

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON SIXTY-NINE)

“DON’T GIVE THE DEVIL A FOOTHOLD”

EPHESIANS 4:25-27

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

In **Ephesians 4:25-32**, the Apostle Paul provides a list of specific sins which were characteristic of the **old man**, but are **not** to be characteristic of the **new man**. He also lists the contrasting virtues which **are** to be characteristic of the **new man**. Since the **old man** with all his accompanying lusts has been **put off**, and the **new man**, who is created in the righteousness and holiness of the truth has been **put on**, the life-style of the believer must demonstrate that a radical change has occurred.

In verse **25**, he writes, “*Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.*” The first filthy garment of the **old man** that Paul exhorts believers to put off is **dishonesty**. As new creatures in Christ we are to display the life and loveliness of our Lord. The Apostle Peter emphasizes this in **1 Peter 2:9-10**. The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10 You once were not a people, but now you are God's people. You were shown no mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Dishonesty has **no part** in the life of the **new man** in Christ.

The second filthy garment of the **old man** that Paul urges believers to put off is un-godly **anger**. In verse **26** Paul writes, *“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”*

In our previous Lesson, we stated that the words *“Be angry”* are the translation of the Greek word **orgizó: (or-gid'-zo)**, which refers to a brooding, simmering anger that is nurtured and not allowed to die. It describes a settled and abiding habit of the mind. The word **orgizó** is in the present imperative, commanding a continuous action. Paul is actually commanding believers to manifest righteous anger as a lifestyle! This abiding, settled attitude of righteous indignation against sin and sinful things, is commanded, together with the appropriate actions when conditions make them necessary. But the words *“and sin not”* which follow, provide a check and restraint to the anger. Paul is speaking here of an anger that is approved by God and is to be encouraged in believers. Paul forbids only a particular form or measure of anger. He is acutely aware that even righteous anger has the potential to become sinful if it is not restrained by temperance.

In verse **27** Paul writes, *“Neither give place to the devil.”*

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“Do not give the devil an opportunity.”*

We do well to note where this verse is located in **Ephesians 4**. It is located between verse **26**, which forbids ungodly anger, and verse **28**, which forbids theft. **John Phillips** says, *“The devil lurks between anger*

and dishonesty, waiting to exploit them to ruin our testimonies and dishonor the Lord's name." So, Paul says, "*Do not give the devil an opportunity, or a foothold*"

The word "*neither*" connects verse **27** with verse **26**. In the previous Lesson we noted that when a righteous indignation is aroused within us, we must deal with it in a way that is scripturally sound, so that the devil is prevented from gaining an opportunity in our lives. We also said that the longer we postpone dealing with our anger, the less likely we are to ever deal with it. If we allow anger to settle in our spirits, it will degenerate into enmity, and we will become bitter and vengeful. The idea indicated by the connection is, that anger which is not dealt with in a scripturally appropriate manner, will eventually afford the devil an opportunity to gain a foothold in our heart and life.

The word "*give*" is a translation of the Greek word **didómi: (did'-o-mee)**, which means, "to grant someone the opportunity or the occasion to do something." The word is in a construction in Greek which forbids the continuance of an action already going on. Paul is literally saying, "Stop giving the devil a foothold in your heart and life! Stop giving him an opportunity to create division in the Body of Christ!"

Paul says, "*Neither give **place** to the devil.*" The word "*place*" is a translation of the Greek word **topos: (top'-os)**, which refers to a specific, marked-off, geographical location. Brothers and sisters, the devil is after every area of our lives. He is after our relationships with God and with our fellow believers; he is after our ministry; he is after our health; he is after our finances. He wants it all. In order to launch his campaign to conquer these areas of our lives, he first seeks an entry point. We "give place" to him, or allow him an opportunity to exploit us when we lie and fail to deal appropriately with our anger.

