A detailed historical illustration depicting a scene from the New Testament. On the left, Jesus stands on a rocky outcrop, wearing a blue robe and pointing his right index finger upwards towards the sky. A large crowd of men, women, and children, dressed in traditional robes, stands in a semi-circle at the bottom of the hill, looking up at him with attention. The background shows a rugged landscape with a path leading up the hill.

Essential Church Responsibilities, Pt 2

1 Thessalonians 5:12–15

“To the world at large this was a sad waste of five young lives. But God has His plan and purpose in all things. . . . The prayers of the widows themselves are for the Aucas. We look forward to the day when these savages will join us in Christian praise. Plans were promptly formulated for continuing the work of the martyrs.”



—Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*, 252–54

“People have always been upset by insensitivity and negligence, but the profile of offendedness, understood in this modern sense, is being immeasurably heightened. The right never to be offended, never to suffer feelings of hurt or shame, is being touted and promoted by both the media and by the government and interest in it is being continuously excited. As a result offendedness is coming to enjoy social and legal recognition of the sort that it has never before enjoyed. . . . Claims to be hurt are being noticed. They are likely to be rewarded.”

—Paul Helm, “Offendedness,” *Salisbury Review* (Summer 2006), 17

“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.”

—1 Thessalonians 5:12–15

REVIEW

I. The Responsibilities of Church Members to Leaders (5:12–13)

Three Exhortations:

- A. Appreciate your leaders (v. 12).
- B. Esteem your leaders (v. 13).
- C. Pursue peace with your leaders (v. 13).

II. The Responsibilities of Church Members to Each Other (5:14–15)

Five Exhortations:

- A. Correct the stubborn (v. 14).
- B. Encourage the discouraged (v. 14).
- C. Support the frail (v. 14).
- D. Endure them all (v. 14).
- E. Seek grace, not justice (v. 15).

- Paul concludes his list of eight exhortations related to *essential church responsibilities* (5:12–15) with the most detailed command.
- This command takes the form of an *antithesis* exhortation (“do not do *this* but do *that*”).
 - I. Refuse to retaliate (v. 15a).
 - II. Strive to bless (v. 15b).

I. Refuse to retaliate.

“See that no one repays another with evil for evil”
(v. 15a).

- “See that” – “to be alert or on guard”—the command addresses the entire congregation.
- The construction expresses *apprehension*.
- Such apprehension was based on Paul’s general awareness of the struggles of the Christian, and perhaps of some specific circumstances of the Thessalonian congregation.

“See that **no one** repays another with evil for evil”
(v. 15a).

- Paul couples the plural imperative with the singular, indefinite pronoun.
- “*You all together* be attentive that *no one individually*.”
- The entire community is held responsible for the single individual.



“See that no one repays another with evil for evil”
(v. 15a).

- Paul’s language calls into focus the *lex talionis*—the “law of retaliation” or “retribution.”
- The law finds its basis in the Mosaic Law.
- **Deuteronomy 19:21** – “Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

- **Exodus 21:22–25** – “If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman’s husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges *decide*. But if there is *any further* injury, then you shall appoint *as a penalty* life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”
- **Leviticus 24:17–22**

- *Lex talionis* (“law of retribution”) is rightfully part of the Mosaic Law because it reflects God’s own character.
- **Deuteronomy 32:35** – “Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them.”
- **Psalm 94:1–2** – “O LORD, God of vengeance, God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up, O Judge of the earth, render recompense to the proud.”

- **1 Thessalonians 4:6** – “*and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.*”
- **1 Thessalonians 5:1–3** and the Day of the Lord.
- **2 Thessalonians 1:6** – “For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.”

- *Lex talionis* was never intended as permission for personalized, individual retaliation.
- It was intended to ensure punishments fit the crimes—that they were neither too lenient nor too excessive—and that they were applied equally to all.
- It was a standard for the governing structures among the people of Israel to maintain justice, not a license for settling grievances in interpersonal relationships.

