
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 5:22

By: Brian A. Yeager

“Abstain from all appearance of evil” (I Thessalonians 5:22). There is a lot to think about from what is stated in this one short sentence. When a person chooses to be a disciple of Jesus Christ that person has decided to depart from the evil ways of this world. Paul wrote this to Timothy: *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (II Timothy 2:19). This is not just a New Testament truth either. Being among God’s people has always carried with it that you leave evil behind. One Psalm says: *“Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore”* (Psalms 37:27). Solomon wrote: *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil”* (Proverbs 3:5-7). It is hypocritical to claim that you love good without the abhorrence for evil (Romans 12:9). However, the instruction wouldn’t be given if there wasn’t a reason for such.

Some fell away because they loved the world (II Timothy 4:10). Some fell away because they loved money (I Timothy 6:10). Some fell away because they had ungodly lusts that they pursued (I Corinthians 5:1). Some fell away because they listened to false teachers (II Timothy 2:14-18). The list could go on. The one commonality of all that we could list is that evil things cause Christians to err from the faith.

Followers of Christ are commanded not to sin (John 5:1-14, John 8:1-11, Romans 6:1-2, I Corinthians 15:34, II Corinthians 7:1, I Peter 4:1-2, I John 2:1, etc.). How can this be accomplished? Well, that is really what I Thessalonians 5:22 is all about. From the time Jesus was on this earth He taught principles that will keep a person from sinning. For example, He told Peter this: *“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41). Later, when Peter was teaching, he wrote something very close in principle to what Jesus taught him. Notice: *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”* (I Peter 2:11).

In both the main verse we are considering in this article and the one I just quoted above, we find the word “abstain” being used. If you were to use your Bible program and do a word study on this, you’d find it is translated from the Greek word “ἀπέχομαι.” That Greek word can be simply understood as to refrain from (Strong’s # 567). We saw this word used already in

this first letter to the saints in Thessalonica in chapter four (I Thessalonians 4:3). There is nothing too complicated in understanding what it means to abstain from something.

The word translated “appearance” in the KJV is the word that often gives folks trouble. The Greek word that appears there is “εἶδος” which means: “a view, that is, form (literally or figuratively): - appearance, fashion, shape, sight” (Strong’s # 1491). You can think of this word as “shape” (Luke 3:22 and John 5:37), “fashion” (Luke 9:29), or even “sight” (II Corinthians 5:7). Remember the previous verse is about testing all things and holding fast to that which is good (I Thessalonians 5:21). To hold fast to what is good one needs to refrain themselves from all fashion, shapes of evil.

From the beginning of life on this earth evil has been the opposite of good (Genesis 2:9). Good does not bring forth evil (Matthew 7:17-18). Thus, saints are taught to eschew evil and do good (I Peter 3:10-12). We are to follow that which is good rather than to follow that which is evil (III John 1:11). Some people take these things too far though.

It is pretty easy to take I Thessalonians 5:22 and think that if something even appears to be evil it has to be shunned. While on the surface this seems to be a safe route to take, but it would leave a Christian seeking a place to be alone in the middle of a deserted area. The whole world lieth in wickedness (I John 5:19). So, think about the measures a person would have to take to avoid everything that even looks evil. God does not require Christians to avoid such (I Corinthians 5:1-13). That does not mean we should immerse ourselves in the world either.

Consider one of the reasons that Jesus gave His life for: *“Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father”* (Galatians 1:3-4). That is not to physically remove His disciples from this world (John 17:11-17). The expectation is that saints do not have close companionship with the world nor love the world (James 4:4 and I John 2:15-17).

These instructions do not mean that we have to completely separate ourselves from all in the world or of the world (I Corinthians 10:23-33). Jesus was separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:22-26). That did not mean spacial separation (Matthew 9:9-13). The very work Christ expects from us demands us to be in the midst of evil (Philippians 2:14-16). We have to be on guard though. Evil can rub off on us (I Corinthians 15:33). For us to remain faithful we have to make sure we are not putting ourselves in harm’s way. That is the teaching of I Thessalonians 5:22. When you study through other Scriptures you see that this will have many different individual applications. The recovering addict may have to abstain from forms of drugs that others may not (i.e. pain killers). Apply I Thessalonians 5:22 so that you can remain faithful. Just do so with the proper balance.