
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 5:15

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Our last article ended with the instruction for the saints in Thessalonica to be patient [forbearing; longsuffering] with all (I Thessalonians 5:14). That instruction leads to what we are going to study now. Notice: *“See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men”* (I Thessalonians 5:15).

Think about how forbearance fits into not repaying evil with evil. Christians are instructed to: *“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye”* (Colossians 3:12-13). For the sake of clarity, we should recall that Jesus doesn't forgive unconditionally (Luke 13:1-5) nor can we (Luke 17:1-4). Having made that clear, we need to think about how forbearance gives a person the opportunity to change. Whereas, immediate retribution may prevent such.

Our Lord shows us this clearly. For example, when the Jews crucified our Lord He did not call for fire from Heaven to immediately destroy them (Luke 23:34). As a result of our Lord's forbearance, many were able to later repent and be converted (Acts 2:1-41). It is not that people will always change if given the chance. Consider what happened in Thyatira to a trouble-making woman there: *“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works”* (Revelation 2:20-23). Even though the woman did not change, Jesus gave her the opportunity to do so. Aren't we to follow His example (I Peter 2:21 and I John 2:3-6)?

We live in a world that lacks compassion. Our world's present “cancel culture” doesn't give people a chance to correct their errors. We cannot conform to the ways of the world (Romans 12:1-2). The root of rendering evil for evil starts with a lack of forbearance. So, my brothers and sisters in Christ, work on that first. If we can be longsuffering, we will be able to resist repaying evil to those who treat us badly.

We live in an evil world (I John 5:19). So, it is likely that we all will experience someone doing wrong to us because of that very fact. Having said that, our chances of being treated poorly by someone are greatly increased due to the fact that we are Christians. At the beginning of our Lord's teachings on earth He said this: *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"* (Matthew 5:10-12). If you have been a faithful Christian for a lengthy period of time you likely have faced some form of persecution (II Timothy 3:12). How did you respond? When someone does us wrong, we have to keep from retaliation.

To the saints in Rome, Paul wrote: *"Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not... Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:14; 12:17-21). Peter wrote: *"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it"* (I Peter 3:8-11).

Rather than repaying evil with evil, Christians need to ever follow that which is good to both saints and sinners alike (Matthew 5:38-48). The Galatians were told: *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Galatians 6:10). In the Hebrew letter this was written: *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"* (Hebrews 12:14). Paul wrote this to Titus: *"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men"* (Titus 3:1-2).

This information should not be new to faithful Christians. Jesus taught: *"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God"* (Matthew 5:9). It is easy enough to find trouble in this world. We do not want to escalate it. With doing good, we want to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men (I Peter 2:15). We want to remember that in this world we are behind enemy lines (so to speak). We do not want to draw any unnecessary attention to ourselves. By being "do-gooders" we decrease our chances of facing persecution (I Peter 3:13). So, press forward doing good as defined by our Lord!