

MESSAGE *Life Together – Not Giving the Devil a Foothold*

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You've probably heard the sentence, "the devil made me do it". Perhaps you've said it yourself. I usually say it in reference to eating too much or some other experience of gluttony. Most of the time I think it's said jokingly, but maybe deep down there's a part of us that likes to think there's a way out of personal responsibility for our own actions and attitudes. Maybe we like to think that we are powerless over the forces of darkness; that we are merely the victims of it. Today's lesson would teach us otherwise.

As we continue moving through Ephesians, I have to say, though this letter was written so long ago, it still speaks to our human and community experience today.

Ephesians 4:22-5:2; 5:15,16

²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. **5** ¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

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I climbed a lot of trees when I was a kid. I grew up in this neighborhood that had a lot of great climbing trees. Some of the ones that were easiest for me to climb were the ones that were of course shorter – and those in my yard were the crab apple trees. You had to be very careful in those trees, because of the thorns. My sister was much better at climbing trees than I; able to jump and get a hold of the branch and set her feet just so and pull herself up. I sometimes just couldn't seem to get a grip nor the right footing, so she would have me go first....giving me a boost – hold her threaded hands together or bend her knee to create a step for me, and I would step up on her hands or knee and up I'd go into the tree. She would give me the foothold I needed in order to get into the tree.

In that circumstance, giving a foothold was great.  
But that's not always the case.

We hear: do not give the devil a foothold. The writer of Ephesians did not say anything like "the devil makes us". Rather, it is very clear that what *we do* can actually give darkness a boost...what we do can give the forces of darkness leverage in the world.

Like unresolved anger....that can give the devil a foothold

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."

A popular piece of marriage advice is "don't go to bed angry." And there's good reason for that. When you sleep on your anger, it settles into your being. Your grudge settles in. Your side of the story gets rooted. You become more closed off to the other person; entrenched in your anger; – which can lead to something more.

When we get angry with someone, we don't always know the full story. We make assumptions .... We might assume the other person had ill intentions. I think we've seen this so much around our COVID situation and the arguments around masks and vaccines. Folks who think strongly one way or the other easily assume things about people who think the opposite. I think we've all succumbed to assumptions about someone else during this mess: they're afraid, they're selfish, they don't care, they don't have a strong faith, etc.

That's just one situation....what are the others: assumptions we make about people in a different political party; assumption about people from another race or economic background;....

Assumptions are the result of letting the sun set on our anger, that is, not seeking clarity; not trying to work things out.

We give darkness and destruction, the devil, a foothold.

And then we have of course we have Triangulation .... an untold number of times in my life, when I've been frustrated with someone, I go to talk with someone else about it. It's called "venting" . Person A is mad at Person B, but instead of talking to person B, goes to Person C and airs all the complaints. Now Person C, feels for Person A, and perhaps lives with those same assumptions about Person B and that relationship is now jeopardized. And sometimes, Person B has no idea that Person A and person C is mad. And if they do, they can't fix it because you can't fix the unknown.

That gives darkness and destruction, the devil, a pretty strong foothold to drive animosity.

And let's not forget that lovely part of the broken human experience: Accusations .... "you always" "you never" "you did". Man, whenever I hear those kinds of things, my defenses go right up and my rebuttal accusations start forming in my mind....and the potential for the circle and cycle of anger takes hold.

Darkness and destruction, the devil, has been given a foothold.

Honestly, we've seen enough of this in our world. And we've seen enough of it in the church. This is why, beginning in a couple of weeks, we are focusing on Holy Conversations with a worship series, looking at what the Bible says about these things. And on the last day of the series, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, we will have a training event with a leader who will teach us crucial skills for good conversation.

I hope along with the writer of Ephesians that we, as the people of God, will stop giving the devil a foothold!

And there are clearly ways we can live that help:

We don't give the devil a boost when we sharing with those in need

We don't give the devil a boost as we build each other up; when we are kind and compassionate and forgiving.

I was given permission to share something I heard just this week. Two people in our congregation, who have differing thoughts about vaccines sat down and talked with one another; shared why they felt and thought the way they did. They knew they had differing views. They knew those differing thoughts could affect their relationship. But this conversation they had, brought healing. That time they spent together took away the foothold for the devil. And they came away from that conversation stronger in their friendship and with even more appreciation for one another.

Our passage today began with the image of putting off and putting on. "to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

This intentional Christian living is how we have power over the forces of darkness. This is the way of Christ – who loved us and gave himself up for us He showed us the truth that the devil can't make us do anything!