

# 1 Thessalonians 5:22 Commentary

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JESUS IS COMING AGAIN  
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1 Thessalonians Overview				
1 Th 1:1-10	1 Th 2:1-20	1 Th 3:1-13	1 Th 4:1-18	1 Th 5:1-28
LOOKING BACK			LOOKING FORWARD	
Personal Reflections History			Practical Instructions Hortatory	
Ministry In Person		Ministry in Absentia (Thru Timothy)	Ministry by Epistle	
Word and Power of the Spirit		Establishing & Comforting	Calling & Conduct	1Th 4:13ff Comfort
				1Th 5:12ff Commands

1 Salvation	2 Service	3 Sanctification	4 Sorrow	5 Sobriety
Paul Commends Spiritual Growth	Paul Finds the Church	Strengthening of the Church	Directions for Spiritual Growth	Holy Living in Light of Day of the Lord
Exemplary Hope of Young Converts	Motivating Hope of Faithful Servants	Purifying Hope of Tried Believers	Comforting Hope of Bereaved Saints	Invigorating Hope of Diligent Christians
Written from Corinth Approximately 51AD				

1Thessalonians 5:22 **abstain** from **every form** of **evil**. (NASB: Lockman)

**Greek:** [apo pantos eidous ponerou apechesthe. \(2PPMM\)](#)

**Amplified:** Abstain from evil [shrink from it and keep aloof from it] in whatever form or whatever kind it may be. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** Keep yourselves well away from every kind of evil. ([Westminster Press](#))

**NLT:** Keep away from every kind of evil. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Steer clear of evil in any form. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Be holding yourselves back from every form of perniciousness. (Eerdmans)

**Young's Literal:** all things prove; that which is good hold fast

**ABSTAIN FROM EVERY FORM OF EVIL: apo pantos eidous ponerou apechesthe (2PPMM):**

- 1Th 4:12; Ex 23:7; Isa 33:15; Mt 17:26,27; Ro 12:17; 1Cor 8:13; 10:31, 32, 33; 2Cor 6:3; 8:20,21; Php 4:8; Jude 1:23
- 1 Thessalonians 5 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [1 Thessalonians 5:21-22: A Call for Discernment--Pt 1](#) - John MacArthur
- [1 Thessalonians 5:21-22: A Call for Discernment--Pt 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [1 Thessalonians 5:21-22: A Call for Discernment--Pt 3](#) - John MacArthur

When the testing determines that the utterance is spurious or from another spirit, we are commanded to steer clear of the evil.

**Darby** - hold fast the right; hold aloof from every form of wickedness.

**Abstain** (568) (**apechomai** [word study] from **apó** = away from - conveys the idea of putting some distance between; serves as a marker of dissociation, implying a rupture from a former association + **écho** = have) means to be away or be at a distance and here means to keep oneself from.

**John MacArthur** - The emphasis is on the believer's complete avoidance of any evil teaching or behavior. Nowhere does Scripture permit believers to expose themselves to the influences of what is false or evil; instead, they are to abstain from such things, even flee them (1Cor. 6:18; 10:14; 1Ti 6:11; 2Ti 2:22-note; cf. Ps 34:14; Ps 37:27; Ps 97:10; Pr 3:7; 8:13; 14:16; 22:3) ([MacArthur, John: 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Moody Press](#))

Paul is saying **Keep holding yourself** (**middle voice** conveys the idea that this is something the subject must initiate and then participate in the results thereof - it is a continuing personal obligation) **away from every form or "species" of harmful evil**

The first use of **apechomai** in this same letter was designed to produce greater holiness is abstinence from sexual immorality (1Th 4:3-note). Paul called his readers to avoid it, implying the need for exercising self-discipline enabled by God's Spirit.

Here are the other NT uses of **apechomai**...

(The Jerusalem council concluded) that we write to them (Gentile converts to Christianity) that they **abstain** from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood... 29 that you **abstain** from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you

keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell." (Acts 15:20, 29)

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you **abstain** (**present tense** = continually only possible as we renounce self-reliance and rely on the Spirit's enabling power) from sexual immorality (1Th 4:3-note)

(Context is that in later times some will fall away from the faith paying attention of deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, among whom are) men who forbid marriage and advocate **abstaining** from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. (1Ti 4:3)

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to **abstain** (**present tense** = continually = Just try to pull this off relying on yourself! We need to jettison self-reliance and rely on the power of the Spirit! Continually!!!) from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. (1Pe 2:11-note)

Paul is saying in context, that after the testing is made, any and every aspect of evil must be rejected. And this rejection is **not to be carried out in a spirit of legalism**, for as one person has written "Good men avoid sin from the **love** of virtue (2Cor 5:9-note, Gal 1:10-note) whereas wicked men avoid sin from a **fear** of punishment."

Webster's defines "**abstain**" as to refrain deliberately and often with an effort of self-denial from an action or practice. This is a good definition except that self denial is the world's way. Believers have access to the fruit of the Spirit, self-control (Gal 5:23-note) and yet we do have to make the choices and take actions that cultivate the character trait of self control (2Pe 1:6-note).

