes satirical articles on politics, current events, and religion.

I'm a fan of the Bee. They are often very insightful, and they are also often laugh out loud funny. And recently they featured a post titled, Eight Handy Bible Reading Tips.

[1 : 15] Here's a sampling from that particular post. It begins with, it's not always easy to crack open the Word of God. You've got more important things to do, like browse TikTok.

So it's important to have a plan of attack to make sure you read the Bible at least a little bit every day. Luckily for you, your friends at the Babylon Bee are way more spiritual than you are.

And today we've got some hot tips for reading your Bible. Here's some of their hot tips. Get an audio Bible read by William Shatner.

Oh my my. Make sure you set aside at least seven seconds a day to read the Bible. It's important to dedicate a few short seconds to the Lord before you spend the rest of your day on social media. Next, spend most of your devotional time trying to get a good picture of your Bible next to a cup of coffee for your Instagram. Now that you've got a few seconds with the Lord, spend the entire time live tweeting your devotions and getting that perfect Instagram shot.

[2 : 26] Next, look for creative ways to rip verses out of context and make them all about you. When your kids try to interrupt you, shout, not today, Satan.

Satan. Underline the entire book so no verses feel left out. The more underlining, the more spiritual you are.

And then finally, whenever you read a really convicting verse, make sure to apply it to everyone else instead of yourself. This is an important one.

If you read a verse that convicts you of sin in your life, just think of how much Becky from Bible study needs to change her life instead of you.

It's better this way. Let me just alert you. Our passage this morning, though brief, is really convicting stuff.

[3 : 34] I'm convicted each and every time I read this passage. I'm convicted every time someone references this passage.

So this morning, as we read this passage and consider this passage, let's avoid that temptation to apply this passage and these commands to everyone in our relational world rather than apply them to ourselves.

So join me this morning in resisting that temptation as we consider these commands. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 16.

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances.

For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

[4 : 47] Let's discover afresh how God has graciously given us these convicting commands for our good.

And ultimately for his glory. And consider how we can apply them to our lives rather than the person sitting next to us this morning.

Beginning in verse 12, Paul transitions from describing a life characterized by hope, anticipating the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in chapter 5 verses 1 through 11.

And then he concludes the letter addressing daily life and the congregational life of the Thessalonians as the new community that God has created through the proclamation of the gospel. And what is particularly striking about this concluding section is that we are suddenly met with a barrage of brief, simple commands.

[5 : 46] Some 19 in all. So in this concluding section, beginning in verse 12, Paul goes all gas, no brakes, communicating one specific, potent command after another.

So this is how the gospel that creates the church is to shape the daily life of the church is to shape the daily life of the Christian.

And by the way, this is also Paul at his pastoral and practical best. These commands are all informed by his love for this church, by his knowledge of this church.

And their purpose is to strengthen this church that he deeply loves. And in our text in verses 16 through 18, Paul addresses their relationship with God in three distinct commands.

Each of these commands and all of the commands really in this closing section, they're all informed and inspired by the gospel. The gospel is central in this letter.

[6 : 57] Paul has been declaring and celebrating the gospel from the first chapter of this letter where he reminds the Thessalonians of Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

So God's love in rescuing them through Christ and him crucified precedes and informs these commands in chapter 5.

So the obedience of the Christian to God's commands is in response to the relationship that God has created by his grace, not in order to earn it.

So these commands and our obedience to these commands, they don't create our relationship with God, but instead they regulate our relationship. And obedience to these commands and obedience to these commands, puts on display the transforming effect of the gospel in our lives.

I like how Brian Chappell describes this in his book titled Unlimited Grace, where he writes, Through the blessings of grace, walking with Jesus is no longer a forced march of merit, but a willing response of love, gratitude, and thanksgiving.

[8 : 19] Oh, is that not good news? So obeying these commands, my friend, is not a forced march of merit on our part. Four, we are forgiven and justified and accepted by God only because of the merits of another, only because of the merits of our Savior.

So we are not saved by our good works, but we are saved by the good works of another, the Lord Jesus Christ, on our behalf and in our place.

Obeying these commands is what loving devotion to the one who rescued us from God's wrath looks like.

And actually we should view these commands, these good and wise commands, we should view them as kind invitations from God to grow in our devotion to God, deepen our affection for God and find satisfaction ultimately in God and God alone.

So I want you to view these commands, kind invitations from our gracious God, these good and wise commands. Listen, they are meant to lift burdens from our lives, not add burdens to our lives.