If we nurture anger and fail to deal with it appropriately, our hearts will be laid open to the devil and to the malignant passions which are associated with his presence and operations. We are not to give place to him by allowing anger to fester within us, for as Shakespeare observed:

“When the fox hath once got in his nose, He'll soon find means to make the body follow.” If we give **any** place to the devil, he will soon infect **every** place!

Brothers and sisters, our sinful thoughts, words and actions have consequences. Paul is pleading with believers to stop giving the devil a foothold, or a base for his sinful, destructive operations. The devil works in and through hearts which cherish anger. It is a part of his scheme to get believers to act maliciously toward other believers. In **2 Corinthians 2:10-11**, Paul writes,

10 If you forgive anyone for anything, I also forgive him—for indeed what I have forgiven (if I have forgiven anything) I did so for you in the presence of Christ,

11 so that we may not be exploited by Satan (for we are not ignorant of his schemes).

(New English Translation)

If we give the devil a foothold in our heart and life, as a result of failing to effectively deal with our anger, we will be exploited or taken advantage of by him. If ungodly anger can give the devil a foothold in our heart and life, in our churches and in our relationships, then dealing with anger is an essential part of spiritual warfare. We must endeavor to make peace with those whom we have offended and with those who have offended us. We must also be discerning about our anger. We must try our best to ensure that it is justified and not sinful. As we do these things, we prevent the devil from exploiting or taking advantage of us.

Brothers and sisters, if we do not want to “give place to the devil” in **any** way, we must resist him in **every** way!

In **James 4:6-7** we read the following:

6 But he gives greater grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.”

7 So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you.
(New English Translation)

In verse **6**, James informs us that God “*opposes the proud.*” The word “*opposed*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to set an army in array against, to arrange in battle order, to line oneself up against.” The word was a military term picturing an army arrayed against an enemy force. It means to oppose someone, involving a psychological attitude and the behavior corresponding with it. The Greek word is in the present tense which signifies that this is God’s continual attitude in respect of persons who are proud. The idea is that God continually sets Himself against the proud. God is continually in full battle array against the proud, because **pride is the basic sin from which all other sins proceed. God hates pride because it is the sin that sets itself most against Him.** Other sins are against God’s laws, but pride is against His sovereignty. Indeed, pride is against God’s very being.

Pride not only withdraws the heart **from** God but lifts it up **against** God. Someone has observed that “The proud man or woman has a little altar in their heart where they bow down before themselves and this causes their eyes to look at all others with a silent contempt.” **James 4:6** alone should be enough to motivate us to run as far from pride as the east is from the west!

Earlier in the verse James wrote, “*But he gives greater grace.*” What James desires for his readers to understand is that pride is antithetical to grace, because the proud person does not believe that he or she needs grace. To access the grace of God we must cultivate the attitude of humility which continually recognizes its need of grace. **God’s attitude toward an individual is determined by that individual’s attitude toward him.** James says in effect to his readers, “grace is available to you, yea abundant grace is available, but you can only secure it in a vessel of humility.”

“God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.”

Humble persons seek grace, and therefore they receive grace. **John MacArthur** notes that, “Just as pride is the root of all sin, so humility is the root of all righteousness. It is only when the things of the world are no longer admired and sought, when self-concern is replaced with concern for God's glory, that God's Spirit can work His sovereign and gracious will in a heart, changing it from being an enemy to being a friend.”

In verse 7 James writes, *“So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you.”* Brothers and sisters, only the humble receive the grace of God, and without God's grace, it will be impossible for us to resist the devil. The point James is making is that unless we are submitted to God, we will not have the power to resist the devil. **There is nothing that places a person out of the reach of the devil so much as humility.**

The English Puritan minister, **Thomas Manton**, commenting on the relationship between submitting to God and resisting the devil, made the following observation: “If you will humbly submit to God, you must expect to resist Satan. In this case, note that true obedience finds much opposition from the devil. Since the fall, a godly life is not known by perfection of grace so much as by conflicts with sin. Satan is still busiest wherever he has least to do. Pirates do not set upon empty vessels, and beggars do not need to fear the thief. Those who have most grace feel most trouble from Satan. He envies them for enjoying the situation and interest in God that he himself has lost.”

