

Giving the Devil a Foothold

READING

Ephesians 4:26-7

Ephesians 4

Romans 12

As your mind is transformed by the holy spirit, your way of living will become more and more like Yeshua, and less and less like those around you who are still sold out to the ideas and values of this world.

The NIV translates Ephesians 4:26-7 as “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

On the surface, that sounds like it’s saying that if you go to bed angry, then you have given the devil a foothold. And “deliverance ministries” take this verse to mean that you have given the devil authority to enter your life.

More literal translations, like the NASB, or the LWT, translate the word “foothold” as “opportunity”. The LWT says

“Be provoked to anger, but don’t sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, neither give an opportunity to Diabolos.”

That is saying that it’s ok to get angry, but when you do, don’t let that result in you sinning. It’s also saying, don’t go to bed angry, resolve it today. And it’s also saying, don’t give the devil an opportunity.

Opportunity and foothold are quite different things.

The Greek word *τοπον* (topon) means a piece of land. Clearly nobody is giving the devil a block of land, of any size. This word is being used figuratively here.

Foothold has the connotation of something to stand on, somewhere to put your foot as you make an assault on a wall or cliff face. And that connotation is not in the original Greek. Opportunity is just an opportunity, and it is a better translation of the figurative use in the context of this passage.

But either way, neither of these words have anything to do with authority. Neither of these translations, nor the original Greek are saying anything about giving the devil any authority over you or over the church.

This section of Ephesians has a context.

“Regarding the former way of life, take off the old person, the one which is being corrupted by the desires of deceit, and be renewed by the spirit of your mind, and put on the new person, which is being created, just like God – in righteousness and in the piety of the truth.”

Paulus is comparing our former way of living with what we should be in Yeshua. He is telling us to choose to remove the old way, and to actively take on the new way. And he is giving us some examples. In modern jargon, he is “unpacking” that for us so we can understand how to apply it to our lives.

For example, he says, worldly people lie to each other. Don’t do that. Speak the truth with your neighbours, especially other Christians.

He says, we all get angry, that’s OK. But worldly people sin when they’re angry, (they take revenge, or hurt the other person, or turn to drugs, sex, power, ... anything to take away their own hurt).

Paulus says, don’t do that. It’s OK to get angry, but don’t sin when you do. And in particular, don’t let your anger simmer, deal with it today.

If you don’t, you give the devil an opportunity - (to damage the church, to damage your relationships, and to damage you). Opportunity, not authority.

It’s dangerous for a soldier to raise their head to look around. Doing so gives the enemy an opportunity to shoot them. But it doesn’t give them permission!

He says, if you used to steal things, stop doing it. And be willing to work hard to earn what you have so you can share with those who are in need.

And when you speak, speak good things, that build others up, not rubbish that tears them down. Show that you care about one another. Stop thinking about just yourself.

There is no implication that failing in these ways gives Satan any authority whatsoever. Only that when we do them it grieves the holy spirit who knows how we should be living and is desperately trying to change our thinking so we can.

The cure to all these, is to have your mind renewed by the spirit of Yahweh. The same message as Romans 12. Your mind will be renewed and that will change your behaviour. As your mind is transformed by the holy spirit, your way of living will become more and more like Yeshua, and less and less like those around you who are still sold out to the ideas and values of this world.

This passage of Ephesians is nothing to do with demon possession.

It is nothing to do with giving Satan authority over your life.

It is about one thing: Taking off your old life, and putting on the new one.

Reading more into it than that is just giving the devil an opportunity.