

Exhortations to Godliness
“LIVE CIRCUMSPECTLY”
1 Thessalonians 5:22

Theme: We are to intentionally avoid evil.

Introduction ...

I. THE SENSITIVITY TO EVIL - “From every form of evil ...”

A. The Meaning of Evil - “... evil ...”

1. As Paul brings his emphasis on godliness to a close, he includes the other side of the coin of discernment.
2. It is not enough to seek to “hold fast to that which is good,” one must also “hold aloof what is evil.”
3. It would be helpful to understand “*evil*” [πονηρός] - something that is morally or socially worthless, base, or degenerate.”
4. It refers to that which is of a moral quality antithetical to what should be - that which is “good.”
5. The two most common words for “*evil*” are this word, and **κακῶς** referring to what is base in nature.
6. In our text, the word refers to what is destructive, injurious, and “*evil*” in its affect.
7. “*Evil*” is something that is identified primarily for its lack of correspondence to the holiness of God.
8. Something is “*evil*” - not because it is unpopular or undesirable by a culture, but because it is out of harmony with the holiness of God.
9. In our context here, it refers to what is doctrinally aberrant as well as what is morally degenerate.
10. This term is often translated “wicked” or degenerate.
11. In this sense, evil finds its personification in the Devil -

Matthew 13:19 - “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.”

John 17:15 - “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.”

1 John 5:19 - “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”

12. As it lives under the power of the Devil, the world and its priorities are wicked - cp. **Galatians 1:4** - “who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father”.

B. **The Manifestation of Evil** - “*every form ...*”

1. Paul tells us that it is not okay to tolerate any evil - that we are to see evil in whatever way it appears as something to be shunned.
2. The word “*form*” [εἶδος] - refers to the outward appearance or manifestation of something.
3. It can mean “kind” - in this sense, every “kind” of evil.
4. This is an emphasis on the inclusiveness of Paul’s command here - we cannot allow any evil to be normalized in our lives.
5. Hence, even the inkling that something is inconsistent with righteousness and holiness ought to be avoided by us.
6. It has been noted that “evil has a complexity which stands in striking contrast to the simplicity of the good.”¹

II. **THE SUPPRESSION OF EVIL** - “*... abstain.*”

A. **The Intentionality of Abstaining**

1. Paul uses the term “*abstain*” [ἀπέχω] - in a present tense middle form - emphasizing that we are to constantly be - for ourselves - avoid contact with evil.
2. We are to be opting out of evil circumstances and pursuit of our own volition.
3. This means that we intentionally examine everything and sort through what is good and evil and choose the good and shun the evil.
4. It is interesting that the root of the term “abstain” is the same as the root for the term “hold fast” - the one can literally be seen as “holding apart” from yourself, while the other is “holding with or to.”

¹ Hiebert, p. 249.

5. This is the very issue raised in **Romans 13:1-4** - *“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.”*
6. It is through the work of studying God’s word that we find the training in good vs. evil - cp. **Hebrews 5:13-14** - *“For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”*

B. The Intensity of Abstaining

1. We are to avoid or suppress *“every form of evil”* - meaning intolerant of any evil.
2. This is consistent with the commands of God in other texts - cp. **Romans 12:9**. - *“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.”*
3. As we diligently “hold fast” to what is good, “evil” will itself be overcome - cp. **Romans 12:21** - *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*
4. Our responsibility is to be so consistently committed to suppressing evil that we are considered “innocent in what is evil” - cp. **Romans 16:19** - *“For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.”*

We are to intentionally avoid evil.