- **Psalm 7:3–5** – “O LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is injustice in my hands, if I have rewarded evil to my friend, or have plundered him who without cause was my adversary, let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake *it*; and let him trample my life down to the ground and lay my glory in the dust. Selah.”
- **Proverbs 24:28-29** – “Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, ‘Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.’”
- **Proverbs 20:22; 25:21–22**

- **Matthew 5:38–42** – “You have heard that it was said, ‘AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”
- **Luke 6:27–36**

- **Romans 12:17–21** – “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,’ says the Lord. ‘BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

- **1 Corinthians 6:7–8** – “Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. *You do this even to your brethren.*”
- **1 Peter 3:8–9** – “To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”

- Refusing to exact personal revenge also reflects the character of Jesus Christ.
- **1 Peter 2:21–23** – “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously.”

- Few things are as innate to our flesh as to seek retaliation.
- No vice is so easily and universally justified—and even regarded as virtue—as retaliation.
- Even Christians can be fearful that God may show the offender the same kind of mercy He has shown to them—and so they attempt to take vengeance into their hands to settle the score on their own.

“Forgiving costs us our sense of justice. We all have this innate sense deep within our souls, but it has been perverted by our selfish sinful natures. We want to see ‘justice’ done, but the justice we envision satisfies our own interests. We must realize that justice has been done. God is the only rightful administrator of justice in all of creation, and His justice has been satisfied. In order to forgive our brother, we must be satisfied with God’s justice and forego the satisfaction of our own.”

– Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*, 207–8

“Revenge indeed seems often sweet to men,
but oh, it is only sugared poison, only
sweetened gall. Forgiving, enduring love
alone is sweet and blissful and enjoys peace
and the consciousness of God’s favor. By
forgiving it gives away and annihilates the
injury. It treats the injurer as if he had not
injured and therefore feels no more the smart
and sting that he had inflicted.”

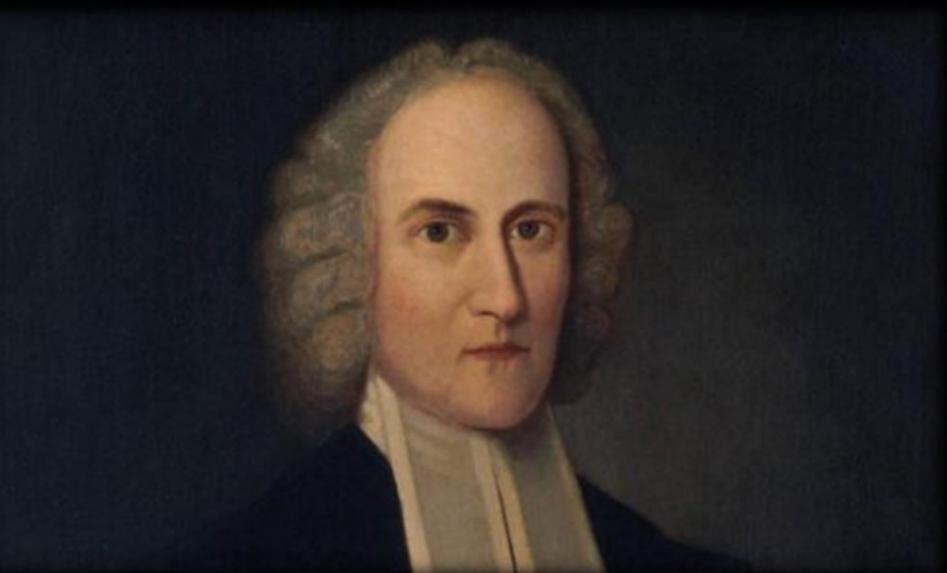
—William Arnot, *The Parables of Our Lord*





“It is more honor to bury an injury than to revenge it.”

– Thomas Watson



“Resolved, never to do anything out of revenge.”

– Jonathan Edwards, Resolution #14

II. Strive to benefit.

“**but** **always** seek after that which is good for one another and for all people” (v. 15b).

- “**but**” – a strong contrast; sets up the positive side of the exhortation.
- “**always**” – “covers every type of imaginable situation; there is no context in which believers are not to seek the welfare of those around them” (Weima, *Thessalonians*, 397).

“but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people” (v. 15b).

- “**seek after**” – a strong verb; “to follow in haste in order to find something,” “to strive for, seek after”
- The verb is so intense that it is sometimes used by Paul to describe to *persecution* (1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13).
- But Paul also uses it to describe *life-consuming pursuits* (Phil 3:12, 14; 1 Tim 6:11).

“but always seek after **that which is good** for one another and for all people” (v. 15b).

