

# 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. [21b] hold fast to that which is good; [22] abstain from every form of evil.

1. Paul wrote something similar in **Romans 12:9b**, “Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.”
2. To **abhor** what is evil is to despise what is evil, or to detest it, or to utterly loathe it. Such feelings and thinking come from inside of us and powerfully influence how we see and deal with the things that are evil. Therefore, we are not only to abstain from evil, we are also to **abhor** or hate what is evil.
3. To **cling** to what is good is to adhere or stick to or hold fast to what is good – and that brings us back to **5:21b**.

B. [21b] hold fast to that which is good;

1. To hold fast to something is to keep a firm grip on it, or to hold it so securely it cannot be yanked out of your hands, or slip away ever so slowly.
2. Holding fast to what is good may be a one time decision, but it is an action we are wise to carry out – day by day – for the rest of our lives on earth.
3. And why must we hold fast to that which is good for the rest of our days on earth? Let me begin to answer this question by referring to Jesus and His experience with temptation. And then I will follow that example with more reasons to hold fast to what is good by

pointing out various evils that tend to pull us away from what is good.

- a. After being in the wilderness for 40 days where Jesus was tempted by the devil, we read in **Luke 4:13**, that “When the devil had finished every temptation, he left [Jesus] until an opportune (*or advantageous*) time.”
  - (1) Jesus’ experience with the devil’s temptations was ongoing, and therefore provides a clear reason why we need to continually hold fast to that which is good.
  - (2) The reality is, the devil may back away for a time, but he doesn’t give up. He continues to look for opportune times to tempt us away from God and toward evil.
  - (3) And what is an opportune time? Depending on your view of life, it could be a time when you are discouraged, or feeling like a victim, or feeling unloved and alone, or feeling denied something you want, or cheated out of what belongs to you, or experiencing an injustice, or being threatened with the loss of something precious, or angry, or – and I could go on but I think you get the idea.
  - (4) Because the devil looks for opportune times to tempt us, it is a serious threat to our spiritual health and consistent Christian living. Therefore, we must hold fast to what is good if we are to remain godly in the face of his relentless and varied temptations.
- b. Apart from the devil’s schemes and temptations, we have our own selfish and sinful inclinations, passions, lusts, foolish fears, expectations, greed, and ungodly hopes that can steer us away from what is good and into what is evil.
  - (1) Therefore, we read in **2 Timothy 2:22**, “Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue (*and we could add, hold fast to*) righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
  - (2) The reality is, we are not only fighting against the devil’s temptations, we are fighting against our own inclinations toward selfishness, fear, pride, and sin – which is another reason why we must hold fast to that which is good if we are to remain godly day after day.
- c. Then there is the matter of money – a force that woe us to trust it instead of God, that motivates us to store up treasures on earth instead of in heaven, and that feeds such harmful and

evil things as greed, hoarding, stinginess, and a lack of godly compassion for the poor and needy.

(1) The threat of money to our spiritual health is so real that we read in **1 Timothy 6:8-10**, “If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. [9] But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

(2) The point is, money can turn us away from what is good, which is why – when we have money, and we do – we must hold fast to that which is good to prevent entering in to things that are evil.

- d. Beyond the temptations related to money, most of us too easily give in to frustration and anger, which often leads to attacking or avoiding, arguments or the silent treatment, unkind and even abusive speech, manipulation and control, resentment, bitterness, and damaged or broken relationships.
  - e. Such things as trials, tribulation, sickness, sadness, loss and hurt feelings easily lead to distrust of God and His goodness, which in turn produces unnecessary fretting and anxiety, complaining and discontent, and ingratitude toward God.
  - f. Then there is recognition, praise, and fame which feed pride, conceit, arrogance, and self-exaltation – all things that pull us away from what is good.
  - g. Add to all these things such seemingly minor things as gossip, luxury, fashion, wanting what others have, wanting to know more about others than you need to know, cell-phones, the internet, Facebook, video games, TV, sports, being a workaholic or perfectionist, and the felt-need to be busy. If we do not hold fast to what is good, even these seemingly minor things can motivate us to do things that are harmful to our spiritual well-being and damaging to our relationships.
4. My final example has to do with intentional and planned spiritual growth. I suspect we all know how easy it is to get so busy with the daily affairs of life that we don't have – or should I say don't protect – the time necessary to keep growing in our knowledge of God, or to continue pondering and meditating on His word, or to repeatedly evaluate our thoughts, words, and deeds in order to see what still

needs putting off and what part of Christ-likeness needs to be put on, or to seriously work at loving our spouse and raising our children in a way that attracts them to God and godly living.

5. My purpose here is not to say or even imply we don't do anything good. We do many good things, and that to the glory of God.
  - a. Nevertheless, life is filled with varied reasons to let go of what is good and start doing what is evil and harmful to our spiritual health, families, community, workplace, and church.
  - b. Therefore, God and wisdom call us to hold fast to that which is good, or as we read in **Romans 12:9b**, to cling to what is good.

C. But what is good? Jesus summed it up in two commandments: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself, that is, love those around you in the same way and to the same degree that you love yourself.