The word *“resist,”* is the translation of a Greek word which literally means “to stand or set against.” It was used to refer to an army arranging itself against an enemy force in order to effectively oppose it.

James is saying, “Take a stand against the devil. Set yourself against him. Withstand him and his demons.” The word is in a construction in the Greek which conveys a sense of urgency! In the same way that God

sets Himself against the proud and opposes them, believers must set themselves against the devil and oppose him. To resist him is the only way to be rid of him.

Remember that we will not be able to resist the devil effectively in our own strength. We can only do so in the strength of God which He supplies by grace, and it is as we submit ourselves to God that *“He gives greater grace.”*

James gives us a guarantee that if we resist the devil, *“he will flee.”* The very statement itself teaches us that our mighty adversary and his assistants can be successfully resisted. We must never forget that Christ’s victory over the devil on the Cross has rendered him a defeated foe. The **New English Translation** renders **Hebrews 2:14-15** as follows:

14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he likewise shared in their humanity, so that through death he could destroy the one who holds the power of death (that is, the devil),

15 and set free those who were held in slavery all their lives by their fear of death.

The word *“flee”* is a translation of the Greek word **pheugó: (fyoo’-go)**, which means, “to flee away in the sense of taking flight in order to seek safety.” When we submit to God and resist the devil, he must immediately flee!

The Apostle Peter wrote the following in **1 Peter 5:8-9**:

8 Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.

9 Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of suffering.

(New Living Translation)

Peter exhorts believers to “*Be sober and alert.*” The words “*Be sober,*” are a translation of the Greek word **néphó: (nay’-fo)**, which was used to refer to either complete abstinence or, to temperance (drinking but not to the point of intoxication).” In the New Testament **néphó** is used only figuratively and refers to freedom from every form of mental and spiritual “intoxication.” The idea then is to be calm and self-controlled, well-balanced, and clear headed. It describes the believer who is controlled and dominated by the indwelling Holy Spirit, for we cannot “be sober” in our own strength. We are 100% responsible for staying sober minded, but we are 100% dependent on the Holy Spirit’s enablement to do so. It is for this reason that in **Ephesians 5:18**, Paul writes, “*And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit.*”(New English Translation).

The word “*alert*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to be watchful or to refrain from physical sleep.” Later, the word came to be used in a moral and religious sense, calling on persons to be in a constant state of readiness, vigilant to avoid danger. Peter is urging us to ensure that we do not become lazy and lethargic spiritually. The outside forces that come against us demand that we be always alert and vigilant.

Why are believers always to be alert and vigilant? Because our “*enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.*” The Greek word translated “*enemy,*” describes one who is actively and continuously hostile toward someone. It refers to one who contends with, opposes, or resists. The devil is the great enemy or adversary of the believer. Peter goes on to describe him as a prowling, roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

Theologian **Grant Richison**, commenting on this verse writes that,

“The Devil uses stealth. He stalks every Christian. He is now on the loose. He is on the prowl looking to trap you in his devices. The Devil always seeks opportunities to undermine our Christian walk. He is

constantly on the prowl. He is not omnipresent for he can only be in one place at a time. However, he has a massive infrastructure of emissaries (demons) who do his bidding. They seek to seduce every one of us....

This lion produces a howling or roaring sound. The lion uses his roar to frighten his game. By his roar, he immobilizes his victims. His roar is a weapon. What the Devil cannot accomplish through allurements he tries to achieve through dread....A roaring lion intimidates by his roar. The Devil intimidates by fear. He casts fear into weak Christians because that will intimidate them from a life of faith. As a lion in the wild chases a herd of gazelles and runs down the weak of the herd, so the Devil usually catches weak Christians first because he freezes them in fear. Fear incapacitates us from moving ahead with our Christian walk."