Although Paul uses a different verb (**aphistemi**) in 2Ti 2:19 the charge to Timothy is still the same = **abstain!** In fact in this passage Paul makes it clear that one of the marks of those who are **really His children** is abstinence from evil = "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord **abstain** (**aurist imperative** = Do this now! Don't delay! It is urgent!) from wickedness." (**see note**)

**Job** is an excellent OT example of one who **abstained** from evil. Three times God says that Job was a man who made it the habit of his life to keep turning away from evil, so clearly God considers this an important description of His choice servant Job! It strikes me that God wants all of His children to emulate/imitate Job's attitude and actions in Job 1:1, 8, 2:3! How are you doing dear saint? Notice that the Septuagint adds a detail not apparent in the Hebrew text -- the Greek has not just "turning away from evil" but adds the word "**pas**" (pantos) which means **all without exception!** All forms, all the time would be the idea! Why does the Greek use the **present tense**? Because the lures and snares of sin are constantly being encountered in this evil world system --temptation cannot be avoided, but temptations to evil can be turned away from by His Spirit and His gracious power!!! "Lord, do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Mt 6:13) should be our daily (many times in the day) prayer!

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and **turning away from** (Hebrew = sur = to turn aside; Lxx = **apechomai present tense** = continually turning away from) evil. (Job 1:1)

**Comment:** Look back at this verse [and the following one] and see if you can discern what it was that motivated Job to turn away from evil. Clue - check the context. Could his turning away have anything to do with his reverential fear of God?

The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." (Job 1:8)

And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and **turning away** (Lxx = **apechomai present tense** = continually) from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause." (Job 2:3)

**Vincent** has an interesting historical note - Paul wrote from **Corinth**, where sensuality in the guise of religion was rife. In **Thessalonica**, besides the ordinary licentious customs of the Gentiles, immorality was fostered by the Cabeiric worship. About the time of Paul, a political sanction was given to this worship by deifying the Emperor as Cabeirus.

**Form** (1491)(**eidōs** from **eído** = see) literally means that which is seen or what is visible and then the external appearance (shape and structure) of something as it appears to someone.

The KJV rendering is a bit misleading = Abstain from all **appearance** of evil.

Note that no other version uses **appearance** which could lead to a misinterpretation of the passage (see **notes below**).

The **UBS Handbook** comments that...

If KJV interpretation is chosen (and it is not impossible), the translator should guard against the misunderstanding that Paul is warning only against *apparent*, and not against *real*, evil. ([The United Bible Societies' New Testament Handbook Series](#))

Every **kind** of evil is the way in which almost all translations understand the text as exemplified by the versions listed above and below...

- Avoid every **kind** of evil (Good News Translation)
- Stay away from **everything** that is evil (New Century Version)
- Stay away from every **form** of evil (NET)
- Avoid every **kind** of evil (NIV)
- Hold yourselves aloof from every form of evil (Weymouth)

In Greek writing **eidōs** referred to a class, kind, sort, or species. This is somewhat the nuance in this verse - so we might say something like "every species of evil" implying (correctly) that there are many "species" of evil, just as there are many *species* in a given *genus*.

**Friberg** writes that **eidōs** means...

(1) with a passive sense, as what is visible to the eye form, (external) appearance (Lu 3:22)

(2) with an active sense sight, what one sees (2Cor 5:7)

(3) (particular) kind, sort (1Th 5:22) ([Friberg, T., Friberg, B., & Miller, N. F. Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament. Baker Academic](#))

It is interesting to note that a word derived from **eidōs** is **eidōlon** the Greek word for an idol!

**Green** notes that **eidōs** "appears in other contexts with the meaning "appearance," but only in the sense of external appearance that reflects internal reality (Green, G. L. The Pillar New Testament Commentary)

**Hiebert** - While the Greek term **eidōs** can mean outward appearance, it can also mean "sort, kind, species." This gives the best meaning here. We may then render "from every sort of evil" (Williams). Evil presents itself in many forms. "The essence of evil does not change, but ever seeks new and attractive forms through that it may embody itself." These must be recognized and resisted. Evil has a complexity that stands in striking contrast to the simplicity of the good. (Ibid)

There are only 5 uses of **eidōs** in the NT...

**Luke 3:22+** and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily **form** like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased."

**Luke 9:29+** And while He was praying, the **appearance** of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.

**John 5:37** "And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His **form**."

**2 Corinthians 5:7+** for we walk by faith, not by **sight**-- (Comment: Believers are guided in their behavior not by what they can behold naturally, but by what they know to be true though unseen)

**1 Thessalonians 5:22** **abstain** from every **form** of evil.

There are 40 uses in the Septuagint (LXX) (Gen. 29:17; 32:30f; 39:6; 41:2ff, 18f; Exod. 24:10, 17; 26:30; 28:33; Lev. 13:43; Num. 8:4; 9:15f; 11:7; 12:8; Deut. 21:11; Jdg. 13:6; 1 Sam. 16:18; 25:3; 2 Sam. 11:2; 13:1; Est. 2:2f, 7; Job 33:16; 41:18; Prov. 7:10; Song. 5:15; Isa. 52:14; 53:2f; Jer. 11:16; 15:3; Lam. 4:8; Ezek. 1:16, 26) Here are some representative uses...

**Genesis 29:17** And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of **form** (Hebrew = toar = outline, form; Lxx = eidōs) and face.

**Exodus 26:30+** "Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its **plan** (Lxx = eidōs) which you have been shown in the mountain.