1. In the home it is husbands loving their wives as Christ loves the church, and wives submitting or yielding to their husbands as unto the Lord. It is fathers not exasperating their children so that they do not cause their children to feel like they can never please their father and so lose heart. And it is children obeying their parents. It is the younger generation caring for their widowed mothers or aged parents.
2. In the workplace it is doing your work as if you are working for the Lord – regardless of the quality or temperament of your boss.
3. In the community it is caring for the weak, the widows and orphans, the hungry and those who need clothing. It is never paying back evil for evil to anyone. It is respecting what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, it is being at peace with everyone.
4. In the church it is loving one another, serving one another, sharing what we have with one another, praying for one another, speaking the truth to one another, encouraging and exhorting one another, edifying one another, strengthening and protecting the weak, admonishing, calling to account, and if necessary, disciplining the wayward, maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and growing together into spiritually mature, Christ-like believers.
5. In your heart and mind it is to setting your mind on the things above, and on the Spirit as opposed to the flesh. It is to thinking on and pondering the things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, excellent, of good repute, and worthy of praise. It is to

thinking sensibly, being sober-minded, and thinking as Christ thought (*that is, having the mind of Christ*). It is to be single-minded as opposed to double-minded. It is working for a pure heart, and being humble of heart. It is loving from the heart, serving from the heart, and rejoicing and giving thanks from the heart.

6. These things only represent a portion of what is good. Clearly, the lists I have given you are far from exhaustive. There are such areas as business practices, clothing, amusements, entertainment, and music that we haven't covered today.
7. And so I am urging each of you to go further and enlarge the lists we looked at today. Ponder, talk with other believers, and ask God for wisdom in expanding the list of what is good, and in this way help yourself hold fast to that which is good.
8. The next thing Paul says is to –

D. [22] abstain from every form of evil.

1. When we know what is good it becomes much clearer what is evil. When we know what is good and live up to what we know, we become keenly aware of what is evil – including its subtleties.
  - a. It has been said that when the FBI teaches their agents to spot counterfeit money, they make them study real money because anything thing that doesn't match real money stands out as counterfeit.
  - b. Therefore, as those who have been Christians for a time, we are wise to put a significant effort into learning what is right and good – as taught to us by God's word, the Holy Spirit, our conscience, our intellect, and our spiritual teachers. The more we know about what is good, the more we see what is evil because it doesn't match what we know is good.
2. To abstain from something is to voluntarily refrain, or hold yourself back, or deny yourself, or relinquish your perceived right to do what you know is wrong.
  - a. Have you ever thought you deserve to do what is wrong, or have you justified doing what is wrong because of the way another person's behavior has affected you? If you have, then you have acted as if you have a right to do what you know is wrong.
  - b. I am bringing this up because too many of us too often justify or assume we have the right to do what we know is wrong because of another's behavior – whether it is behavior that hurts our feelings, makes us feel unloved, demands from us what we

think is unfair, takes advantage of us, denies us what we feel we are owed, or in some other way wrongs us.

- c. And the point is, we are to abstain from even the evil we think we have a right to do.
- E. To take the exhortation to abstain from evil a bit further, I want to add the words of **Romans 12:9b** . . . Abhor what is evil.
1. To **abhor** evil is to despise evil, to detest it, or to utterly loathe it. This means we are not only to abstain from evil – which we can do through the right use of self-discipline, we are also to **abhor** evil.
    - a. One example of abhorring evil is Phinehas, who upon seeing a fellow Israelite bring a Midianite woman back to his tent for sensual reasons took a spear and went into their tent and pierced both of them through the body. His actions not only stood for righteousness, it stopped God’s plague on the sons of Israel for participating in such revelry.
    - b. Another example of abhorring evil is Joseph’s response to Potiphar’s wife – when he chose to flee even though what was being offered promised to be highly gratifying.
  2. I believe we gain a greater understanding of how we are to deal with evil when we put the statement in **1 Thessalonians 5:22** with the statement in **Romans 12:9**.
    - a. Though they appear to send the same message, one calls for an outward response to evil while the other calls for an inward response that shows itself in outward behavior.
    - b. For example, **1 Thess. 5:22** says to abstain from every form of evil – which is an outward response driven by identifying what is evil and then staying away from it. In other words, **abstaining** from evil engages our mind and requires self-discipline.
    - c. **Romans 12:9** says to abhor what is evil – which begins inside and reveals itself outside. In other words, **abhorring** evil engages our heart, emotions, mind, and then self-discipline.
  3. I believe you can see the truth of this in your own life. Are there not evils you abhor, and evils you would like to do – yet you abstain?
    - a. Now I want to be clear that both abstaining and abhorring bring us to the same good, God-honoring end regarding evil.
    - b. Yet, what you **abstain** from you are more easily tempted to do. While what you **abhor** you are not likely to be tempted to do. Therefore, if you can nurture an inward hatred or revulsion of

an evil you are easily tempted to do, you will greatly decrease or even remove your tempt-ability in that area.

### III. Conclusion

- A. To hold fast to that which is good we must learn what is good and cling to it with all our might.
- B. To abstain from every form of evil, we must voluntarily, intentionally, thoughtfully, and persistently refrain, hold ourselves back, or even flee so that we do not do what we know is wrong.
- C. This may feel too hard at times, or too personally costly, or unfair, and yet in spite of how it may feel, saying no to evil is an essential part of saying yes to doing what God says is good.
- D. And when you hold fast to what God says is good, you are walking on the path of life.