

**1 Thessalonians 5: 15; “Pursue what is Good”, Sermon # 27 in the series –
“A Persevering Faith”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 18th, 2015,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

A few Sundays ago we looked at the first 4 exhortations of the 14 exhortations which are given to us here in these nine verses; verses 14-22. This afternoon we want to take just two more. We saw that these exhortations were given to the whole church there at Thessalonica, not just to her pastors. It is not just the minister of the church who is called to be spiritually-minded and pursue holiness; it is every believer. The truth is, that if everyone in the local church is keeping each of these exhortations in mind as they live their Christian life, then together we will be advancing in holiness. But the tendency of the human heart, and sometimes even the tendency of the Christian heart, is to keep these commandments when everything is going fine, but when someone does evil to us, then we can be tempted to do evil to them. I want you to think with me about the witness of our life before God, and the witness of our life to a watching world.

What I will do this afternoon is to take each of these two exhortations of verse 15 and illustrate them with incidents from the life of David. For David is one of the prime examples in the Scriptures of how a Christian should conduct himself when he is beset about by men who want to do evil to him. We will see that at points they did succeed in doing evil to David and to those whom he loved. But the Lord delivered his life from all distress. God gave him great and abounding grace to do good for himself, and for those around him who loyally stood with him in his trials. He was faithful, both before and after he became king. He did not return evil for evil, even though he was hard pressed at many points. You and I are called to do the same, whether it is in our families, or whether it is in relation to the church that we are a part of, or whether it is in relation to outsiders. So let me open up this theme of what it means to pursue what is good, by giving you 3 points concerning what a Christian leader and all Christians should do when evil is being done to them. 1st - I would like you to see that a Christian may be treated evilly even when he has, or would do, good. 2nd - I would have you to remember that a Christian should see to it that no one returns evil for evil. And then 3rd - I would have you to consider that a Christian should pursue what is good for all men, and not just what is good for himself.

1st of all – I would like you to see that a Christian may be treated evilly even when he has, or would, do good.

“See to it that no one renders evil for evil to anyone.” This is a very straightforward and plain command, but it is hard at times to live it out. The reason for this is because people can act in unloving and provoking ways to us when we have only tried to do them good. Turn with me to 1 Samuel chapter 17. Here in this chapter we find that the young man David had the Spirit of the Lord working mightily within him. No one wanted to go and fight the giant, the Philistine Goliath. He had struck fear in the hearts of all the men of Israel except David. When David came up to visit his brothers at the front line of battle and bring food to them from home, he heard the words of the Philistine, taunting the army of Israel. In verse 8b Goliath yelled out to the army of Israel, “Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me.” “If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants.” “But If I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” David heard these words and he saw that the men of Israel were afraid, but he was not afraid. He, by faith, was going to do good for all of Israel. In verse 26 it says, “Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, ‘What shall be done for the man who kills the Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel?’” “For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

David was full of holy courage. He was jealous for the honor and glory of God. He was willing to take his own life in his hand to slay this dread foe. Now look at verse 32. In return for

this willingness to do what no other man of Israel would do, what did he get in return? He received the scorn and contempt of his own brother Eliab. Verse 28 it says, “Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab’s anger was aroused against David, and he said, ‘Why did you come down here?’ ‘And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?’ ‘I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.’ Now is it not worth noticing here that even though Eliab is not willing to go and risk his own neck in order to save Israel from this Philistine, that he is willing and bold enough to pour scorn on his own brother who would. He was probably thinking to himself: “Who does David think that he is anyway?” “He is making me look bad.” “He thinks that little brother can do what big brother can’t.” “How proud and insolent you are David!”

I think that we need to take notice of this; how Eliab who is acting as a high and mighty judge, to call his younger brother proud and insolent, is really wrong in his analysis. And he is hindering the good thing that God would do through David. Just because Eliab doesn’t think that he can slay this giant, this does not give him leave to assert that someone else could not. And why not David? It was because Eliab was guilty of the very pride that he accuses David of, that we find him acting in this way. He is accusing David of not being right in his spirit when all the while he does not have control over his own. He would judge all of the motives of David’s heart as though he knew them as well as God. Let us beware of such a spirit lest we quench what the Spirit would do through others. We may think ourselves stronger and wiser than others, but do not forget that it is the Lord alone who can give us the victory over our common enemies. You notice how mildly David turns his brother’s harsh words away. Verse 29 says, “And David said, ‘What have I done now?’ ‘Is there not a cause?’ David’s holy motive is the cause of God. His motive is the glory and honor of God. He is right in this, and God will uphold him. But I want you to notice that he does not return evil for evil. He doesn’t accuse his brother of the same thing that he accuses him of. He goes on to do what would be good for all.

But 2nd – I would have you to remember that a Christian should see to it that no one returns evil for evil.

Both David and Jonathan could have been tempted to do this in regard to Saul. In verse 32 it says, “Then David said to Saul, ‘Let no man’s heart fail him because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.’” We see in verse 38 that Saul tried to clothe David in his own armor, but David declined it saying that he had not tested them. (vs. 39) Instead David chose 5 smooth stones from the brook to use with his sling. Then he drew near to the Philistine and slew him with the sling and the stone and cut his head off with his own sword. When he came back into Jerusalem, returning from the fight with the head of the Philistine in his hand, Saul asked him, “Whose son are you, young man?” “So David answered, ‘I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.’” Then in chapter 18, verse 1, it says, “Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” This is surely returning good for good. Jonathan stood next in line to the throne to Saul, and yet there is not an ounce of jealousy or suspicion or anything in him to indicate that he was worried about losing his own position because of what David had done. His own heart was right, and we are going to see how he would help David to do the right thing even when his own father and his own future position in the kingdom are at stake.

