**1 Thessalonians 5:15**

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**The Uniqueness of Christianity**

* This morning we are continuing our examination of v. 12-15 in which Paul gives practical instruction to the church in 3 distinct areas, each of which I’ve highlighted in a different color.
	+ In v. 12-13a Paul began by instructing the church regarding the need to ***know*** and ***esteem*** church leaders as those who are given charge over the souls of their flock.
	+ In v. 13b-14, which we examined last week, Paul gives instruction to the church in regard to interpersonal relationships between church members . . . those who are of the fellowship of faith.
	+ And now, here in v. 15 Paul gives instruction to the church in regard to their attitudes and actions toward unbelievers . . . those who are outside the fellowship of faith.
* With that outline in mind, lets once again read the entire passage . . . v. 12-15

***12 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, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 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.***

* Last week, in his second section of instruction regarding relationships within the church, Paul gave 5 specific command regarding how the church was to function:

**1. *Live in peace with one another***

**2. *Counsel and correct those who are in sin***

**3. *Encourage the fainthearted***

**4. *Help the weak***

**5. *Be patient with everyone***

* This week, in his final instruction regarding the conduct of the church, Paul issues **2 more commands . . . 1 negative and 1 positive**.
* The first command of the church, which is stated as a negative command, is found at the beginning of v. 15 . . . ***see that no one repays another with evil for evil.***

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* The command verb is translated ***see that*** (*horaō*—#3708). This command is **a plural command**, meaning “be on your guard.” Being a plural command indicates that this command is intended for the entire church.
	+ In addition, being **a present tense command**, the command literally means **“continually be on your guard.”**
	+ The meaning of this plural present tense command implies that **watchfulness on the part of the entire church is necessary to keep the prohibited practice from creeping in.** Like a guard standing his post, watching for the enemy, every Christian is to “continually be on guard” so that evil attitudes and actions don’t creep into their hearts.
* Specifically, the negative command that Paul issues here in **v. 15 has to do with the practice of retribution for a wrong suffered.**
	+ Here in v. 15 the term ***repay*** (*apodidōmi*—#591) means “to render in kind.”
* As I mentioned in my message last week, revenge and retribution have always been the normal practice of the cultures around the Mediterranean Sea.
	+ Revenge and retribution were not only accepted in these societies, **they were expected**.
	+ A man who did not seek to avenge a family member who had been wronged was seen as weak and a traitor to his family, clan or tribe.
* Even among the Jews, the practice of retribution was practiced and endorsed by Jewish society. It is because of this practice that Jesus instructs against it during His Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:38 the Lord states the condition that existed in Israel . . .

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***Matthew 5:38— "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'***

* This law that Jesus cites is found in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21, in which God instructs the Israelites . . .

***Exodus 21:24-25— 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.***

* But in His instruction to the Jews in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord is impressing upon the people that **the instruction from Exodus 21 was** **given by God as a rule to regulate the decisions of judges in ruling over the nation of Israel.**
	+ In judging over Israel, the judges were to take an eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth, and to inflict burning for burning. As a judicial rule God declared that such judgments were proper and just.
	+ The judgment of God in giving this rule was to ensure that the punishment for a crime was proportional to the offense . . . that a minor offense not result in an overly harsh punishment. **And Jesus** **Christ finds no fault with the rule as applied by judges and does not to repeal it**.
	+ But instead of confining this rule to the judges of Israel, **the Jews had extended the practice to private conduct, and made it the rule by which they could legally and morally take revenge.**
	+ Since this “eye for eye” rule was used to rule justly over Israel, the Jews considered themselves justified by this rule to personally inflict the same injury on others for injuries they had received, **without the use of the courts**. And in His sermon to the people Jesus tells the Jewish people that this private practice was wrong and should not continue.
* Jesus’ point in Matthew 5:38-42 is to teach us that rather than seeking revenge and retribution against others when we are wronged, we should do the opposite . . . we should strive to disarm the conflict and strive to live in peace with one another.
	+ In Matthew 5:38-42 the Lord instructs us on the proper response for when a wrong has been suffered . . .

***Matthew 5:38-42— 38 "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 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. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.***

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* The general principle which the Lord lays down in this passage is that we should not repay evil for evil . . . that we should not set ourselves against an evil person who is injuring us.
	+ But we must be careful to understand that this general direction is not to be pressed too strictly. Christ did not intend to teach that we are to see our families murdered or be murdered ourselves. **Of course we are correct in defending ourselves when we are at risk of serious injury or death.**
	+ Here in Matthew 5:38-42 the Lord is confining His instruction to small matters . . . disputes between individuals of a small nature. To get an idea of the type of matters the Lord is speaking of, we read in 1 Peter 3:8-9 . . .