**Numbers 9:15+** Now on the day that the tabernacle was erected the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the **appearance** (Hebrew = mareh = sight, appearance, vision; Lxx = eidōs) of fire over the tabernacle, until morning.

**Numbers 12:8+** With him I speak mouth to mouth (without any special mediation), even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the **form** (Hebrew = temunah; Lxx = eidos) of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?" (The meaning is that Moses saw some visible manifestation of Jehovah, although from John 1:18 [cp Ex 33:18ff] he did not see the LORD in all His unveiled glory and essential nature. cp Ex 24:10, 33:23)

**Isaiah 52:14 (Speaking of Jesus)** Just as many were astonished at you, My people, So His **appearance** (Hebrew = mareh = sight, appearance, vision; Lxx = eidos) was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men.

**Isaiah 53:2 (Speaking of Jesus)** For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor **appearance** (Hebrew = mareh = sight, appearance, vision; Lxx = eidos) that we should be attracted to Him.

**Jeremiah 15:3** "And I shall appoint over them four **kinds** (Lxx = eidos) of doom," declares the LORD: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag off, and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.

**Ezekiel 1:16** (note) The **appearance** (Hebrew = mareh = sight, appearance, vision; Lxx = eidos) of the wheels and their workmanship was like sparkling beryl, and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship being as if one wheel were within another.

**Every form of evil** - This phrase stresses the all inclusive nature of this command and the manifold manifestations (different "species") that **evil** is capable of - lies, distortions of truth, moral perversions, etc. In Romans Paul says the unregenerate are "*inventors of evil.*" (see note Romans 1:30) It follows that **evil** may take on ostensibly "new" forms, but it remains the same "old" destructive, corrupting force! Avoid evil of every kind and of every species.

**Hiebert** adds a qualifying thought writing that "the rendering "*all appearance of evil*" (KJV) must not be interpreted to mean that they are to avoid that which looks wicked to those who see it, although in itself it may not be so. The term does not denote semblance as opposed to reality. Such a dictum might enable them to shun some unpleasant duty. "*It is a poor heart that is much afraid of seeming evil in a good cause.*" While believers should abstain from actions that will knowingly offend others, it is not always possible to abstain from everything that may appear evil to a narrow and foolish judgment. (Ibid)

**Spurgeon** writes that Paul does not mean "from that which other people choose to think evil, but from all real evil whatever it is — even from the very shadow that it casts and the shape which it assumes.

**Vincent** offers a similar thought writing that "As commonly explained, *abstain from everything that even looks like evil.* But the word (eidos) signifies **form** or **kind**. Cp Luke 3:22; John 5:37...It never has the sense of *semblance*. Moreover, it is impossible to abstain from everything that **looks like** evil. ([1 Thessalonians 5](#))

**Morris** - The meaning will be '*evil which can be seen,*' and not '*that which appears to be evil.*'

The **Amplified Version** more accurately conveys the meaning than the KJV rendering it - Abstain from evil [shrink from it and keep aloof from it] **in whatever form** or **whatever kind** it may be.

**Jamieson** amplifies this idea writing that "In many cases the Christian should not abstain from what has the *semblance* ("**appearance**") of evil, though really good. Jesus healed on the Sabbath, and ate with publicans and sinners, acts which wore the **appearance** of evil, but which were not to be abstained from on that account, being really good. (Critical and Explanatory Commentary)

**Evil** ([4190](#))(**poneros** from **pónos** = labor, sorrow, pain) refers to evil in active opposition to good.

**Poneros** - 78x in 72v - **NAS** = bad(5), crimes(1), envious(1), envy\*(1), evil(50), evil one(5), evil things(1), malignant(1), more evil(1), more wicked(1), vicious(1), wicked(6), wicked man(1), wicked things(1), worthless(1).

Matt 5:11, 37, 39, 45; 6:13, 23; 7:11, 17f; 9:4; 12:34f, 39, 45; 13:19, 38, 49; 15:19; 16:4; 18:32; 20:15; 22:10; 25:26; Mark 7:22f; Luke 3:19; 6:22, 35, 45; 7:21; 8:2; 11:13, 26, 29, 34; 19:22; John 3:19; 7:7; 17:15; Acts 17:5; 18:14; 19:12f, 15f; 25:18; 28:21; Rom 12:9; 1 Cor 5:13; Gal 1:4; Eph 5:16; 6:13, 16; Col 1:21; 1 Thess 5:22; 2 Thess 3:2f; 1 Tim 6:4; 2 Tim 3:13; 4:18; Heb 3:12; 10:22; Jas 2:4; 4:16; 1 John 2:13f; 3:12; 5:18f; 2 John 1:11; 3 John 1:10; Rev 16:2.

**Hiebert** writes that **evil** (poneros) "is a strong term and is properly distinguished from kakos. The latter term points to the base nature of a thing; its lack of those qualities and conditions that would makes it worthy of the claim that it makes. The former term is active and denotes that which is destructive, injurious, and evil in its effect." It is malignant evil, blasting and destroying what it

touches. It includes the doctrinal as well as the moral.

**Lenski** - The worst forms of wickedness consist of perversions of the truth, of spiritual lies (The Interpretation of Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon).

Jesus described Satan as ponesos or actively harmful. So if something even has the appearance that suggests it might be actively harmful, we are to keep holding ourselves away from it. Be diligent, sober minded.