[9 : 49] I think I can safely assume that the majority of us, if not every one of us, got out of our cars and walked into this building carrying burdens on our hearts.

Certain burdens. We came here today with specific burdens on our hearts. Perhaps burdens that are weighing us down.

I think I can accurately assume that. So let me just announce from the outset, these commands are gifts from God that are meant to lift those burdens from our hearts and lives so that we walk to our hearts so that we walk to our hearts at the end of this meeting with a discernible joy and peace in our soul.

So whatever burdens you brought with you this morning and into this place, view these commands as a gift from God in order to lift those burdens from your soul.

So let's just welcome this morning. Let's welcome the sweet gift of conviction where appropriate.

Let's just resist and dismiss even the slightest whisper of condemnation from the evil one about our failure in relation to these commands.

[11 : 12] And let us receive these commands and respond to them as kind invitations from God.

Actually, I don't think it's the commands to rejoice and pray and give thanks that we find daunting or

perhaps discouraging.

I really think it's the comprehensive nature of these commands that is daunting. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.

Give thanks in all circumstance. I think it's the comprehensive nature of these commands. They appear at first glance, do they not, as unrealistic.

These commands at first glance can appear to be just like, no way. This is impossible to fulfill.

These commands are like a setup for failure.

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances. Here's what I hope we learn this morning. Hope we learn that they appear this way to us because we have misunderstood the comprehensive nature of these commands.

[12:31] And we have misunderstood how to apply these commands to our lives. Actually, I would argue that the comprehensive nature of these commands is good news.

Here's why it's good news. They are good news because it means there is no moment or circumstances that these commands don't apply to our lives with their life-changing potential and potency.

So that is good news for each of us this morning. So what I hope is with eager anticipation of the difference, obedience to these commands by the grace of God, the empowering grace of God can make in our lives.

Let's consider them in their order. First, verse 16. Rejoice always. It's just a remarkable command. And it's particularly remarkable because the original readers, they're suffering.

So the original readers of this letter, the original recipients of this letter, they are suffering and they are enduring persecution for the sake of the gospel. And by the way, they have been from the moment of their conversion.

[13:39] Their conversion actually took place in the context, in the midst of hostility and opposition to the gospel. And it appears, it appears that the Thessalonians didn't expect this persecution to continue.

But it did. And this was unsettling to their souls. And Paul actually addresses this and encourages them in chapter 3 with these words. He said, we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one may be moved by these afflictions.

For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. And my friends, so are we. So are we. There is an opposition to the gospel.

There is a hostility to the gospel that is without doubt on the increase in our culture. Not only a hostility toward the gospel, but a hostility to the ethical implications of the gospel.

So we will find letters like Thessalonians all the more relevant. But then listen, Paul says, for when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction.

[14:57] Just as it has come to pass. And just as you know. So that this command in 5.16, it reminds them of their responsibility, their duty to rejoice always, even as their experience of affliction and persecution continues.

And not just when circumstances are favorable or enjoyable. And by the way, this was one of the distinctives of their conversion. Their extraordinary experience of joy in the midst of suffering. Paul reminds them of that in the opening chapter where he writes, For you receive the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

So Paul does not want their prolonged experience of persecution to rob them of the joy that characterized them at their conversion.

They needed this reminder in chapter 5 and verse 16. And I'm saying if they needed the reminder, I need the reminder. I think we need the reminder. And they have many reasons to rejoice always.

[16:06] They got many reasons to rejoice always. And in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, Charles Wanamaker, he explains why. Why the Thessalonians have many reasons to rejoice.

When he writes, Although Paul does not spell out the source or basis of Christian joy in 5.16, the instructions to rejoice always derives its meaning from the earlier passages in the letter.

And this next sentence is money. To rejoice always is to see the hand of God in whatever is happening and to remain certain of God's future salvation.

Without such conviction, joy would not be possible in the face of affliction, suffering, and death. Oh my. So, they are commanded to rejoice always.

Why? They're commanded to rejoice always because, well, because the hand of God is always at work in their lives. That's why they're commanded to rejoice always.

[17 : 13] And Paul has already modeled this for them. He's modeled how to perceive the hand of God at work. How to rejoice in the hand of God at work. Really from the outset of this letter.

Because in the opening verses, he reflects back on his experience with them. And he identifies the hand of God at work in them. In chapter 1, verses 2 and 3, when he writes, We give thanks to God always for you.

