Do Not Give the Devil an Opportunity

Zanesville, OH | November 10, 2019 | John Pollard | Sermon Notes

**Foundational Scripture:** Eph. 4:27

**Intro**:

* It is no secret that the devil is on the prowl looking to devour those whom he can (1 Pet. 5:8). As public enemy #1, Satan spends most of his time trying to get Christians to fall and surrender their identity as changed individuals following after Christ. The sad reality is that even though God’s people know this, they don’t take it to heart and they don’t take the necessary precautions to avoid becoming the devil’s prey. Many underestimate the devil and what he is capable of doing, how he goes about doing it and to what extent he is willing to go just to see us destroyed. And that’s a grave mistake!
* Yes, we need to run away from temptation and yes we should not give in to our lusts and evil desires when they arise but the bible takes that a step further. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he commended them to walk worthy of the calling to which they were called (Eph. 4:1). Many of the citizens who resided in Ephesus became Christians as a result of Paul’s effort in conjunction with many others. But their walking worthily wasn’t going to happen overnight and so he urged them to make changes and behave like the new people they were supposed to be (Eph. 4:17-6:20). It is within this very conversation that Paul commands them: ***“…and do not give the devil an opportunity.”***

1. **Ephesian culture and Paul’s appeal to the saints**
   1. Ephesus, a Roman colony, was a very prominent city in Asia minor. Mounce says, *“Situated at the mouth of the Cayster River on a gulf of the Aegean Sea, it flourished as an important commercial and export center for Asia. By NT times it had grown to more than a quarter of a million in population”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
   2. Ephesus was also a very important political city as well where at times the Roman governor would try court cases. They had many important edifices including that which is well-known: Temple of Artemis (Eph. 19:23-41). Mounce also adds that *“temples were built to Roman emperors including Claudius, Hadrian and Severus”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
   3. The Ephesian saints were a part of a culture that tied together politics, trade/economics and religion in an intimate way that would provide appealing benefits to the faithful citizens but also pose severe consequences to those refusing to partake in the pattern.
   4. Stealing, unwholesome speech, fornication, adultery, lying, anger and malice were qualities that were considered to be a requirement if you were to be successful in such a society. Whether or not they believed these things to be sin, they certainly didn’t care because they were more concerned with the potential pay-off to be had.
   5. This is the culture that the Ephesians lived in and this was the culture a lot of the saints had to deal with and come out of. Paul wrote to them he himself knowing what the city was like and what their culture preached.
   6. Christianity posed a significant threat to this 3-way pattern of lifestyle and many of the saints could face persecution or backlash as a result (Acts 19:11-20, 23-41). Could you see how this backlash and the fear of having their livelihood taken away would lead some to give in to the devil or to make a deal with him so to speak?
   7. Knowing what we do about the culture, could you see how Paul’s letter to the saints would be received with great appreciation and even desperation? And Paul would not dare to compose this letter without telling them: ***“do not give the devil an opportunity.”***
2. **What does it mean to not give the devil an opportunity?** 
   1. Many Christians are of the mindset that they are strong enough to overcome certain temptations and consequently they put themselves in environments that breed the schemes of the devil.
   2. I have heard too many stories of “strong Christians” who have done this very thing and they have either fallen away from the Lord or experienced a world of hurt and pain. The bottom-line is that the devil knows our weaknesses and he knows how to get us to fall no matter how strong we think we are.
   3. True strength is not illustrated by placing ourselves in an environment to test ourselves to see whether or not we can resist when we are sure to be tempted to sin and commit evil against God and our neighbor.
   4. True strength is seen in entrusting ourselves to God by putting on His full armor (Eph. 6:10-18) and running away from the devil and situations that increases our will to give into lust.
   5. Take for example someone who is an alcoholic. That individual has overcome that sin because of God’s help and the help of His people. Would it make much sense if that person frequented the environment where Satan devoured them?
   6. The one who has overcome their sin of alcohol consumption and addiction would most certainly be wise not only to avoid being around that environment but also to avoid going anywhere near the same route they would take to go to that place. The entire idea is to run away as far from Satan as possible and as far away from any situation that would tempt us to give into him.
   7. The consumption and addiction of alcohol isn’t the only sin meaningful to this idea. Fornication is a big deal. Unwholesome speech, lying, greed, stealing and drug consumption are all sins that many Christians and non-Christians struggle with.
   8. Pornography is a sin that has been on the rise for some time now and recent polls show that more and more people are finding it to be appropriate and even “helpful” to their relationships. It’s the “new drug” as some organizations call it.
   9. Take for example someone who struggles with pornography and their medium to commit such sin is their smart phone. That individual has overcome that sin because of God’s help and the help of His people. Would it make much sense for that person to go back to having a smart phone with them?
   10. James tells us to submit to God. But he also tells us to resist the devil and he will flee from us (Jam. 4:7). One cannot submit to God and resist the devil by putting themselves back in the environment and the situation that they know they fell in the first place or they are bound to fall. It’s counterproductive, foolish and exactly what Satan wants!
   11. When the bible says *“do not give the devil an opportunity”* it means that we should do everything in our power to flee from these immoral, ungodly situations that can and will plunge us into ruin. God promises that us that He will give us the way of escape but we can’t escape if we don’t try to (1 Cor. 10:13).

**Conclusion:** The only power Satan has is the power we give to him. When we give him opportunities to subdue and devour us that’s on us and no one else. We would all do well to heed God’s word by refusing to give the devil an opportunity. May we entrust ourselves to the faithful One and flee from sin and evil. If you are here this morning and maybe you are struggling with some sin in your life, whatever it is and whoever you are, God can and wants to take it away and make you better, to transform you into someone new! *“Why do you wait? Get up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”* (Acts 22:16).

**Sources:**

Mounce, R. H. (1977). *The Book of Revelation*. NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub.