
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 4:6

By: Brian A. Yeager

“That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified” (I Thessalonians 4:6). We are going to start our study by looking at the word translated “defraud” [πλεονεκτέω]. Strong’s dictionary defines this word like this: “To be covetous, that is, (by implication) to over reach: - get an advantage, defraud, make a gain” (Strong’s # 4122). Another Lexicon says: “1) to have more, or a greater part or share; 1a) to be superior, excel, surpass, have an advantage over; 2) to gain or take advantage of another, to overreach” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon). This Greek word appears in four other verses in the New Testament. Notice how this Greek word is translated in those other Scriptures in the King James Version: “advantage” (II Corinthians 2:11), “defrauded” (II Corinthians 7:2), and “make a gain” (II Corinthians 12:17-18).

So, what are some ways in which one Christian could take advantage of another Christian? For one you can look back in the first century and see that there were erring wealthy “Christians” who took advantage of their position over the poor (James 2:1-13 and James 5:1-7). Another example can be found in how those entrusted with the teaching of the Gospel abused their role and treated people like merchandise (II Peter 2:1-22). Another example can be found in Corinth where brothers were taking each other to the courts of law to settle differences (I Corinthians 6:1-8). While slavery can exist without abuse (Colossians 3:22-4:1, I Timothy 6:1-2, and Philemon 1:1-19), think about all of the potential abuses that could exist and why teaching had to happen on the subject (Leviticus 25:39-43 and Deuteronomy 15:12-15). Another application can be in business transactions. Think about how one Christian could take advantage of another’s trust and make gain unrighteously (Leviticus 19:11; 19:13, Deuteronomy 25:13-16, and Amos 8:5-6).

We could spend time on this being an instruction that applies only between Christians. I could make the case that such is taught because of the term “brother.” That conclusion would not be concrete. The Greek term translated “brother” is broad (Strong’s # 80). It can mean those spiritually related in Christ (II Corinthians 1:1), a physical brother (Luke 8:20), or even kinsmen (Romans 9:3).

So, let’s approach this from the standpoint that we as Christians are seeing here that we should not take advantage of anyone. That conclusion is certainly a safe one. One thing is for sure, we are to treat all people right (Luke 10:25-37 and Romans 13:8-10).

When we look at the Scriptures there were sickening times wherein those professing to be God's people took advantage of defenseless people. For example: *“Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless... Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Now, thou son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou judge the bloody city? yea, thou shalt shew her all her abominations. Then say thou, Thus saith the Lord GOD, The city sheddeth blood in the midst of it, that her time may come, and maketh idols against herself to defile herself. Thou art become guilty in thy blood that thou hast shed; and hast defiled thyself in thine idols which thou hast made; and thou hast caused thy days to draw near, and art come even unto thy years: therefore have I made thee a reproach unto the heathen, and a mocking to all countries. Those that be near, and those that be far from thee, shall mock thee, which art infamous and much vexed. Behold, the princes of Israel, every one were in thee to their power to shed blood. In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow”* (Isaiah 10:1-2 and Ezekiel 22:1-7).

Those things did not just occur during what is known as “Old Testament times.” During the days that Jesus walked this earth, note what He said: *“And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation”* (Mark 12:38-40). So, we can see that the Jews had a long practice of defrauding their brethren. It was such a problem that it had to be dealt with among Jewish Christians too. When James wrote to early first century Jewish Christians that were scattered (James 1:1), he wrote this: *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world”* (James 1:26-27).

The brethren in Thessalonica are being warned. It is not that they needed to be taught to love one another (I Thessalonians 4:9). It is that they needed to be warned not to take advantage of others. Sometimes people miss the specifics. Well, the warning is clear. If they take advantage of others, God is going to take vengeance on them. That truth has been the case with God since long ago: *“I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor... Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: For the LORD will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them”* (Psalms 140:12 and Proverbs 22:22-23). “In any matter,” a Christian must not seek to take advantage of someone else for gain. If you want to make a profit in this world the lawful way, do the work to earn that profit (Proverbs 13:11). Provide things honest in the sight of all men (Romans 12:17). Don't be a crook (Ephesians 4:28).