

Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc.

1789 Iglehart Ave St. Paul, MN 55104-5215 dantrygg@msn.com Ph. (651) 283-0568

Do Not Give Opportunity To The Devil

by Dan Trygg

“Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity.”
Ephesians 4:26-27

In Ephesians 4:26, the point of Paul's command was that we ought not to cover over anger with a mask of pretension. **If we are to be able to be "truthing in love" (Eph. 4:15), then for the sake of effective Body relationships, we must speak what is real and honest inside of us.** If we are to learn to put off ineffective strategies of living our lives, to stop "stuffing" our inner pain and "medicating" it with an unending pursuit of pleasure (Eph. 4:17-19), then we must learn to bring it out where we can deal with it in a healthy manner. **It really should come as no surprise that to "put aside the old man, which is being corrupted (spoiled, made rotten) according to the strong-desires of the deception" (vs. 22), should somehow involve learning to walk in the truth.** One problem that many of us have, however, is that we have understood "walking in the truth" as strictly referring to "obeying the Scripture", which we easily interpret as "doing the right behaviors on the outside". Most of us totally miss the connection between our tendency to "cover up" our inner pain, and our *inability* to change our outward behaviors, or to maintain the changes we have instituted. Nor do we see how absolutely necessary it is for us to "get real", first with ourselves and then with others, if we are ever to develop healthy, sensitive, upbuilding relationships in the Body of Christ. **Often the same mechanism we use to "stuff our inner pain" is unwittingly being used to disregard the inner voice or leading of the Holy Spirit.** The "medications" we might use to "numb out" our inner pain also anesthetizes our spiritual receptors, so that it is difficult for us to clearly discern what He is prompting us to do. In some way, the old way of living life "deadens" some aspect of clarity, or urgency, of the inner signaling-mechanisms God has put within us. **Since the Christian life is based almost entirely upon learning to live from the inside-out (responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit), instead of the outside-in approach of conforming behavior to an outside standard (legalism), it is essential that we work on sharpening up, and tuning into, our inner selves.** The battle field for our minds and hearts is within *us*. We can either attempt to fight the foe in the inner fog of confused emotion, with "potholes" of unaddressed hurts littering the landscape, or ...we can learn to face and process our current emotions and past hurts, so we can "clear the air" and "fill in those holes" to be more effective in our encounters with the enemy.

In light of this background, we understand why Paul advocates, "laying aside falsehood (taking off the mask of being phony, or deceptive), **speak truth, each one of you with his neighbor** (share what is "real", make known the unobserved, hidden things of you, with someone "near" you), because we are members (limbs, Body-parts) of one another".

[Note: There is a lot of room to interpret what this *may* mean. It does *not* mean, (1.) That we must tell everybody everything. This would contradict Jesus' teachings of Mt. 7:6 and Mt. 18:17. Not everyone is "safe" to share our inner thoughts with. (2.) That we must speak what is on our heart all the time. This contradicts the message of: (a.) Eph. 4:29; 5:4,12 -- Some things should *not* be spoken; (b.) Ecc. 3:7; Prov. 15:23; 25:11; I Cor. 14:30-32 -- There is often a "timing factor" to be considered; and (c.) the example of Jesus, who often did not tell people what He thought, even when asked (e.g., Mk. 11:27-33).]

Paul's thoughts quickly move to, "Be angry and do not sin". This type of anger (Greek = *orgē*) was a mental bent or impulse to act against some invasion upon you by another person, ...motivation to act to right a wrong, or to bring vengeance upon some injustice. **This anger is an involuntary emotional response to some kind of perceived injustice or inappropriate action.** It is an inner signal that is telling you, "Something is wrong here. Take action to correct this situation." **It is important to stress that emotions are not volitional, i.e., we do not choose to experience this feeling, it is automatic.** We can, however, choose what action, if any, to take in response to the emotion we feel. The emotion is there to tell us to pay attention to what is happening, and to prepare to take action to correct the wrong, or personal assault, that seems to be taking place. **The phrase, "and do not sin", could be also translated as "do not miss-the-mark", or "do not err".** One interpretation of this would be to not err in the expression of anger one chooses, ...a qualification of the anger-response one might enact. This is how we have commonly understood this verse. I would suggest, however, that since the problem is one of wearing a mask of pseudo-niceness and propriety, Paul is actually advocating the opposite. **He is more concerned that we will *not* express our anger, ...that we will "stuff" the inner pain..., than that we will**

