



Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

Seek after Good

There is a natural tendency on the part of people to want to get even or get back at someone who has, at least in their view, wronged them. So strong and ingrained is this desire that the scripture has to deal with it in a variety of ways and from a variety of people. The challenge, from God's perspective, is to change the thinking of saints in particular so that they are looking for positives to compliment rather than negatives at which to be enraged. When the inside of man is a seething cauldron of anger, waiting for the slightest disturbance to enable it to boil over, then it is only a matter of time and some incident will serve as the excuse for outrage or the opportunity for "evening the score." Rather, God wants those He calls His children to be calm on

the inside, looking for ways to soothe the spirits of others, and in general making peace.

- ▼ **No evil for evil** — Jesus Himself taught on the issue of the mind and how it must handle difficult people. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy,'" He noted, "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45). He appealed to the brethren in the future who would read His words to be like their heavenly Father in character. "Pardon," He said, "and you will be pardoned" (Luke 6:37). This perspective, then, is a theme that also runs through Paul's Holy-Spirit-inspired writings. "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone," he exhorted the Roman brethren. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:17,19). Hence it is not surprising if this sentiment also shows up in his message to the persecuted brethren in Thessalonica, "See that no one repays another with evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

- ▼ **Seek what is good** — Where an individual focuses is where his conversation and actions are going to land. Jesus commented that "The lamp of your body is your eye; when your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light; but when your eye is bad, your body is full of darkness" (Luke 6:34). Similarly, the apostle Paul instructed the saints in Philippi thusly, "Brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Philippians 4:8). If the mind focuses on the dark and dreary, the destruction and disasters, then that is what will continually come out of the mouth, and what will be the direction of action.

By contrast, if the mind dwells on the pure, the true, the lovely, and the excellent, then praise for progress and solutions to problems will exude from the conversation, and be exhibited in the action of a life well lived. Such a saint will be able to carry out Paul's injunction to the congregation at Thessalonica, "always seek after that which is good for one another and all men."

The saint who is following in the footsteps of Jesus recognizes that he is always scattering the seed for the word of God. The kind deed, the word of encouragement, the card of appreciation ... who knows what big plant can grow from such a small seed! For the sake of the gospel, the Christian lets the evil pass without retaliation; but he continues to focus on what is eternally important. "If you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others?" asked the Lord Himself. "Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (Matthew 5:47). The saint is to do good for his brothers in Christ, but also reach out and do good for all men!

**"SEEK AFTER
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JAY WILSON