Here's why. Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, that's the hand of God. That's the hand of God at work in the Thessalonian Christians. That's what informed Paul's outburst of rejoicing at the outset of this letter.

So, this is good news for us. If you are a Christian this morning, God commands you to rejoice always because his gracious hand is always at work in your life.

[18 : 19] Providing you with something to rejoice in, beginning with your salvation. And since the gracious hand of God is always at work in the life of the Christian, there's always something to rejoice in.

There's always something to rejoice in if we're paying attention, if we know what to look for, even in the midst of suffering. And I think the Puritan Thomas Watson really has accurately described both our temptation and tendency.

He's provided the remedy as well in his book, The Art of Divine Contentment, when he wrote, Oh, see if you can't identify with this. Our tendency is to pour over losses rather than ponder our mercies.

A gracious heart spies out mercy in every condition. Oh, that's money.

The command to rejoice always. What does it teach us? Well, it teaches us to spy out mercy in every condition. So, let me ask you, where do you see the merciful hand of God at work in your life, even if you're suffering?

[19 : 41] This is in no way meant to minimize the pain of suffering. But Scripture calls us to rejoice within our experience of suffering because God's hand is always at work, even in and especially through our suffering.

The Thessalonians were suffering, yet Paul commands them to spy out mercy in their condition.

Paul says to them through this command clearly, The gracious hand of God is at work in your life.

Do you notice it? Are you looking for it? Or are you pouring over and preoccupied with your losses? So, my friends, if you're a Christian, if you look for his hand in your life today, you'll see it. If you see it, oh, you will see it. And if you don't see it, ask someone who knows you to help you see it.

Because sometimes others can see it more clearly than we do. But the hand of God is at work. And in his book, The Mystery of Providence, John Flavel wrote, He who observes providence will never be long without a providence to observe.

[21 : 01] Oh, you will find that to be true in your life. If you become a keen observer or providence, you will never be long without a providence to observe.

You'll never be long without perceiving God's gracious hand. So, can I give you a practice that I think will serve you informed by this command so you can apply this command?

Let me just recommend you just devote some unhurried time. Beginning today, just a few minutes, but unhurried time. And by the way, let it carry over throughout the week.

Carefully observe the providence of God in your life. Recognize the many ways the hand of God is graciously at work in your life.

If you do this, you will then re-look at this command and say, Oh, actually, by the grace of God, that command is not too difficult to apply to my life.

[22 : 00] Because God is always graciously and generously at work in my life, providing me with plenty to rejoice in.

And when you do this and apply this command, it will deepen not only your awareness of God, it will deepen your affection for God himself. And it will alter the disposition of your heart for all to see the transforming effect of the gospel.

Second, pray without ceasing. This command, it's meant to encourage us to pray.

It is not meant as a discouraging reminder that we don't pray enough. So many is the time I've read this and each time previous without being theologically informed, that's how I'd read this.

It's like, yep, there's a reminder. I don't pray enough. Well, no, no, Paul didn't remind that he did not write this to remind them that they don't pray enough.

[23 : 05] He is not scolding them. He's encouraging them to pray. And I would argue this command is a particularly easy one to misunderstand because it can just, well, it just appears impossible to obey.

How impractical is this? Pray without ceasing. I have a job. You know, how am I supposed to navigate my way through the responsibilities I've been given and pray without ceasing?

So it just appears initially when you read like this is impossible to obey. This is just impractical. I'm sorry to say as an aging man over the last few years in recent years, my exercise regimen has been reduced to walking.

That's it. That's it. That's all we got. As a younger man, I mocked walkers. Yes, to my shame. I would drive by people walking and just criticize them as I drove by.

How lame. Walking. Are you actually convinced there's some benefit from this? And why are you even attempting to walk at a faster pace?

[24 : 25] You look odder. You know, why don't you join the world of real athletes and actually exercise and exert yourself?

So I would say things like that in my arrogance and in my ignorance. And then as time went by, studies were done and books were written that walking has like these miracle working powers, etc. And then the harsh reality of age just came into my life where you just injure yourself getting out of bed this morning. You know, in the morning. So you just, life becomes a risk.

Yeah. Oh my, my. And so I have joined the ranks of those who walk. Okay. So you do your research on walking.

Okay. But what makes for healthy walking, etc. And oh my, do you get drawn into a world that can be a bit confusing. Now, you'll have articles just stating emphatically, well, 10,000 steps a day.