**John MacArthur** rightly observes that "Believers who yield to the Holy Spirit's complete control will appreciate Scripture's character, allow its power to sanctify their lives, and examine everything by its standards. Thus they will fulfill three more vital responsibilities all believers have to Jesus Christ—to honor His Spirit, obey His Word, and exercise spiritual discernment. ([MacArthur, John: 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Moody Press](#))

**Hiebert** adds that "These two commands (**abstain...hold fast**) must not be separated in Christian experience. Both are necessary for the development of true Christian character. Christian growth requires not only the assimilation of the good but also the rejection of the evil. The intensity of our adherence to the good will be measured by the strength of our rejection of the evil. (Ibid)

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A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil that good may come of it. —William Penn

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**Spurgeon** - Idleness is the mother of all vices. It produces a state of mind which is favourable to every form of evil. Say a fellow is lazy, and nothing worse remains to be said of him. Idleness is the shipwreck of chastity, and the root of all evil.

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**Spurgeon** - The old naturalist, Ulysses Androvaldus, tell us that a dove is so afraid of a hawk, that she will be frightened at the sight of one of its feathers. Whether it be so or not, I cannot tell; but this I know, that when a man has had a thorough shaking over the jaws of hell, he will be so afraid of sin, that even one of its feathers — any one sin — will alarm and send a thrill of fear through his soul This is a part of the way by which the Lord turns us when we are turned indeed. (Spurgeon quotes) Manton says: "A man that would keep out the cold in winter shutteth all his doors and windows, yet the wind will creep in, though he doth not leave any open hole for it." We must leave no inlet for sin, but stop up every hole and cranny by which it can enter. There is need of great care in doing this, for when our very best is done sin will find an entrance. During the bitter cold weather we list the doors, put sandbags on the windows, draw curtains, and arrange screens, and yet we are made to feel that we live in a northern climate: in the same way must we be diligent to shut out sin, and we shall find abundant need to guard every point, for after we have done all, we shall, in one way or another, be made to feel that we live in a sinful world. Well, what must we do? We must follow the measures which common prudence teaches us in earthly matters. We must drive out the cold by keeping up a good fire within. The presence of the Lord Jesus in the soul can so warm the heart that worldliness and sin will be expelled, and we shall be both holy and happy. The Lord grant, it for Jesus' sake.

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**J R Miller** - "Abstain from every form of evil." We are accustomed to think of some violations of God's Word—as only slightly evil; while we imagine that other transgressions are very black in their sinfulness. Some people appear to think that if we keep ourselves from the worst kinds of evil—that we need not be so watchful against the minor forms of misconduct. They will not lie, nor steal, nor swear, nor do other things which would brand them in the eyes of the community as 'wicked'. But meanwhile they are ungentle, unkind, selfish, bad tempered, and loving the world. But Paul's exhortation is, "Abstain from every form of evil." We are not to pick out certain sins and condemn these alone as evil, abstaining from them; meanwhile indulging in pet vices and sinful habits of our own. Whatever is wrong in even the slightest way—is to be abstained from. There really are no little sins, no 'little white lies', no slight deviations from right and purity. Even evil thoughts, our Master says, break His commandments! ([1 Thessalonians 5:14-28 Paul's Counsel to the Thessalonians](#))

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**Devotional by John MacArthur - REFUSING TO BE ENTICED** Abstain from every form of evil. - Hatred of evil leads to avoidance of it. You can't dabble with sin and avoid falling into it. Refusing to be enticed by temptation, the righteous person's "delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2). You can't pursue righteousness and at the same time tolerate evil. That's why Paul counseled Timothy and all believers with this message: "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2Ti 2:22-note).

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### **John Angell James - THE DUTY OF PROFESSORS TO AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF EVIL**

"God has called us unto holiness." 1 Thes. 4:7. Impressive idea! It is our very vocation to be holy. Holiness was the image of God in which man was created, against which the envy and malignity of Satan were directed, and which he dashed at and destroyed, when he found himself unable to reach the divine original. Holiness is the end of all God's dispensations towards his people, whether of

Providence, of Grace, or of Glory. Holiness will constitute the perfection of man's moral nature in heaven. Holiness is the spotless garment in which the seraph ministers before the throne of the Eternal. Holiness is more, for it is the beauty of the Divine Being himself; not so much a separate attribute of his nature, as the perfection of all his attributes. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all," and from the midst of his excellent glory, he is ever calling to us and saying, "Be holy, as I am holy."

True religion is conformity to God, and God is holy. Herein is Christianity distinguished from idolatry, and its infinite superiority above the classic paganism of antiquity demonstrated. Some of the philosophers, especially of the Stoic sect, delivered many fine sentiments and even beautiful maxims of a stern and rigid morality—but their ethics had no connection with their theology. "The gods of the Pagan heaven were little better than men's own evil qualities exalted to the sky, to be thence reflected back upon them, invested with Olympian charms and splendors. A mighty labor of human depravity to confirm its own dominion! It would translate itself to heaven, and usurp divinity, in order to come down thence with a sanction for man to be wicked." So that while men in Christian lands become wicked for lack of religion, those who dwell in heathen countries become wicked by religion. The moralist and the priest are in opposition to each other, and the former, if he would succeed in making men better, must caution them against allowing the latter to bring them within the precincts of a temple, or introduce them to the presence of a god.