***1 Peter 3:8-9— 8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 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.***

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* + The type of conflict that the Lord and Peter speak of are small conflicts between individuals . . . personal disputes that result in harsh words or personal animosity, such as an insult or some other personal offense.
* Here in 1 Thessalonians 5:15 Paul is commanding the same attitude and response the Lord commands in the Sermon on the Mount . . . ***see that no one repays another with evil for evil***.
	+ We all know and understand that **this instruction by the Lord and by Paul is contrary to one of the strongest impulses of human nature . . . to seek retribution.** That’s what makes this command so difficult to obey. **It is our nature to seek retribution for an unjust wrong suffered.**
	+ But to show you the importance of this command of the Lord and of Paul, it is also found elsewhere in the New Testament. In Romans 12:17 Paul later writes . . .

***Romans 12:17— Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.***

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* + And, as I just read, in 1 Peter 3:7 the apostle Peter writes . . .

***1 Peter 3:7— not returning evil for evil or insult for insult . . .***

* It is important that we understand what is being taught here by the Lord, by Paul and by Peter. The use of the phrase ***evil for evil*** describes both the worthlessness and the wickedness of all acts of retribution.
	+ **Retribution is not seeking justice. Retribution is merely the exchange of one evil for another.** You hit me, so I’m going to hit you. You insulted me, so I’m going to insult you. There is nothing positive or good that comes from any act of retribution. It is purely vindictive and evil.
	+ However, the prohibition against ***repaying evil for evil*** does not mean that you cannot use every legal means available to seek **justice**. That’s what our justice system if for . . . so that society can apply the laws to seek a just resolution to a legal wrong suffered.
	+ But any personal retribution is specifically prohibited . . . and for good reason. We all know what happens when **evil is returned for evil . . . it escalates.** And as long as two people are reacting with evil and animosity toward one another, the conflict and evil will continue to grow and not be resolved.
	+ There are many instances in which long-simmering feuds between people or families have gone on so long that no **one remembers what the original offense was** that began the hostilities. All they know is that they have been feuding with the other party for a long time.
* In order for conflict and animosity to be defused between two people, someone has to be willing to de-escalate the situation. Someone has to be willing to seek peace. Or, better yet, someone has to be **unwilling to allow** an offense to create animosity.
	+ **That** is what Paul is teaching here . . . don’t allow someone else’s act of evil to draw you into a conflict. Be willing to defuse the situation by **not** ***repaying another with evil for evil***.

**The proper, godly response to a wrong suffered**

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***1 Thessalonians 5:15— 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.***

* Then, having commanded against ***repaying another with evil for evil***, Paul then goes on, in his second command of this verse, to command **the positive Christian response to a wrong suffered . . .** ***but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.***
* Just as it is our nature to seek retribution for an unjust wrong suffered, **it is contrary to our nature to be kind and do good to those who have done evil to us.** But that is precisely what Paul is saying here in v. 15.
* And Paul knows that this command runs counter to every fiber of our being. In his command to ***seek after that which is good***, the command ***seek after*** (*diōkō*—#1377) means **“try to pursue.”**
	+ By his use of this command Paul acknowledges that “trying to pursue good” toward someone who has committed evil against you is difficult . . . it does run contrary to our nature.
* Again, we find the foundation for this command of Paul in the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the same passage as before . . . the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:43-48 the Lord instructs the Jews on the hillside the proper and desirable response to a wrong suffered . . .

***Matthew 5:43-48— 43 You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?  Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***

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* Here in Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus’ teaching is a radical departure from anything the Jews and humanity have every heard. Here in this teaching the Lord is teaching something that is completely contrary to both human nature and the practice of virtually every society.
	+ The concept of loving and seeking the good for those who do evil to us is totally foreign. **But Jesus did not merely teach this new thinking to humanity,** **He lived it and demonstrated it**.
	+ Despite the fact that He was the Creator of heaven and earth and all that are contained in them, the God of all Creation humbled Himself by becoming like His creation and He came to live among us. And not only did God live among us, but He lived among us as the lowliest of men . . . a penniless commoner.
	+ Peter describes the Lord’s response to evil done to Him in 1 Peter 2:23-24. And in Peter’s words we see that the Lord walked the walk He talked. Peter says of the Lord . . .

***1 Peter 2:23-24— 23 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; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.***

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* + In allowing His creation to persecute and murder Him, the Lord demonstrated, to the utmost, what He taught.
* These two commands by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:15 . . . ***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*** . . . present one of the sternest tests of a Christian’s character found in Scripture.
	+ It is far easier to **say** I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God than to **actually live** by the tenets that He taught. But that is what Paul is commanding of us here in v. 15 . . . to live by the Lord’s teaching. As the Lord says of His true followers in John 14:15 . . .