[25 : 24] You're in 10,000 steps a day. Okay. Let's try the, I'm, I'm, okay. Let's try to do that. 10,000 steps in a given day. And then you read, no doubt, you know, months later. No, they've dropped that down to 8,000.

Eight's good. And by the way, who's being funded for this kind of research? I really, I want to look into this. And then you read another article that says, no, 5,000.

We dropped it down to 5,000. Now we're down to 5,000. And I fully expect, I fully expect over the next couple of years, I'm going to read an article saying that those who do walk 5,000 steps a day die prematurely.

That's what I'm anticipating is eventually, that's going to be the end result of this study. The end result is going to be stop walking. You're a total idiot. Stop it. You are, you're going to die prematurely.

If I read in any of those articles, walk without ceasing, what would my reaction be?

[26 : 21] Oh, walk without ceasing? What, cease to live life? No, I can't. That's unreasonable. That's ridiculous. That's impractical. I have a life to live.

It involves more than walking. Well, listen, this isn't what Paul is commanding here. So we must not misunderstand. This isn't a command for us to, in effect, neglect work, to neglect school, to neglect caring for children, and devote ourselves, monk-like, exclusively to praying in private without ceasing.

Now don't misunderstand. There's certainly a benefit to a set time for prayer, the practice of unhurried prayer, undistracted prayer. Normally, for me, that happens earlier in the morning, and it wonderfully sets the tone for the day.

But Paul is not commanding them, or us, by implication this morning, to be devoted to the uninterrupted practice of prayer, because that actually would contradict what he's taught previously in this letter.

He's taught them about the importance of work. Check it out for yourself. In chapter 4, he's exhorted them to work. He's talked to them about other realities that make up daily life.

[27 : 42] So he doesn't mean here that we must be devoting every waking moment to the practice of prayer, because that would mean neglecting other God-given responsibilities we are commanded to attend to each and every day.

And I think Greg Beal, in his commentary, helpfully describes what this command is meant to produce when he writes, during, during daily activities, we must focus on the task at hand, but we

should never lose sight of God in our spiritual, peripheral vision.

Oh, that's helpful. This is a call to prayer that isn't restricted to a certain time or location. Why? So that we never lose sight of God in our spiritual, peripheral vision throughout the day.

So our practice of prayer in applying this command, it's not limited to certain prescribed hours. No. It should, though, permeate our daily lives.

So this command is a kind invitation from God, listen, to enjoy communion with God, not simply during a fixed time in the morning, but throughout the entire day.

[28 : 59] So I need this command. I need this command to be my companion throughout the day as I make my way through a busy day, because this command is an invitation to commune with God at any time and all the time without neglecting other God-given responsibilities.

In an article titled, Don't Ever Stop Praying, the Refreshing Privilege of Unceasing Prayer, Scott Hubbard, he makes this point. I think he makes it effectively when he writes of this command. If prayer is communion with God, communion with this Father, Son, and Spirit, then we will hear the command differently.

Enjoy God without ceasing. Depend on God without ceasing. Gain strength from God without ceasing.

And find that he is ever near, always faithful. Oh, my friends, I pray all of us would hear this command differently if we've previously heard it inaccurately.

[30 : 16] This command is about communion with God throughout each day that isn't confined to a certain time or location that doesn't require that I be on my knees or bow my head.

And for applying this command to my life, I really found the wise counsel and practice of Charles Spurgeon so helpful over the years in obeying this command. Read this years ago, and it has served me from that day to this.

Mr. Spurgeon wrote of his practice in applying this command, I always feel it well to put a few words of prayer between everything I do.

Oh, that's wisdom. Oh, take that with you. You can be in any context. So if you're working in an environment that understandably is populated by non-Christians, your devotion to this doesn't have to be announcing to everyone in a particular meeting.

I'd like to voice a word of prayer right now because God's word commands me to pray without ceasing. So I'd like everybody to join me in prayer. No, no, no, no.

[31 : 22] You can, you can, and you don't have to bow your head. You don't have to draw any attention to yourself. You could actually be maintaining eye contact with someone in a meeting. And all the time you are putting a few words of prayer between whatever is presently happening and what's going to happen.

You can do it without drawing any attention to yourself. And by the way, if you know anything about Charles Spurgeon, let me just assure you, regardless of how busy you are, Spurgeon was busier. Okay? Unless you're a mother with multiple small children. Then Spurgeon was not busier. And those ladies need to be held in the highest esteem. Every day here is Mother's Day, given the sacrifices they make.