But it is the excellence and glory of Christianity, that its refined morality is founded upon and arises from, its pure theology; which contains every possible motive and every necessary means to holiness. Our great business then in this world is to be made and kept holy. Our whole life is to be one incessant struggle against that moral evil, which is all around us and within us. "We are called," I repeat the expression, "to holiness!" How emphatic, how comprehensive, is the apostolic admonition which is the subject of this chapter, "abstain from all appearance of evil." 1 Thes. 5:22. Some expositors render the expression thus, "abstain from every sort or kind of evil." In this sense, it is a most important precept. Evils are of various kinds and degrees, and it is a Christian's duty to avoid them all. He must not reconcile himself to any one thing that is contrary to God's word. He must declare war, and maintain irreconcilable hostility against every sin!

But, probably, the true meaning of the text is the commonly received one, that we are not only to abstain from those things that are really and manifestly evil—but from such as are only doubtfully and in appearance such. We must avoid not only the identical evil thing itself—but all shows and resemblances of it.

1. Professors should abstain from the smallest beginnings of evil, the first buddings of sin; those things which would not be noticed in others, and are made apparent, like faint stains upon white linen, only by the white background of their profession; and which after all, in the estimation of many, are so small and insignificant, as to be rather appearances than realities. Little sins lead on to greater ones, and if they did not, and were not feared on account of what they may lead to, should be shunned for their own sakes. A female, vain of her beauty, is annoyed not only by sores upon the countenance—but also by freckles. A professor is not to be vain of the beauty of holiness—but still he is to be watchful of it, and must therefore avoid the smallest disfigurement of it by sin!

2. We must not venture to the extreme verge of what is good, nor try how near we can come to evil, without actually committing it. The boundary, as I have elsewhere remarked, between right and wrong, is an invisible line, which many rash adventurers have passed, before they were aware they were approaching near to it. Besides, though it may be quite perceptible, and avoided by those who are near, yet people who are close to it may appear to others, who look from a distance, to be gone over it. It is a most dangerous thing for ourselves, to go as near sin as we can without committing it; and as to observers, there are many to whom we are certain, in such a position, to seem to be committing it. All sober, serious, conscientious, and considerate Christians, try to keep far within the territory of holiness, being aware that the border country is generally disputed ground, and much infested by marauders from the opposite land, who are lying in ambush to make captives of those who adventure beyond the line of their defense. But there are many of an opposite description, who have so little circumspection and tenderness of conscience, that if they can but keep themselves from that which is intrinsically and notoriously evil, make no scruple of venturing upon the borders and edges of sin.

3. We must take care not to "let our good be evil spoken of"—for even virtues may be sometimes so exercised, or exercised in conjunction with such circumstances as to give them the appearance of evil. There is, in some instances, as great a lack of judgment in the doing of what is good, as there is in others a lack of conscience in the doing of what is evil, and, in the end, with much the same result; I mean, the disparagement of religion. It is truly painful to think how much of real and even eminent holiness has, in some cases, been witnessed, not only without admiration—but with disgust; and has been spoken of rather with contempt than applause, merely in consequence of the encrustations of folly by which it has been disfigured. A professor, eminent for her earnest solicitude about her soul, in her anxiety to grow in grace, and keep up the vitality of religion, will, perhaps neglect all the duties of her household, and leave a sick child to servants in order to attend a prayer-meeting or a sermon. A second, in his zeal for the cause of Christ, will give that property for its support, which belongs to his creditors. A third, in his hatred of sin, will be guilty of all kinds of rudeness in reproving transgressors. Mercy sometimes degenerates into a pernicious weakness. Justice sometimes degenerates into harshness. Spirituality sometimes degenerates into cant. Humility sometimes degenerates into baseness. Devotion sometimes degenerates into superstition. And a tender conscience sometimes degenerates into a diseased one. If it is injurious, and

most injurious it is, to the cause of holiness, to give the names of virtue to vice, and thus reconcile men to a bad thing by the 'potent spell of a good word', it is not much less so, perhaps, to disgust men against what is really good by affixing to it the appearance of what is evil. Names have a mighty influence in human affairs. Hence the woe denounced against those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Isaiah 5:20.

4. The rule commands us to abstain from what appears to ourselves of doubtful propriety. There are many things, of which the sinfulness is so manifest; which have so much of the palpable substance as well as the appearance of evil, that they are shunned without a moment's hesitation, by everyone who has the least regard to the authority of God. But there are others, the criminality of which is not so clear, and of which, therefore, even a good man may stand in doubt. We oftentimes meet with such things, and are in much and painful indecision whether we may carefully venture upon them or not. This is the state of mind, which has been called "a doubting conscience."

The apostle has laid down rules for guiding us safely out of this dilemma, and which are sufficiently plain for all ordinary cases. "He that doubts is condemned if he eats, for whatsoever is not of faith (that is, which a man does not believe he may lawfully do) is sin." Rom. 14:23. Doubts about the propriety of an action are strong presumptive evidence that it is unlawful, for they must have their origin in the perception of some appearance of evil. Yet still there are people of such a timid and nervous constitution, of such a physical incapability of coming to any conclusion that shall be free from all scruples, that if they never acted till they had got rid of all doubts, they would never act at all. The following rules may, perhaps, be of service to such people, and indeed to all.