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***John 14:15— "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.***

* + In 1 John 2:3-4 the apostle John echoes the Lord’s words in teaching that Christians must live by the Lord’s commands . . .

***1 John 2:3-4— 3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;***

* But what ***commandments*** is Jesus referring to in John 14:15?
	+ In Matthew 22:36-40 the Lord distills **the 10 Commandments** of God into **2 commandments**. When He is questioned by the Pharisees, Jesus responds. . .

***Matthew 22:36-40— 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, " 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."***

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* + In v. 39, the Lord does not differentiate between friends and enemies or believers and unbelievers when He states, ***you shall love your neighbor as yourself***. We are commanded to ***love our neighbor***.
	+ And unlike the rich young ruler, who sought to equivocate when he asked the Lord, ***who is my neighbor*** in Luke 10:29, the Lord allows us to make no distinction. **All men and women are to be regarded as our neighbors . . . even those who seek to do evil to us.**
* In John 13:34, in the Upper Room Discourse, the Lord reiterates this commandment when He tells the apostles . . .

***John 13:34— “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.***

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* + Jesus does not make a distinction when He uses the plural pronoun ***one another***. And without distinction, the Lord intends that we demonstrate love without distinction or preference. We are called to **love all people**, regardless of whether they love us or not.
* Later, in his letter to the Romans, Paul reinforces this teaching of the Lord when he states in Romans 12:17-21 . . .

***Romans 12:17-21— 17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 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. 20 “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.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***

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* Similarly, in his first epistle, the apostle Peter teaches in 1 Peter 3:8-9 . . .

***1 Peter 3:8-9—8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 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.***

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* So, here in our passage today . . . 1 Thessalonians 5:15 . . . Paul gives us explicit instruction regarding our attitudes and actions toward the unbelieving world. We are commanded, using a negative and positive command, to ***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.***
	+ And, in so doing, we are demonstrating evidence of our faith. In obeying these commandments we are demonstrating that we are not merely confessors of Jesus Christ. By our lives we also demonstrate we are imitators of Jesus Christ, which make us unique among all other men and women of the world.

**What makes Christians different from the world?**

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* It is because we do seek to do good to all men that makes Christians and Christianity distinct and different from all the other religions of the world.
* Do other religions of the world teach that we should love one another?
	+ No. No other religion of the world teaches that we should love one another. Self-sacrificing love for strangers . . . including those who may hate us . . . is unique to Christianity.
	+ Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the world loves to persecute Christians . . . because we strive not to ***repay another with evil for evil***.
	+ When true Christians are reviled by the world, we try not to revile in return.
	+ This is unlike the Muslims, who have demonstrated that they riot and kill you if you insult their prophet. On the other hand, the world knows that if it insults Jesus Christ that we won’t riot and kill. So, the world knows that it is safe to persecute, slander and defame the name of Christ without the risk of reprisal.
* While Christians seek to love one another and ***try to pursue that which is good for one another and for all people***, the world does the opposite . . . it persecutes those who don’t think and believe like them.
	+ Look at the religion of environmentalism. In the world today the worship of the creation has become so zealous that it has become a religion. Environmentalists worship the earth.
	+ And not only do they fanatically worship the earth, but they ruthlessly persecute and seek to imprison those who reject their gospel of climate change. That is the way the unbelieving world responds to those who disagree with them . . . they revile and persecute those who disagree with them.
	+ And that is also what distinguishes us from the world. We, Christians, strive to ***love one another***, regardless of whether believer or unbeliever. We all know that without the Holy Spirit working in us, we would all still be like the world.
* As I have mentioned several times over the past few months, the Thessalonian believers were demonstrating Christ-likeness in their behavior. Paul has already commended them in this letter for the reputation they have for extending love and grace toward those fellow countrymen who were persecuting them.
* Here in this section of his letter . . . in v. 12-15 . . . Paul is merely reminding and exhorting the Thessalonians to press on in their Christian walk.
	+ Such repetition of this instruction from God’s word is not tedious or monotonous. It is beneficial to every Christian to be reminded of the Lord’s instruction **because our natural inclination is to not do these things. Therefore, we benefit from these reminders we have in God’s word. It is good to hear these lessons taught over and over again.**
	+ It is by this repetition within God’s word that we are able to daily strive to keep God’s word in our hearts and implement it principles in our lives.
* So, with the benefit of repetition of God’s word in mind, let me close this section of instruction by re-reading it . . .

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***12 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, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 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.***