But when you study Spurgeon's life and the volume of work he produced, Charles Spurgeon would make eye contact with you if you said, you know what, I've watched you and like you're pretty busy. Like you're incredibly busy. You're always moving. There's 40 some ministries here. How do you apply pray without ceasing? Spurgeon would tell you, well, I just put a few words in between everything I do.

[32 : 33] Just a few words are necessary. Why don't you try it, CJ, and see if it doesn't serve you. By the way, Luther also argued that prayer ought not be long and elaborate as much as frequent and fervent.

So, this command is an invitation. It's a sweet one. To draw near to God this week without ceasing. Enjoy God this week without ceasing.

Depend on God this week without ceasing. Gain strength from God throughout this week without ceasing. And experience the nearness of God without ceasing by praying without ceasing.

Finally, give thanks in all circumstances. Verse 18. This is another stunning command. It's another stunning command, particularly in light of their harsh circumstances.

Let's not misunderstand this command. It doesn't mean we're just to concentrate on giving thanks every moment of the day. No, but what it does mean is that in the midst of every circumstance,

whether good or adverse, we are to give thanks to God.

[33 : 49] I'm telling you, this is a simple command. When it's obeyed, it will have a profound heart-altering perspective, altering effect on your life that will be noticeable to others.

When you obey this command, here's what I'm saying. When you obey this command, whenever you obey this command, it will have an immediate discernible effect on your life. Go ahead, test drive it.

Test drive it as you go from here and see if it doesn't have an immediate discernible effect on your life and soul in relation to God and others.

Gratefulness to God. Giving thanks to God for his graciousness and generosity. That's to be a distinctive in the life of the Christian and in the life of the church.

It's to be an observable effect of the gospel in the heart and the life of the Christian. And the Thessalonian Christians and each and every one of us by implication, we are to give thanks in every circumstance.

[34 : 54] In all circumstances. So there is no circumstance that exists where this doesn't apply for the good of our soul and ultimately the glory of God.

And so there's no misunderstanding. It does not say for all circumstances. Right? Thanking God for the effects of sin that we experience in this fallen world.

However, we are to give thanks for God in all circumstance. Why? Because God is sovereignly at work for our good and his glory in all circumstances.

Sanctifying us and glorifying himself. So, even when we meet adverse circumstances. And those are inevitable to differing degrees in each and every day.

In some form. There is to be this ceaseless gratefulness and a distinct absence of complaining.

[35 : 55] Listen, if I could meet with each one of you individually after this meeting. Sit across at whatever the coffee shop of your choice is.

One of the things I could say to you is there is always something for you to give thanks for. Always. And actually, I would argue there's plenty for you to give thanks for.

Why? Because God is gracious and generous. That's why. That's why. So, this command is given so that we might learn that really, no matter how difficult a day is or a season is, there's always things in that day to be grateful for.

Because God is always graciously at work. So, the command, I want you to see it. We need to see it. It's a kind invitation. The command is a gift to us to consider how we might give thanks for his undeserved kindness.

Because it's present and it's pronounced in our lives each and every day. So, I'm assuming most of you are familiar with the famous hymn that exhorts us to count your blessings and name them one by one.

[37 : 10] And boy, the hymn writer got this right. Because when you do count them and you do name them, what happens? You go from blind to perceptive.

You see what God is doing and has done. And you will be surprised at what the Lord has done. But if you don't count them, if you don't name them and one by one name them, you won't perceive them. And so, you won't walk around surprised by what the Lord has done.

So, too often, I don't see because I'm not counting. And oh, this is relevant. And I experienced the transforming effect of this command and the application of it through my wonderful wife's example. A number of years ago, we were walking through a difficult season of trial. And inspired by this command, inspired by this hymn, Carolyn said, you know, I think what we need to do, we're tempted right now to pour over our losses rather than to perceive evidences of grace.

[38 : 21] So, I'm going to start creating a list of the evidences of grace. I'm going to be naming them one by one. And I remember thinking, that's a wonderful idea, commending her for that.

That's, I'm sure, going to serve me, going to serve all of us. And so, she embarked on that. And very quickly, the list was a lengthy one. Very quickly.

And I remember when I first read the first draft of the first list from the first day, I was both, I was convicted that I had lost sight of all these evidences of grace.

And I'm sad to say, and to my shame, I also found myself not wanting to give excessive attention to this list.