When in the proposed actions all the doubts lie on one side, there need be no hesitation. When one action will promote our interest, and the other oppose it, the probability is, that the way of duty lies in the course which is disadvantageous to us. It is always best, in doubtful cases, to take the safer side; that which, as far as we can judge, will involve least risk of our own reputation, and be best for the comfort and well-being of others. It is well, in some difficult cases, to suppose the affair to belong to somebody else, and to look at it, as far as we can, as theirs, and then to ask ourselves the question, "How should I judge for them?" and vice versa, to suppose them looking upon us, and to say, "What will be their opinion how I ought to act?" In all cases we should consult the word of God; but not, however, to find passages which will favor that side of the question to which we are already, perhaps, inclined—but with a sincere desire to know the will of God, and, at the same time, accompanying this exercise with fervent prayer to God for direction. If, after all, we should be still in doubt, we may then ask the opinion and advice of some discreet Christian friend or friends, on whose judgment and conscientious impartiality we can rely.

When we have thus endeavored to know what is right, we are to proceed to action, and should not allow ourselves to be checked, interrupted, or distressed by any speculative doubts, or by the fears and misgivings of a sensitive and somewhat morbid imagination. We must be led by judgment, and, in some cases, against the doubts and fears that arise from these sources. There is frequently an apprehensiveness which makes some people pause and hesitate, and almost resolve to turn back, even when their judgment urges them on; just like that groundless fear, which makes a timid traveler doubt and ready to return, although the finger-post over his head, and the mile-stone by the wayside tell him he is right.

A really sincere desire to know and do the will of God, at all risk and all costs, will rarely leave a person in much doubt, as to what is right to be done. God has promised to guide the weak in judgment, and to show them his way. As a general principle, then, it holds good, that what appears to be evil is evil, and must be abstained from. We must not go on against the convictions of our judgment, nor even its well-grounded fears. When conscience meets us in the path we are going, striding across the road, as did the Angel to resist the progress of Balaam, we must not resolve to force a passage, and continue our course.

A question will, perhaps, arise in the minds of some, of this import, "Are we bound in all cases to follow the dictates of conscience? If so, as conscience is often misinformed, and erroneous, we may sometimes do that conscientiously, which is evil." True it is, as Christ foretold his disciples, many have thought they did God service when they persecuted and murdered his saints. And the apostle tells us, that in his unbelieving state, he verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth; and yet, though he did it ignorantly, at the dictate of an erroneous conscience, he calls himself on that account the "chief of sinners." It is not to be doubted that others do many evil things, and yet act conscientiously therein. How, then, are we to judge? If we say that conscience is not to be followed in all things, we depose this internal monitor from his throne, and affirm that we are not always bound to do that which we believe to be right; while, if we say we always are to follow conscience, we seem to prove that some do right in sinning against God, because they do it conscientiously.

It will help us out of this difficulty, to consider what is CONSCIENCE. It is that power which the mind possesses of judging its own actions, by comparing them with some acknowledged rule of conduct, and of approving or condemning them according as they agree or disagree with it; together with that susceptibility of self-approbation, or pain of remorse, which follows the verdict. Conscience is not the rule of action—but the faculty of judging ourselves by a rule. This rule is the word of God. When, therefore, the question is asked, "What is right?" we answer, not what conscience—but what the Scriptures declare to be so. Still, however, the question returns, ought we not to do that which we believe is enjoined upon us by the word of God? I answer, yes; but then we ought



also to form a right judgment of the word itself. We are responsible for our opinions.

Our duty, therefore, may he thus stated—our conscience must be first directed by the rule of Scripture, and our lives guided by our conscience. It is certainly true, that if we act in opposition to our conscience, we sin; and no less true, that we sin if our conscience is opposed to the word of God. We hence see the necessity of searching the Scriptures with trembling awe, simplicity of mind, and earnest prayer to God. And we may rest assured that whatever we do, which is condemned by this infallible rule, will be considered and treated by God as sinful, notwithstanding it has been done at the dictate of conscience; for the error of the judgment must have originated in something wrong in the heart, some deficiency of caution in examination, or some prejudice or selfish end we wished to serve, by which evidence was resisted, and a wrong conclusion drawn.

5. We ought in many cases to abstain from what appears evil to others. Here, of course, some exceptions must be made. If anything which is good in itself should appear evil in their eyes, we are not in this case to avoid it. The whole Christian religion appeared evil in the eye of the Pagans among whom it was first propagated, and was persecuted by them as such. Protestantism appears evil in the eyes of Papists—Nonconformity appears evil in the eyes of High Churchmen; and spiritual piety appears evil in the eyes of worldly-minded people to this day. In all cases of this kind, and in whatever is our duty to God, we must disregard the opinion of the world, and do what is right. To all who would turn us from the path of duty, we must give the Apostle's reply, "Whether it be right to obey men rather than God, judge you." We must not venture upon a scandal to the church, to avoid a scandal to the world. It would be a most preposterous kind of charity to please men by disobeying God. Though all the world should utter its howl against the strictness of our religion, and demand a relaxation of it, we must not gratify their desires, nor seek to win them, by relaxing the least part of that severity which the law of God and our own conscience require of us.