- “**good**” – *literally*, “the good”—that which is beneficial and edifying.
- The word stands in direct contrast to “evil” used in v. 15a—that which is harmful and destructive.
- Paul does not merely advocate *passivity* or *making nice*.
- Whatever the evil merited, the opposite is to be done.

“In place of wrong, injury, or harm motivated by a vengeful spirit, Christians must diligently endeavor to produce what is intrinsically beneficial to others. . . . The welfare of the offender must be the prime objective.”

—Robert Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” 431



the good

**“but always seek after that which is good
for one another and for all people” (v. 15b).**

- “one another” – members of the church (those who should “know better”).
- “all people” – those outside the church (see 2:14).
- **1 Thessalonians 3:11** – “and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you.”
- I.e., a law for *all* of life’s personal relationships.

“It must be ‘always,’ rather than ‘hit or miss’; it must be ‘what is good,’ rather than ‘wrong for wrong’; and it must be pursued,’ rather than done occasionally and at one’s convenience.”

—Gordon Fee, *Thessalonians*, 212

Application

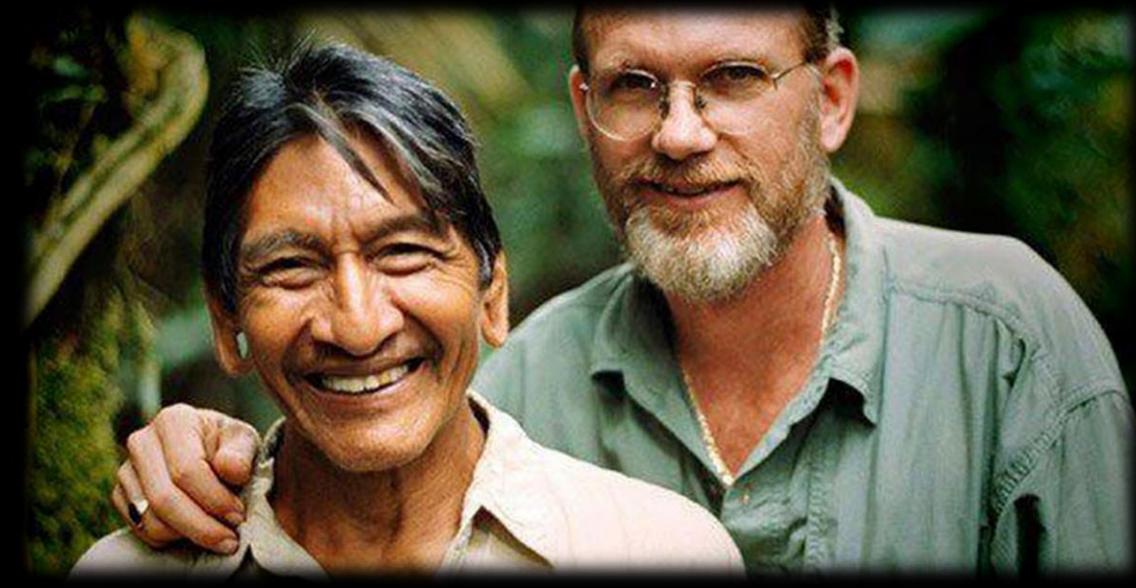
- Relinquish the pursuit of retributive justice; it is better to be defrauded than to get equal.
- Passivity is not enough; you must seek the good of those who offend.
- Hurtful actions are to be met with the opposite—gracious edification.
- Rest in the sovereignty and wisdom of God.



“Cause and effect are in God’s hands. Is it not the part of faith simply to let them rest there? God is God. I dethrone him in my heart if I demand that he act in ways that satisfy my idea of justice. . . . The one who laid the earth’s foundations and settled its dimensions knows where the lines are drawn. He gives all the light we need for trust and obedience.”

—Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*, 269, 273

“I have known Mincaye since I was a little boy when he took me under his wing and had his sons teach me to blowgun hunt. He was one of my dearest friends in the world. Yes, he killed my father, but he loved me and my family. One of my grandsons is named Mincaye. We will miss you, Maemae Mincaye, but we hold onto the certain hope that we will soon see you again (John 3:16).”



—Steve Saint (son of Nate Saint), “Obituary for Mincaye,” May 2020