First Thessalonians 5:22

5:22 **<u>Paul commands them to avoid even the appearance of evil in doctrine and in their lives</u>.**

1. In this text are two senses, which are not contradictory, but rather complementary.
   a. **Abstain**. To keep or withhold oneself, to refrain. To keep oneself from feeling, doing, or indulging in something. To avoid participation in some activity.
   b. If we look at context, before is doctrinal proving and after is personal holiness.
   c. God's law is very broad (Ps 119:96), so let us avoid unfairly restricting a verse.
   d. Since both applications are certainly true, we shall not exclusively choose one.
   e. We usually use this verse to condemn even what looks like sin in our own lives.
   f. But it also condemns even a semblance of doctrinal compromise in others.
2. We are to avoid even the appearance of any compromise by teachers or members.
   a. If we even smell compromise or confusion of doctrine or Scripture, we reject it.
   b. We must earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3).
   c. We must count every word of God pure and oppose all corruption (Prov 30:5-6).
   d. Variations are to be marked, avoided, and cursed (Romans 16:17-18; Gal 1:6-9).
   e. If God's saints had done this, there would not be 10,000 variations of the gospel.
   f. If compromising brethren are not corrected, they should be withdrawn from; and our methods toward them should be intense efforts to save them (Jude 1:23-24).
3. We are personally bound not only to abstain from sins but even what looks like sin.
   a. Clearly, Scripture has many expressly stated prohibitions and commandments.
   b. But we are also to avoid even the suspicion of others that we are violating them.
   c. We are describing a very high standard of holiness, most glorious and beautiful.
   d. Moses had long before taught them to keep ***<u>far</u>*** from a false matter (Ex 23:7).
   e. Solomon, teaching us to avoid temptation, emphasized the same (Prov 4:14-15).
   f. For example, we must do all things in an open and honest way to avoid suspicions of our activities in the ***<u>sight</u>*** of all men (Romans 12:17; II Cor 8:21), which rule applies very well to our business and financial dealings with all men.
   g. For example, we must avoid things that may appear as evil to weak brethren, as some in the early churches would think if they ***<u>saw</u>*** you eating meat (I Cor 8:10), which rule applies well to things like alcohol, tobacco, dress, entertainment, etc.
   h. For example, Jesus paid a tribute tax He was legally exempt from in order to avoid the ***<u>public offence</u>*** of an explanation not easily recognized (Mat 17:24-27), which rule applies well to civil obedience regardless of your knowledge of law.
   i. For example, though all things might be lawful – not specifically condemned in the Bible, that does not mean they are ***<u>expedient or edifying</u>*** (I Cor 6:12; 10:23), which rule applies well to things like music, hobbies, friends, reading, etc.
   j. Because what other people think of our actions reflects on Jesus Christ and His doctrine, we are to avoid any offence to the world (I Corinthians 10:31-33).
   k. We should let our good works be ***<u>seen</u>*** for the greater glory of God (Matt 5:16).
   l. And it is our duty to grow in favour with God and men and seek that good reputation that commends the gospel, not condemns it (Luke 2:52; Prov 22:1).
   m. This does not mean at all that we ever (1) compromise Scripture to please men (Acts 5:29), (2) modify our liberty for scornful Pharisees (Matt 15:14; Mark 3:1-6; Rom 14:1), or (3) make a public pretense for religious show (Matt 6:5; 23:5).
   n. Stated positively, we are to emphasize holy living that is always visible to all.
   o. We are to be shining lights without blame, harm, or rebuke in a dark and perverse world, as true sons of God bringing glory to the gospel (Phil 2:14-16).

4. Consider the rule's value, which would take us far from sin and far toward holiness.
    a. It is hard to commit a sin when you are avoiding even the appearance of that sin.
    b. By avoiding the circumstances of sins, we would be insulated from those sins.
    c. The great work of holiness is one of action, not profession, which causes us to emphasize the recently taught wise proverb, actions speak louder than words.
    d. The safe position is to lean to the side of virtue, not approach the line with sin.
    e. If we hated sin and loved holiness, we would avoid provision for it (Rom 13:14).
    f. The things that ought to occupy our minds and attention are all listed (Phil 4:8).
    g. Even what we think is sin is sin, even if it is not expressly sin (Rom 14:14, 23).
5. For application, activity with the opposite sex is guarded for appearance and temptation.
    a. Sexual sins are one of the flesh's strongest temptations, one very often surmised due to this fact and its lascivious appeal, and one very damaging to the gospel by virtue of the world knowing the Bible condemns it. Saints hate sex sins (4:3-8).
    b. Due to the nature of sexual sins, they are committed with great effort at deception and secrecy, so that only a few offenders are ever caught in the act.
    c. The state courts of this country, knowing this difficulty of proof for plaintiffs, will give the judgment of adultery with imperfect circumstantial evidence indicating two things that illustrate our text - mere ***inclination*** and ***opportunity***.
    d. Inclination is even slight evidence of romantic interest in another person to whom you are not married i.e. romantic communication, holding hands, etc.
    e. Opportunity exists when two unmarried parties are alone and unsupervised, and the setting would suggest amorous activities – behind closed doors.
    f. These two kinds of circumstantial evidence need not be exclusive of other conclusions or beyond all doubt for a court to presume guilt worthy of judgment.
    g. Therefore, by application, Christians should avoid evidence of either inclination or opportunity, which create the definite appearance of evil, even to unbelievers.
    h. To avoid inclination, conversation, correspondence, and physical contact must be very sober, pure, and proper between unmarried persons, including email.
    i. To avoid opportunity, situations of being alone with the opposite sex where fornication could occur should be avoided at great lengths, allowing for wisdom.
    j. Unchaperoned dating by the romantically inclined has the strong appearance of fornication; and frankly speaking, very likely has the reality of it as well.
    k. Children make good chaperones in a car, but they are quite worthless in a house.
    l. If saints were to follow these two rules, they could never get close to adultery.
    m. A man and woman not married to each other have no business alone in a house.
6. For application, our conduct on the job ought to clearly reflect our lives as Christians.
    a. We have seen diligent employment as something to show the world (4:11-12).
    b. Consider the list of verses in the outline "Actions Speak Louder than Words," where great weight is given in Scripture for our conduct to become the gospel.
7. For further application, we can and should apply this rule to every part of our lives.
    a. Our speech, even if not expressly sinful, should avoid any appearance of evil.
    b. Our marriages can appear evil – breaking God's laws – to family and others.
    c. Our children should be trained, provided for, and governed for good appearance.
    d. Our civil obedience in all matters should be without reproach for all to see.
    e. Our dress should not compromise the modesty and holiness of Christian women.
    f. Our vacation destinations should be considered well to avoid evil impressions.
    g. Our hobbies should be chosen or sacrificed based on their appearance to others.
    h. Our music should be such as is associated with sober and godly Christianity.