If the strictness of our religion should, as it sometimes may, accidentally prove an occasion of sin to our neighbor, we are not, even on that account, to abate it. There is no doubt that fervent and consistent piety does oftentimes excite not only the ridicule—but the malice of the wicked. It has not unfrequently happened, that they have been provoked into a truly diabolical spirit, and have been irritated by the religion of their friends into greater lengths of wickedness, until those very friends have been ready to conceal or give up much of their religion, under the idea of preventing the wickedness it seemed to occasion. But this is wrong. Our Lord was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to the Jews; some were scandalized at his doctrine, as a despiser of the law of Moses—others at his conduct, as being a glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, and a Sabbath breaker—but yet for all these calumnies he altered nothing in his teaching or in his conduct—but amidst all their clamors still went on preaching and doing. Those that are his disciples must also go on in their course of spiritual religion, although they should perceive that evil men on this account, wax worse and worse in their hatred of God and his people.

Much spiritual discretion, I admit, is required not to offend unnecessarily, by adding to our religion that which God has not commanded; by performing religious duties out of place and season; by the rigid maintenance of an unprescribed precision; and especially by needlessly obtruding our piety in a way that looks like ostentation and parade. All sacrifice of principle, and violations of conscience; all giving up of acknowledged duties for the sake of preventing the outbreaks of wickedness, softening prejudice, and conciliating good-will, is doing evil ourselves, to keep others from doing it.

Nor must we sacrifice our principles, and act in opposition to our conscience, even to please the church of Christ. We must separate from what we deem to be an unscriptural communion, and abstain from what we consider a sinful practice, although it be under the condemnation of many professors of religion, or even the majority of them. Separation from our brethren without a cause, and opposition to them without sufficient reason, are evil, as disturbing, without grounds, the unity and peace of the church. But where there is ground and reason for these, such conduct is strictly proper. "If that appears to be a duty to us," says Hopkins, "that has an appearance of evil to the generality of the most sober-minded and serious Christians, why, now, though this should not presently sway our consciences, yet it should engage us to make a strict search and inquiry, whether it be our duty or not; if it be that which is contrary to the opinion and practice of holy and pious Christians, it ought to have this authority with us, to put us to a stand, and to make us examine whether that we account it to be a duty or not. As, for instance, some among us at this day are persuaded that they ought to worship God one way, and some another; and what appears to be a duty to one, has the appearance of evil in it to another. Why, now, follow neither of these because it is their judgment and practice; but yet if your persuasion be contrary to the persuasion of the most pious and sober-minded Christians, this ought so far to prevail as to make men suspect lest they are mistaken, and to put them upon diligent inquiry and an important search into their grounds and arguments—but after all, still follow that which you are convinced in your own conscience is your duty, how evil soever it may appear to others, one way or another."

These remarks must commend themselves by their candor as well as truth, to every honest mind, and had they been acted upon by the bulk of professing Christians in every age, would have spared the ecclesiastical historian the trouble of recording the thousand angry controversies and horrid persecutions, which have disfigured his pages, and disgraced the various parties which for the time have gained the ascendant in Christendom. Schism and persecution would never have existed, though many separations would—but the seceders would have acted cautiously and conscientiously, while those from whom they had retired, perceiving upon what motives they had acted, would have revered the principle, however they may have lamented the act, and neither attempted to

crush them with the arm of power, nor brand them with the charge of schism.

The appearance of evil, which we are to avoid out of regard to the feelings of others, is such as appertains to things indifferent, or in other words, is connected with the enjoyment of our Christian liberty. Amidst the infinite diversity of human opinion, it is to be looked for, that some things of a perfectly neutral character, which may be done or not done without blame in either case, will appear evil to some; and from which, therefore, in some cases, it is both matter of charity and duty in a Christian to abstain. The manner in which we are to use our liberty in things indifferent is stated at length in Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 8. A question had arisen in the primitive church, about the lawfulness of eating meat that had been offered to idols, and of attending the feasts that were held in the heathen temples in honor of their god. Some of the primitive professors reasoned thus, "I believe the idol to be a mere nonentity, and therefore can, not only eat the flesh of animals that had been offered in sacrifice to him—but I can even go to his feast, for the so-called deity is, in my esteem, a nonentity, a mere name." "But," says the apostle, "be careful that this right of yours in no way becomes a stumbling block to the weak. For if somebody sees you, the one who has this knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, won't his weak conscience be encouraged to eat food offered to idols? Then the weak person, the brother for whom Christ died, is ruined by your knowledge." 1 Cor. 8:9-11. Now, observe the apostle's noble, charitable, and self-denying resolution, "Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, (i.e. if my example leads him to sin) I will never again eat meat, so that I won't cause my brother to fall into sin" The same reasoning is applied to a similar case stated in Rom. 14, and the same conclusion is come to—"Let us follow after the things that make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another." "We then who are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. Even as Christ pleased not himself."

This, then, is the law of Christian liberty in things indifferent. When we do those things which we know to be lawful, yet still not obligatory—but which others think to be sinful, we do not act charitably, and such things therefore should be avoided—to do them is not an act of duty, for they are confessedly indifferent, and to leave them undone is not an act of sin; while the doing of them, in such circumstances, is attended with many disadvantages. 1. Your own piety is brought into suspicion. 2. Others may be unnecessarily grieved, and the communion of saints be interrupted. 3. Some may be led by your example to do the same things in opposition to their conscience, and even to go much further in what is wrong.

