

# 1 Thessalonians

## I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 5:14-22** . . . We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. [15] See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. [16] Rejoice always; [17] pray without ceasing; [18] in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. [19] Do not quench the Spirit; [20] do not despise prophetic utterances. [21] But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; [22] abstain from every form of evil.

B. Pray

## II. Practical Christian living for everyday life and the return of Christ.

A. It is possible that the wording of the five exhortations in **vs 15-18** seems somewhat extreme or even unrealistic. For example: “See that **no one** repays evil for evil,” “**Always** seek after that which is good for one another and for **all** people,” “Rejoice **always**,” “pray **without ceasing**,” and “in **everything** give thanks.”

1. Because the wording seems extreme or unrealistic, some may treat these exhortations as if they are impractical, and therefore not to be taken too seriously.
2. However, the wording only seems extreme to those who are uncertain about God’s trustworthiness, and who aren’t convinced God enables, empowers, and helps us live the life He calls us to live, and who haven’t as yet learned to think about and see life as God and His word teaches us to think about and see life.
3. Therefore, as we work through these five exhortations in the coming weeks, I am urging you to see them as what can be, and to believe that by trusting in God for His enabling and transforming power, He will enable and empower you to live accordingly.

B. [15] See that **no one** repays another with evil for evil, but **always** seek after that which is good for one another and for **all** people.

1. The first thing to notice is that this is a two sided exhortation. The **first side** tells us what not to do, and the **second side** tells us what to do instead.

2. **First side:** “See that **no one** repays another with evil for evil.”
  - a. Of the five exhortations, this is the only one that exhorts the whole church to take on the responsibility of seeing that no individual in the church repays evil for evil.
    - (1) This in no way removes the responsibility that each of us has to not repay evil for evil to anyone.
    - (2) But what it does is call us as a church, that is, as a community of believers, to share this responsibility by working together so that none of us does repay evil for evil.
  - b. Now you may be wondering why God has gone beyond making this an individual responsibility to making this an individual **and** a community responsibility. From my perspective, there are at least three reasons why God did this.
    - (1) **First**, repaying evil for evil is a sin almost all of us are prone to commit – not once, but repeatedly, and not only openly and in blatantly unchristian ways, but also in less obvious and more socially acceptable ways.
      - (a) In fact, this is a sin many of us don’t even realize we are committing – not because we can’t know, but because we do not purposefully and honestly examine our behavior in order to see if, how, and how often we commit this sin.
      - (b) In fact, if you think about repaying evil for evil at all, it is probable you think about it on a grand scale – like the destruction of property and the loss of life the Israelis and Hamas have inflicted on each other over the past several weeks.
      - (c) Yet as we know from Jesus’ teaching about adultery in **Matthew 5:27-28**, sin is not always big and obvious. Sometimes it is small and hidden from public view – which can also be true of repaying evil for evil. But we will get to that in a few minutes.
    - (2) The **second** reason God makes this both an individual and a church responsibility is because when Christians commit it they are misrepresenting God and the Christian way of life. For example, repaying evil for evil is contrary to God’s nature. It is opposite of the way God deals with us. It is contrary to godly living. And it is opposed to love.
      - (a) In fact, the most common motive for repaying evil for evil is the selfish form of self-protection.

- (b) Therefore, it is impossible for Christians to repay evil for evil without bringing shame and dishonor to the name of God.
  - (c) And it is impossible for Christians to love their neighbor as themselves and repay evil for evil – for no one repays evil for evil to seek their neighbor’s good, but rather to do him harm.
- (3) The **third** reason God makes this an individual and a community responsibility is because this sin cannot make anything better. In fact, it makes things worse by adding sin to sin. It heaps suffering and destruction upon suffering and destruction. And it feeds and prolongs hurt feelings, ill-will, unkindness, anger, bitterness, hatred, meanness, and even hostility and cruelty toward one another.
- (a) The reality is, to repay evil for evil is to retaliate or strike back **with the intention** of hurting or harming the person who has wronged you in some way.
  - (b) And though this is often done for the purpose of trying to convince them to stop treating you in some unkind or hurtful way, it is communicated with words and actions that are just as sinful, just as hurtful, and just as harmful as the wrong done to you.
  - (c) For example, when we are hurt or disappointed or unfairly criticized or in some other way made to feel unloved or disrespected, we are prone to punish the one who treated us this way by withholding affection, pulling away, giving the silent treatment, withholding basic kindnesses, using sarcasm, speaking harshly, or holding on to resentment and bitterness.
  - (d) These kinds of responses, though not as obvious or as physically painful as a punch for a punch or a kick for a kick, still hurt, still damage relationships, and are still sinful. Why? Because they are never done as an act of love or seeking the others good, but as an act of retaliation with the hope that by hurting those who hurt you, they will stop hurting you.
- c. Therefore, as Christians who have been loved and saved by a loving, gracious God who has not dealt with us according to our sins, but rather who has done us good in spite of our sins, we are to follow His example and **NEVER** repay evil for evil. And

though we bear this responsibility individually, we are also commissioned by God to bear it as a church with the goal of seeing to it that none of us repays evil for evil.

