Opening Words

Christ has called us into a new community where we worship God equally. And as members of one another we are to live our faith in a way that marks us off from the world of darkness and paganism.

72 Eph Six Ways to Live as a New Man 3 (Anger & Stealing vs. Love & Giving)

I would like you to imagine something with me that will illustrate the great truths that Paul speaks in Ephesians 4:25 and following. Let's say that you have been working on a professional degree. High school is long past and you have been in the professional world for many years. But you go back to college and you earn that long sought-after college degree, and it is now time for you to graduate. In honor of your special day, your friends or your family members buy you a new set of clothes. If you are a guy, they buy you a new suit for this special day. If you are a girl, they buy you a beautiful dress. There is going to be a special celebration after the graduation ceremony, and your friends and family are so proud of you for your new status that they want you to look your best.

And so, the big day comes. You are with the other graduates. You march into the auditorium with your robe and cap on and take your seat with them. But your friends look at you and they are a bit concerned at first because your shoes are showing beneath the gown and instead of shoes that go with that new dress or new suit they notice that you are wearing that old-worn out pair of sneakers you like to wear when you are relaxing around the house. They think that is kind of odd because the sneakers don't match what the occasion calls for, but then they think, "Well, the ceremony is long and they will have to stand for a long time, maybe you are wearing those old sneakers for comfort and then once the ceremony is over you will put on shoes that match your beautiful new clothes."

The ceremony ends. You are escorted into a special room where there will be a special banquet for you with your friends and family members to honor you for this special achievement. Everyone is dressed perfectly to honor you for this day. Finally, you take off your graduation robe and everyone is shocked by what you are wearing. You have on an old pair of sweat pants and an old t-shirt that you wear every Saturday and both look like they haven't been washed for weeks! How inappropriate would that be?

I know the story is a little far-fetched, although some of you may have been thinking of someone you know, but this story illustrates for us what Paul is driving at in these verses in Ephesians 4:25ff. The Lord has brought us into a new relationship with Himself. He has rescued us from darkness and given us a new status. Therefore, live in accordance with that new status. Just as the graduate from college for the special banquet was provided a new set of clothes and should have worn them, so Christ has given us a new set of guidelines and he expects us to live by those guidelines so that our life will match the status we have as his sons and daughters.

We looked at the first guideline in the previous broadcast. Don't live by the lie, but live by the truth. Let's move on today to see what else Paul says. We are in Ephesians 4:26-27 and it says:

> 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.

Paul is quoting from Psalm 4:4 which says, "Tremble and do not sin. Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still." Why did David say this? His psalm is about how his honor had been impugned. His psalm is about how unbelievers are surrounding him and discouraging him. This made him tremble with fear, anxiety and anger. Have you ever been in a situation that was so emotionally upsetting that you trembled? You probably have. I know I have. But David gives some great counsel. Rather than reacting immediately, David says, "slow down. Think about it. Sleep on it. Lie on your bed and be still. Don't react. Take some time. Cool down."

Paul quotes from this psalm and uses it for the many situations that would arise in the churches at that time and I know arise in our own. People make us angry. People do things against us. People offend us. But rather than fly off the handle, rather than take revenge, rather than retaliate and exacerbate the problem by adding sin to sin, Paul says, "in your anger, do not sin." And by quoting from Psalm 4:4 he is telling us what to do instead. Slow down. Think about it. Take a nap. Lie on your bed and be still. Don't react. Take some time. Cool down."

How much grief could we avoid, if we would take this counsel! Paul goes on to say, "Don't let the sun go down on your anger. If we explode with anger. If we react to a situation. If we add to the tension level of a situation, we are only going to make things exponentially worse and will make the solving of the problem that much more difficult and elongated.

Now, I think you know, Paul is not telling us to ignore our feelings. The verse says, "be angry, but don't sin." He acknowledges that we have anger over situations. Sometimes, rightfully so. Sometimes people wound us. Sometimes people sin against us. Sometimes people do dreadful things to us that make us angry. But don't let your anger over their sin lead you to sin. That just puts the whole situation into a downward spiral and that, my friends, is the history of the world. One man offends another. The offended man retaliates, often out of control, and then you have tribe fighting tribe, clan fighting clan, and nation fighting nation.

We are different. Christ has called us into a new community. Christ has reconciled us to himself and one another. Christ has called us into a new community where we worship God equally. And as members of one another we are to live our faith in a way that marks us off from the world of darkness and paganism. One of the ways is by slowing down and cooling off, instead of letting our anger simmer and seethe and grow hotter. That's why Paul said, "Don't let the sun go down on your anger. You must take steps to deal with it, to moderate it, and to come to the situation with a measure of control and wisdom.

Notice what happens if we don't. Right here in this context he says, "don't give the devil an opportunity." What is he saying? He is saying that if we allow our anger to simmer, if we allow bitterness and a spirit of revenge to enter, then the devil will exploit that and make a bad situation worse. You will be dealing, not just with your fleshly behavior, you will be dealing with demonic interference and the problem will intensify and be harder to solve.

Don't let that happen. Are you angry? Have you been offended or sinned against? Fine. OK. That happens to all of us. But start dealing first with your response. Paul is not saying that your feelings are to be ignored. Be angry. But don't sin. Don't let it lead you to the wrong step that will only make things worse. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Start dealing with yourself – not the other person but yourself! Shut the door to the devil. Your anger opens the door to his interference. Don't give him a place. Don't let his foot in the door. Don't let his toe in the door. Shut if off and deal with your heart and then you will see clearly, in the time to come, how to deal with the person or the situation.

Let's move to the next area that Paul talks about. We are now in Ephesians 4:28 and Paul says, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."

Here, Paul deals with those who have trouble stealing. This is commandment number eight in the list of ten commandments. You shall not steal. When we think of stealing, we normally think of possessions. But stealing can take many forms. We can steal from government by not reporting all our income on our tax forms. Now, I know, some people rationalize this by saying, "Well, they are just going to waste it anyway." True, they most likely will, but that is their problem and they will answer to God for that. Our responsibility is to do our part. We can steal from our employer by reducing our time at work, or by being lazy and not working hard. Employers can steal from employees by not paying a fair wage. There are a thousand ways we can steal from one another.

Paul has in mind the thief who uses his hands to take what does not belong to him. Paul says, "this must stop. Was this your life in paganism? Was this your life in the darkness. Steal no longer." But Paul, as he does in this passage does not just give a negative command. He gives a positive command. He tells the one who was engaged in stealing to do two things: First, go to work and use your hands in something productive. Don't be a parasite on society that doesn't contribute. Work with your hands. Build something. Do something. Contribute by your labor. Then, when you get paid you can do the second step, take some of your hard-earned money and give it away. Give it to someone less fortunate than you.

What a contrast! Rather than taking from someone less fortunate than you, your life is changed so that you give to someone less fortunate than you. Often it is the weak and the old who are taken advantage of. Doesn't your heart burn when you hear stories of people who take advantage of the elderly? They steal their life savings. Here we have a picture of a transformation. We have someone engaged in productive work, someone who learns to be generous, and someone who is not just generous but who is helping the needy.

This is the kind of transformation we are looking for. This is the new community into which Christ calls us. This is the New Man that we entered when we were saved. This is the light that shines brightly in a world engulfed in darkness.

Let's live this way, brothers and sisters for the glory of God in the world.