Verse 1 of chapter 18 of 1st Samuel says, “Now when David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” This is a most beautiful love, we should see; of one Old Testament Christian soldier for another. What holy admiration Jonathan had for David. Even Saul, Jonathan’s father, thought highly of David at first. After all, his problem of the Philistine had been removed. Verse 2 says, “Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father’s house anymore.” Verse 3 says, “And Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his as his own soul.” There is no

envy or jealousy here, only love for David in Jonathan's heart. He probably was saying to himself: "This is what I would have done if I could have; slain the Philistine." Verse 5 says, "So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved wisely." "And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants." So far so good.

But look at verse 6. "Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments." "So the women sang as they danced, and said: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.'" "Then," it says, "Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, 'They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands.'" "Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" "So Saul eyed David (he viewed him with suspicion) from that day forward." You see, it was Saul's sin that he wanted to be seen as greater than David. He wanted to be seen as having done greater things than David, and he wanted to be extolled in the eyes of the people. This is what led to his whole downfall as king. I hope that you and I will see that this kind of envy and pride are entirely destructive of our relationships with people around us; even people who are very close to us, even our closest relations. And God is entirely opposed to pride and our trying to make ourselves out to be great in the eyes of other people. This evil way of Saul's looking at David was going to wreak havoc with everything that he did in ruling the kingdom, from that time forward. In verse 29 of Chapter 18, it says, "...and Saul was still more afraid of David." "So Saul became David's enemy continually."

In Chapter 19 we see that Jonathan, Saul's son, tried to turn his father away from doing evil to David. It says in verse 4, "Thus Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, 'Let not the king sin against his servant, against David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his works have been very good toward you.'" "For he took his life in his hands and killed the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great deliverance for all Israel." "You saw it and rejoiced." "Why then will you sin against innocent blood to kill David without a cause?" These words temporarily kept Saul from trying to kill David. But shortly thereafter, when David was in his presence, he tried to pin him to the wall with his spear. Finally David had to flee for his life. Sometimes a Christian can be hated without a cause and evilly treated for his having done good. How will he react, now that he has to live in the wilderness of the disapproval of men? There were two incidents when David and his men lived in the wilderness that show us how he did not return evil for good. The first is in Chapter 24 when Saul was chasing him and Saul came into the very cave where David and his men were hiding, He had turned in there to attend to to his needs. And David arose, at the bidding of his men, and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe. But it says in verse 5, "His heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe." His response to his men was this. "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord." It says, "So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul." "See to it, that no one returns evil for evil."

When David went out of the cave after Saul left it, and called to him and explained to him how he had had mercy upon him, Saul says in verse 17 of Chapter 24, "You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil." "And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the Lord delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me." "For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely?" "Therefore may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day." It is a very interesting thing to note about this man Saul. Even though he recognized what David had done in showing him this mercy, and David's not returning evil for evil, still he kept on trying to

take David's life. We need to realize, that we may understand this truth as right; that a person should not return evil for evil, but the heart of sinful man is so deceitful and self-deceived, that without the grace of Christ, he will still continue on to do what is wrong, and perish in his sin. This is exactly what happened to Saul. It does not mean that men like Saul can never change. But they need the mercy and grace of God through Jesus Christ to come to them. They need to cry out for the grace of repentance to be given to them, as well as their being able to see the good example of the believer's not returning evil for evil.

Then 3rd – I would have you to consider that a Christian should pursue what is good for all men, and not just what is good for himself.

This not returning evil for evil, was something that David had to persevere in, for the better part of 10 years. But during that long period of time, he continued to pursue what was good, not only for himself, but also for everyone around him. Even though Saul was literally pursuing him to harm him, David pursued what was good. I haven't time to tell you of all the incidents that David met with in this regard. But one that stands out in my mind, is when news was brought to David of Saul and Jonathan's deaths in battle. He did not rejoice over Saul's death. An Amalekite man came to him with these tidings and he told David that he had actually found Saul near death and, "when he saw that he could not live after he had fallen, he stood over him and killed him." This evil man, "took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm" and brought them to David. How did David react to this? 2nd Samuel 1: 11 tells us: "Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him." You see, David's not returning evil for evil had really been learned by David's men. "And they mourned and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword." Verse 14 says, "So David said to this man, 'How was it that you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?'" "Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go near, and execute him!" "And he struck him so that he died." "So David said to him, 'Your blood is on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.'"

Now we need to understand that this was not returning evil for evil. This was an act of justice by a King who had every right to go ahead with it. David was now king. The first thing that he would do as king was to give justice on behalf of Saul, a man who had done evil to him, but who he had never returned evil for evil to. This is actually the proof of David's righteousness in this regard. He had now been raised up by God to the place and position that the Lord had appointed for him. But those lessons that he had learned, during all those years in the wilderness were to be of great value to him. He would maintain this doing of good throughout his whole reign, except in the matter of Bathsheba. He would rule the people of God during his reign by pursuing what was good. He would see to it that no man returned evil for evil. And in the outworking of what he would accomplish for the kingdom, he would not only pursue what was good for himself, but also for all men. In everything that we do, may we pray for grace to do the same.