Still this deference to the opinions of others has its limits, nor does it, in any case, forbid the attempt to remove their scruples by argument and persuasion. We are not obliged to consult the whims and caprices of every ignorant or fastidious individual who chooses to take exception to our conduct; nor to submit to the unreasonable and impertinent interference of everyone who assumes a right to call us to account; much less to solicit the opinions of our neighbors on all occasions, for this would be endless and ridiculous. But still a man who is regardful, and every man ought to be regardful, of his own Christian reputation, the credit of religion, and the comfort, especially the safety of his neighbor, will often say to himself, in reference to a particular action, or course of actions, "Well, although I could do this with a clear conscience, because I believe it is quite lawful; yet, as I am not obliged to do it, and I know it is thought to be wrong by others, I will abstain from it, lest I injure my religious profession in their estimation, or lead them, by my example, to do the same thing, in opposition to their own conscience."

Many a professor has injured, if not ruined his reputation forever, in the estimation of some people, by actions which appeared quite lawful in his own eyes, and, perhaps, were really so—but they were not thought so by those observers of them. Their decision was contrary to charity; but his conduct was no less contrary to prudence. Reputation is a thing which no man may trifle with—but which everyone must watch with a sleepless and jealous vigilance; and it is assailable from so many quarters, and wounded by such small, and seemingly contemptible weapons, that we must never be off our guard. It is not enough to do what we know to be good—but we must ever be studious to avoid what others imagine to be evil. We must not only be harmless as doves—but wise as serpents. It is our duty, in some cases, to yield to the ignorance we cannot enlighten, and to give way to the prejudice we cannot convince. We must never, I allow, carry our candor so far as to give up principle to our own harm, nor bow to prejudice to our neighbor's; but when we can give way without the risk of injury to ourselves or our neighbor, and with the probability of good to both, no obstinate attachment to our own opinion should prompt us to stand out. Great sacrifice of feeling, and considerable self-denial, will be sometimes necessary to act upon this plan—but, then, what is religion but one continued course of self denial. Taking up the cross is the condition on which alone we can be accepted as a disciple of Christ. It may, perhaps occasionally inflict a wound upon our pride, make a deduction from our self-importance, and be felt as an abridgement of our independence, to make this concession to weakness or fastidiousness; but it is due alike to ourselves, to our neighbor, and to God. It is the law of religion; and, after all, is the perfection of human character, which consists of the admixture, in due proportions, of the opposite elements of self-wilfulness and servility.

Sin, in any form, and in any degree, is so evil, and should be felt by the Christian to be so hateful and disgraceful, that he should wish to stand clear of it, and be acquitted, not only in the court of conscience, and of God—but at the bar of every human being upon earth. His religious character, as a professor, should be as dear to him, and guarded with as much care, as that of her social reputation to a female, to whom it is not sufficient to know that she has committed no violation of the law of chastity—but wishes to avoid what might appear to be such, in the estimation of all, and who would not be suspected by a single individual in the world.

Professors, consider this close and comprehensive rule of conduct. It is not enough not to do evil, for we must not even seem to do it—we must avoid the first for the sake of conscience, and the second for the sake of reputation; the first for our own sake, the second for our neighbor's sake; and both for God's sake. It is not enough to ask concerning an action, "Is it lawful?" but "is it fitting?" nor must we say, "Prove that it is evil, and I will abstain from it," but "If it has the shadow, though it has not the substance, the mere show of evil, I will avoid it."

And if, then, we are to avoid the resemblances of evil, how much more evil itself—if what only some men think to be sin, how much more what all men know to be such. And while we are to abstain from the mere likenesses of evil, we are also not to be content with the mere likenesses of good; the former as too much, and the latter as too little, to content a Christian mind. By giving ourselves to follow the shadows of evil—we may sink to perdition; while the mere shadow of good will never lead us to heaven. ([The Christian Professor](#))

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**Allergic To . . . By Dave Branon** - Abstain from every form of evil. —1 Thessalonians 5:22

One of our grandchildren is allergic to several kinds of foods. Milk, cheese, eggs, and ice cream are among the items she has to avoid. Even a small amount of these things is detrimental to her health.

She's not alone in being required to avoid certain things in life. While her allergies are related to her physical well-being, each of us as believers in Jesus has dangers we need to stay away from to maintain spiritual health. Scripture gives us a clear indication of what we are "allergic to" spiritually.

Every kind of evil (1 Thess. 5:22). This should cause us to think about the choices we make, because taking part in what is clearly evil is not good for our spiritual vitality.

Foolish disputes and arguments (2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9). This takes discernment, for some arguments have merit in defending the faith. But those for which there is no answer or which have no bearing on truth only cause dissension.

Sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3). The Bible says that any sexual activity outside the boundaries of a marriage between a man and a woman is immoral (Gen. 2:24; Ex. 20:14; 1 Cor. 7:2; Heb. 13:4).

Are we willing to make the effort to steer clear of things we are spiritually "allergic to"?

Today avoid sin's tempting lures  
And evil thoughts subdue,  
Or sinful things may take control  
And someday master you! —Bosch

**To avoid sin, nip it in the bud**