- d. Finally, I want to conclude this **first side** of **vs 15** by reading three more clear statements about this issue from God's word.
  - (1) **Proverbs 20:22**, Do not say, "I will repay evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you. (*Protect you, work it out for good, bring about a good end to the situation*)
  - (2) **Romans 12:17a**, Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.
  - (3) **1 Peter 3:8-12**, To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit (*note the qualities of character that precede and therefore give you the right mindset, values, and beliefs to*); [9] not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. [10] For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit (*regardless of how you are treated*). [11] He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it (*regardless of how you are treated*). [12] For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

C. As I stated earlier, **vs 15** is a two sided exhortation, and the **second side** says that we are to **always** seek after that which is good for one another and for **all** people.

1. Obviously, the words "seek after that which is good" is the opposite of being treated in unkind, unloving, evil ways. In other words, God is exhorting us to respond to mistreatment or hurtful treatment or unfair treatment or selfish treatment by seeking the good of the one mistreating us.
  - a. In other words, though the one mistreating us is acting in a selfish, hurtful, and sinful way, we are to respond by continuing to act in a loving and godly way.
  - b. Now without question, this kind of response is contrary to our old, sinful nature – a nature which is simply trying to protect us from mistreatment, needless suffering, hurt feelings, seemingly endless disappointment, ongoing frustration, painful rejection, unjust criticism, and that horrible feeling of being vulnerable.

- c. However, as Christians, we are supposed to be putting to death our old, sinful nature (**Galatians 5:24**). And as Christians, we are to intentionally and actively put on the new nature – which comes from God and is created in the likeness of His son, Jesus Christ (**Romans 8:29; Colossian 3:9-10**).
2. The exhortation to always seek after that which is good for one another instead of repaying evil for evil is strongly supported by **Romans 13:10**, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor (*in spite of what your neighbor does or has done to you*); therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”
  - a. Jesus put it this way in **Matthew 5:43-45**, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ [44] But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; **for He** causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”
  - b. And lest we think no human in his right mind could live up to this, let me remind you of Stephen’s example in **Acts 7:58-60**, “When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. [59] They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ [60] Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ Having said this, he fell asleep.”
3. I am not saying that living this way is easy or pain free. And I understand that living this way seems impossible or totally irrational when we view life through the eyes of our old, sinful nature.
4. But when you trust God to be your primary source of security, when you believe you are safe in God’s hands regardless of your circumstances, when God is your first and foremost source of love, when your sense of well-being comes from living a life pleasing to Him, when you value love and loving those around you more than being loved, and when you look at life through the eyes of your new, godly nature, **then** what seems impossible, irrational, and unsafe becomes much easier, wise, and totally safe.

5. Returning once again to Paul's words in the second half of **vs 15** we read, "but **always** seek after that which is good for one another and for **all** people."
  - a. It is scriptures like **Romans 12:20-21; 13:10**, and these words here in **vs 15** that helped form my definition of love: "Love is seeking the good of everyone who is in any way affected by my choices and behavior" – and this includes seeking the good of those who mistreat me.
  - b. But what does it mean to seek someone's good? To seek the good of someone is to do what is best for them **and** everyone they effect – whether you are seeking their good in the moment, long term, or throughout eternity.
  - c. The easiest and most straightforward way to figure out how to seek someone's good is to treat them according to the second great commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself," that is, treat them in the way you would want to be treated if you were in their shoes.
  - d. Jesus gives a general example of how God does this in **Matthew 5:45**, where Jesus says that God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
    - (1) Obviously, God does not bless and protect and heal the unrighteous like He does the righteous, but He does them good by making sure they have what they need to carry on life. This establishes a principle that can help us decide how to do good to those who mistreat us.
    - (2) Paul adds some specific examples of doing good in place of repaying evil for evil in **Romans 12:20**, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink." Once again, we see that doing good is at least caring for basic needs of those who hurt or mistreat us.
    - (3) Along with these two examples, I add caring about their eternal salvation, their mental and emotional health, their treatment of those nearest and dearest to them, their own growth in maturity, and if they are believers, their growth in godliness.
6. As I have already stated, God seeks the good of His children in ways that are different from the ways He seeks the good of unbelievers. And so should we. The truth is, our relationship to parents, siblings, spouse, children and dear friends is different from our relationship

with outsiders. Therefore, just as God seeks the good of His family members in ways that go beyond what He does for those who are not part of his family, so should we.

- D. There is much more that can be said about always seeking after that which is good for one another and for all people, but I will end with these two truths.
1. **First**, when seeking any one's good we must consider how doing them good will help or hurt the people they effect. In other words, if doing good for one person harms or deprives others of good, then what we have done is not good. We are to consider the community good when seeking to do good for any individual – and this is true when dealing with family, friends, co-workers, believers, and unbelievers.
  2. **Second**, seeking someone's good sometimes means saying "yes" and sometimes requires saying "no." In other words, seeking the good of others means giving what is needed rather than what is wanted.
    - a. If what is wanted is what is truly needed, then give it. But if it isn't, do what is needed.
    - b. And if you need help to figure out what is needed, ask for help rather being rushed or pushed into giving or doing what is wanted.

### III. Conclusion

- A. Repaying evil for evil never produces a good outcome – for it degrades and damages your character, it damages relationships, and it makes life worse for the community.
- B. May we choose God's way and as a church, work together to see to it that **no one** repays another with evil for evil, but rather we **always** seek after that which is good for one another and for **all** people.