Our arch-enemy, the devil is actively looking for someone to devour. His "**search and destroy**" mission is a constant one. He is looking for any weakness which he can exploit, and sometimes he attacks through an area we thought was a strong area. Indeed, the devil many times uses those characteristics which we believe to be our greatest assets against us. He is always seeking for opportunities to either entice and seduce us, or overwhelm us. The tactics he employs are many and varied. He sows discord, he accuses God to men, he accuses men to God, he accuses men to each other and he undermines our trust in the Word of God. But whatever tactic he employs, his overall strategy is to devour or destroy us. His aim is to silence our testimony and to get us to stop serving God. "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy*" (**John 10:10, New English Translation**).

John Angell James, the English Nonconformist clergyman, wrote the following: "Be vigilant! Watchfulness is an essential duty of the Christian life—none is more necessary—none is more frequently or more solemnly enjoined. Who that is asleep can defend himself against a lion? How cautiously, would we walk, if we were in a country where wild beasts are common, and saw the footprints, and actually heard the

roar of a lion! Such is our situation! See to it, then, that you do walk vigilantly—looking all round, watching every object, lest it conceal the enemy! Be vigilant over...your trials, your comforts, your occupations, your tastes, your pleasures, your thoughts, your desires, your besetting sins, and especially, watch your hearts with all diligence! An unwatchful Christian is sure to be an unsuccessful one."

How is the believer to deal with this enemy, who like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour? Peter tells us in verse 9. He says, "*Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of suffering.*"

The Greek word translated "*resist*," literally means "to stand against or set one's self against." It conveys the idea of an army arranging itself in battle against an opposing armies. It pictures a face to face confrontation. It involves not only a psychological attitude but also a corresponding behaviour.

The Greek New Testament scholar, **Kenneth Wuest**, says that the word "*resist*" does **not** mean "to strive against an enemy," but rather "to withstand the attack of the enemy." He goes on to explain that believers would do well to remember that they are not to attack the devil, but they are to stand their ground in the face of his attack.

Grant Richison states that the Greek word translated "*resist*" is **not** a term of **offence**, but a term of **defense**. We resist by obeying the commands of verse 8: "*Be sober and alert.*" We resist by building fortifications of faith against the devil. We resist by taking our stand on the Word of God. We cannot fight the devil in ourselves. To resist means to defend oneself against the devil **not** to attack him. On the other hand we must not be afraid of him. We must not allow his roar to terrorize us. Clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, wearing the full armour of God, and strengthened in the inner man by the Holy Spirit, we will be able to effectively resist all his diabolical attacks and

cause him to flee. The believer is never instructed to turn his back on the devil and flee from him. We are commanded to stand flat-footed against him and he will run away from us!

Peter says, “*Resist him, strong in your faith.*” Brothers and sisters, the only way that we can be strong in faith is through the Word of God. “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (**Romans 10:17**). We are not to think that our so called “apostolic” formulas and gimmicks, our rebuking and “bleeding up,” our shouting and speaking in tongues, will cause the devil and his emissaries to flee. We must stand fast in the faith and live in accord with the truth of God’s Word. That is why it is critical for us to reject sensationalism and embrace soundness. The devil is the father of lies and the prince of darkness but the truth of God’s Word exposes his lies and overpowers darkness. “It is written, it is written, it is written,” must be our cry! That was our Lord’s tried and proven method of repelling the onslaught of the adversary. It never failed Him and it will never fail us!

We must remember that faith is not feeling. “*Faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see*” (**Hebrews 11, New English Translation**). “*For we live by faith, not by sight*” (**2 Corinthians 5:7, New English Translation**). Our victory is not secured by the personal tenacity or intensity with which we cling to our personal beliefs. Our victory is secured by adhering to the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, where He defeated our adversary the devil forever.

We conclude our Lesson with Paul’s solemn but glorious charge to believers in **Ephesians 6:10-18**. The **New English Translation** renders the passage in the following way:

10 Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

11 Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.

13 For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand.

14 Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness,

15 by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace, 16 And in all of this, by taking up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

17 And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God).

18 With every prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and to this end be alert, with all perseverance and petitions for all the saints.