overdo it. The idea of the *orgē* type of anger is that it has a bent, or a directional, aspect to it already. **Paul is concerned that we will divert this motivation-to-action to something else, ...that we will "cap it off", "sidetrack it", or in some other way keep ourselves from hitting on the real issue that caused us to get angry in the first place.** Not processing and expressing the anger in a healthy way will leave *us* frustrated, and leave the *offender* unaware of his or her offense against us. The God-designed system to enable people to learn from consequences will have been short-circuited, and the offender will not truly be confronted with the effect of their actions. We have looked at this verse as, "I'd better not get too angry, or I will lose control and do something I will regret." Paul is really saying, however, "Follow through on angry feelings. Figure out what they are from and address that issue. Do not hold back and stuff your pain (which would not be good for you). Instead, follow through on the anger-signals to *confront the real problem*, otherwise the offender will not understand the significance or gravity of his or her actions, and will likely do it again (which would not be good for the Body)." In fact, this is what the next phrase, "do not let the sun go down on your anger" is really advocating. The word "anger" in *this* phrase is not the same word as in the previous clause. The Greek word, *parorgismos*, refers to the offense, the thing that triggered the anger-response in you. **Again, the apostle is telling us to "deal with the problem". Get real. Be honest. Share what is really going on inside of you. Do not ignore the anger-feelings. Use the emotional energy for what it is designed to do, i.e., to confront the thing that offended you.**

The Devil's Opportunity

There is another wrinkle to this picture that we have not clearly understood. To the rest of this verse, Paul tacks on the phrase, "and **do not give the devil an opportunity**". This seems almost an afterthought, or a reminder that the enemy is always looking to find a way to harass us. There is actually something much more practical and specific that Paul has in mind by this comment, however. **Literally, the phrase is, "...nor give [a] place to the devil".** The word for "devil" brings up a mental picture of an evil being with a tail, horns, cloven hooves, etc. who is always trying to "get me". These are not Biblical word pictures, so much as they are cultural mythology. **The word translated as "devil" is the Greek word, *diabolos*, derived from a verb which literally means "to throw through or hurl across; to thrust through; to defame, or inform against".** The usage usually refers to a verbal assault. **A *diabolos* is literally a slanderer, a malicious gossip, or an accuser, ...one who hurls across verbal accusations against someone, ...one who "thrusts them through" in the sense of a character assassination of slander, ...one who defames a person's character and motives to another for his own malicious purposes, i.e., to break a trust, ...to destroy teamwork, ...to sow suspicion and discord in order to keep people apart, ...to set people at odds with each other so they are distracted, and more easily attacked, etc.**

With this understanding of *diabolos* in mind, suddenly the practicality of Paul's counsel is readily apparent. **If we do not talk things out, if we do not pursue our angry feelings enough to at least speak with the other person about what they did that offended us, we create a space where the enemy can begin to paint a picture of *that person's character and motives that may be highly exaggerated, or even totally false*, to keep us from dealing with it. He will exaggerate the nature of the offense, ...to make it appear even more heinous and criminal than it actually was, ...to irritate and aggravate us with it, ...to keep it coming up in our face, ...in an attempt to poison us with bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness.** He will berate and cajole *us* for not saying or doing something at the time. **We re-live the situation over and over, thinking of what we should have (could have) said and done, ...imagining scenarios where we put this other person in their place with a sharp, snappy comeback or rejoinder, ...or imagining how we could have handled it differently, usually inflicting appropriate pain on a dehumanized, objectified version of the offender. Often this mental rehearsal process builds up a backlog of angry emotional energy, which we will later dump on someone in an inappropriate explosion of rage (Gk., *thumos*).**

Paul would spare us all of that by having us listen to the emotional signals we experience, and respond to them appropriately and in a timely fashion. **If we keep short accounts, if we attempt to resolve things quickly, the enemy will have little time to spin his webs of slander and character assassination. Also, if we understand his strategy, we can be on the lookout for his slanderous and divisive attacks.** When observed, we can resist them by reserving judgments, by drawing near to God for His grace, and by "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).