Because I was more preoccupied with the losses. I wanted some explanation of those things. And so, she's doing this daily.

[39 : 25] So, this list is expanding daily. Eight and a half by 11 pieces of paper. And I'm sorry to say, I started to just avoid the list.

I started, I knew what it was. I knew what she was doing. She'd tell me what she was doing. Updated version. Ready. Okay. I'll get to it. You know, yeah. Another time.

But to sit and give unhurried time to that list was to perceive how gracious, how good, and how generous God was as she spied out mercy in this difficult season of life so that we could give thanks in all circumstances.

Because there was a list. And it was quickly pages. Pages. To look at the list meant that I was given the gift of sight.

When I didn't look at that list, I went blind to those evidences of grace. And instead became aware of losses and affliction and trial.

[40 : 44] If you don't count, you'll remain blind. And you'll be vulnerable to all manner of complaining. So, this command is for our good. It's meant to provoke us to count.

Oh, my friend. Start your own list. Start your own list. Start your own list. Start your own list. Count them one by one. And see. See.

See what the Lord has done. And then notice as we come to the close of these sweet commands. Paul makes it clear that rejoicing always.

Praying without ceasing. Giving thanks in all circumstances. Notice it's not simply his recommendation. No, no. It's the will of God. It's the will of God. So, he grounds these commands in the authority of God himself.

This is the will of God. Anybody who's been a pastor for even a brief period of time knows that you are approached by those you care for. They've got questions about the will of God for their lives. It's usually related to a decision related to marriage or vocation.

[41 : 46] A major decision of some kind. They have options. They need clarity in the midst of all their uncertainty. It can be a challenge to discern what is the will of God. My friends, we aren't left to speculate or wonder about what is the will of God for our lives from this passage.

No, no. No, this stands at the center of God's will. By the way, if you aren't doing this stuff, don't think you're going to get guidance about the other stuff. That's not the way it works.

No, this is the will of God. Rejoicing, praying, giving thanks. That's the center of God's will. That's not at the periphery. No, that's the center of God's will.

So, isn't that good news this morning? You don't have to wonder. People can often think of this will of God category. Oh, man, you enter into that one. It's one of mystery. You know, who really knows what guidance looks like?

No, no, it doesn't appear to Paul. Paul would look at you and just, nope, nope. Here's the will of God. Here's the will of God. Rejoice, pray, give thanks. That's the will of God. I just love, don't you love the apostle Paul and how he serves us?

[42 : 51] And love the God who inspired him to write this. This is where the will of God begins right here with these commands. And note, note as well, it's the will of God where?

In Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus. Because obeying these commands is only possible because of Christ Jesus. It's only possible because of what he's done for us, because of what he does within us, applied to us by the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

But obeying these commands is only possible if one is in Christ Jesus. So Paul's description of the work of the Spirit here, joining believers to Christ, is what informs the obedience to these commands.

So I just want to say, don't you love how the Lord rolls? God does not issue commands without also empowering us to obey the commands.

What a good God we serve. We obey these because of the empowering work of Christ within us. And then just one more phrase.

[44 : 02] Oh, because these last two words would be really easy for all of us to overlook. Don't overlook the concluding phrase. For you. Oh, I love that phrase.

For you. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. So that, you know what that phrase does? That phrase personalizes these commands. Actually, through that phrase, God is in effect addressing each of us by name. Actually, through that phrase, God himself is making eye contact with each of us this morning.

He's saying to you, sir, all these commands, these kind invitations, they're for you. They're for you. He's saying to you, ma'am, they're for you. They're for you.

He's saying to you, they're for you, pal. They are for you. Saying to you, ma'am, they are for you. God is making eye contact with us and saying, these are from the gracious God who rescued you from his wrath by not sparing his own son.

[45 : 15] And these commands are for you and for your good. I mean you, the Lord says, I mean you only good by these commands.

These commands are for your good. I mean you only good. And these commands, when applied, will lift burdens from your heart.

Deepen your knowledge of me. Your friendship with me. And your affection for me. Let's pray. Oh, Father, I pray that each of us would not view these commands the same.

But would view them as gracious gifts from you. Not as burdens you're placing on us this morning. But instead as kind invitations.

Gifts to us. To lift burdens. So that we would leave here burden free. Because we rejoice. And we pray.

[46 : 27] And we give thanks. So. Thank you. For the empowering work of your spirit in our hearts. And the gift of these commands.

For our good. And ultimately for your glory, Father. In Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com. Thank you.