

1 Thessalonians 5:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

Analysis

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men—horate mē tis kakon anti kakou tini apodō, alla pantote to agathon diōkete kai eis allēlous kai eis pantas (όρατε μή τις κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ τινι ἀποδῷ, ἀλλὰ πάντοτε τὸ ἀγαθὸν διώκετε καὶ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας). Horate mē (όρατε μή, 'see that... not')—imperative warning. Kakon anti kakou (κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ, 'evil for evil')—the natural response to mistreatment is retaliation. Paul forbids this, echoing Jesus (Matt 5:38-44) and Peter (1 Pet 3:9).

But ever follow that which is good (alla pantote to agathon diōkete, ἀλλὰ πάντοτε τὸ ἀγαθὸν διώκετε)—diōkō (διώκω, 'pursue/chase actively') indicates aggressive pursuit, not passive avoidance. Christians don't merely avoid revenge; we actively pursue good. This applies kai eis allēlous kai eis pantas (καὶ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας, 'both toward one another [believers] and toward all [including enemies]'). The Thessalonians faced persecution from neighbors (2:14); Paul commands pursuing good toward persecutors, not vengeance. This supernatural ethic distinguishes Christianity—overcoming evil with good (Rom 12:21).

Historical Context

The Thessalonians suffered persecution (2:14; 3:3-4) that naturally provoked desire for retaliation. Jewish zealots advocated violent resistance against oppressors; Greco-Roman honor culture demanded avenging insults. Paul teaches radically different ethics: absorb evil without retaliation, pursue good toward enemies. This countercultural response eventually conquered Rome—when Christians loved enemies, cared for plague victims, and blessed persecutors, observers were amazed. Tertullian: 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.' Non-retaliation's power exceeded violent resistance; sacrificial love won more converts than armed rebellion.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do you actively pursue good toward those who've harmed you rather than merely avoiding revenge?
2. What specific actions demonstrate that you're 'following that which is good' toward enemies, not just fellow believers?
3. How does pursuing good toward persecutors become more powerful witness than defending your rights or seeking justice?

Interlinear Text

όρᾶτε	μή	τινι	κακοῦ	ἀντὶ	κακοῦ	τινι	ἀποδῶ
See	that none	unto any	evil	for	evil	unto any	render
G3708	G3361	G5100	G2556	G473	G2556	G5100	G591
ἀλλὰ	πάντοτε	τὸ	ἀγαθὸν	διώκετε	καὶ	εἰς	
man but	ever	that which	is good	follow	and	among	
G235	G3842	G3588	G18	G1377	G2532	G1519	
ἀλλήλους	καὶ	εἰς	πάντας				
yourselves	and	among	all				
G240	G2532	G1519	G3956				

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 3:9 (Evil): Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

Galatians 6:10 (Good): As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Leviticus 19:18 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

3 John 1:11 (Evil): Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

Hebrews 12:14 (Parallel theme): Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

1 Peter 1:22 (Parallel theme): Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Psalms 38:20 (Evil): They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow the thing that good is.

1 Timothy 6:11 (Parallel theme): But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

2 Timothy 2:24 (Parallel theme): And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

Psalms 7:4 (Evil): If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me; (yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy:)

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