

“Neither Give Place to the Devil”

Ephesians 4:17 begins the context of a series of exhortations from the apostle Paul to Christians to not walk in the ways of the world. The old man of worldliness is to be put off (verse 22) and the new man of righteousness and true holiness is to be put on (verse 24). Concrete examples of sins that are to be put off include lying (verse 25), sinful anger (verse 26), stealing (verse 28) and corrupt speech (verse 29). These sinful actions are to be replaced with Godly deeds such as telling the truth, working out anger, laboring with one’s own hands and speaking words that edify. In the midst of these exhortations is a simple instruction that forms the foundation for being able to cast off the sinful deeds and engage in those that are pleasing to God. Ephesians 4:27 says, “Neither give place to the devil.”

The word translated, “place” carries primary and secondary meanings. Primarily, it refers to a location (e.g., Acts 27:8). Secondly, in a metaphorical sense it indicates an opportunity (“licence” in Acts 25:16). Either meaning fits the phrase under consideration. Don’t give Satan a place, don’t give him any ground, don’t allow him an opportunity. Each of the sins mentioned in the context can be and often is used by Satan to harm a Christian’s life and influence. Engaging in any one of them gives Satan ground or opportunity to wreck our souls. Don’t let him have a place. Avoid these sins and engage in the noted acts of righteousness instead.

That Satan is constantly on the lookout for a place, or foothold, in our lives is abundantly evident. As a roaring lion who is walking about, seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8), he is an ever vigilant adversary in his observations of our weaknesses. His constant appeals to “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (I John 2:16) have caught even the most faithful of Christians off guard. The only defense we have against his attacks is in the form of the spiritual battle garb mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 6:11-18. When we slough off any piece of the whole armor of God, we open the door for Satan and give him the ground to gain the foothold he desires.

Putting on the whole armor of God, we can deny the devil a place by placing our hearts and minds on things above rather than on things of the earth (Colossians 3:1-2). Returning to the context of this article’s title, take note of the focus that Paul would have in the hearts of Christians. In every way, the focus is heavenward. “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32). “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” (Ephesians 5:1-2). Look to Christ, whom Paul later called, “the author and finisher of the faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Walk as He walked. Love as He loved. In so doing, your hearts will be filled with righteousness and, being thus filled, there will be no room for the wicked ways of the world that are also mentioned in these verses in Ephesians 4 and 5. In short, there will be no place for the devil to get a foothold and gain ground.

The ability to not give a place to the devil lies in one’s determination. How determined are we to shut Satan out of our hearts? How determined are we to cast off the “unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11) and “walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8)? Giving Satan a place is a decision we make. Granted, we may not consciously say, “I’m going to let Satan get a foothold on my soul today,” but being careless and spiritually lazy is the same as coming out and making such a statement. Giving Satan a place is a decision we make. Refusing to allow him any opportunity to establish a foothold in our hearts is a decision we make as well. He wants to occupy our hearts. God wants to occupy our hearts. To whom will we surrender and “give place”?

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