

1 Thessalonians 5:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Analysis

Abstain from all appearance of evil—apo pantos eidous ponērou apechesthe (ἀπὸ παντὸς εἴδους πονηροῦ ἀπέχεσθε). The phrase is ambiguous in Greek. Eidos (εἴδος) can mean

1. 'appearance/form' (KJV: 'abstain from all appearance of evil') or
2. 'kind/type' (ESV: 'abstain from every form of evil').

Context favors the second: after commanding testing (v. 21), Paul says reject every kind/type of evil discovered. Don't merely hold fast the good (v. 21a); also abstain from evil (v. 22). Ponēros (πονηρός, 'evil') describes moral wickedness, active malice.

If 'appearance' is correct, the command means avoid even seeming evil—actions that, while not sinful, might scandalize others or damage testimony. This interpretation supports concern for Christian witness (4:12; Col 4:5). If 'form/kind' is correct, the command means reject all types of evil discovered through testing—false prophecy, false teaching, immoral behavior. Either interpretation supports holiness: avoid evil itself and avoid actions appearing evil. Both meanings are biblically sound; the text likely emphasizes rejecting evil in all its forms after testing reveals it.

Historical Context

Early Christians faced tension between freedom in Christ and care for weaker consciences. Paul taught: 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not

expedient' (1 Cor 10:23). Believers could eat meat offered to idols without sin (food is amoral), yet should abstain if it scandalized weaker believers (1 Cor 8:9-13). This principle extends beyond food: avoid actions that, while not intrinsically sinful, might stumble others or damage testimony. Contemporary application: activities legal and amoral might be unwise if they appear evil to observers or tempt weaker believers. Wisdom considers both intrinsic morality and practical impact.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do you discern which 'appearances of evil' to avoid even when the action itself isn't sinful?
2. What practices, while not intrinsically evil, might you abstain from to avoid scandalizing others or damaging gospel witness?
3. How do you balance Christian freedom with concern for weaker consciences and outside observers?

Interlinear Text

ἀπὸ παντὸς εἴδους πονηροῦ ἀπέχεσθε
from all appearance of evil Abstain
G575 G3956 G1491 G4190 G567

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 6:3 (Parallel theme): Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:

Philippians 4:8 (Parallel theme): Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Romans 12:17 (Evil): Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

1 Corinthians 8:13 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Jude 1:23 (Parallel theme): And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Exodus 23:7 (Evil): Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.

1 Thessalonians 4:12 (Parallel theme): That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

Isaiah 33:15 (Evil): He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;