

Keeping Our Walk Honoring
Ephesians 4:26-29

By Dave Urbanski

As we continued Sunday in our study of Ephesians 4, Pastor Don dove deep into verses 26 through 29: "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

Pastor Don emphasized that emotions are the hardest things for us to control — and chief among them is anger. However, while there are those who incorrectly assume that living as a Christian means one never gets angry, the Lord actually tells us that anger can be a helpful communication tool ... as long as we're not sinning in the midst of it.

That's a tall order, isn't it? It seems that our expressions of anger for the most part are drenched in sin! But God insists that avoiding sin while expressing anger is very much within the reach of every Christian.

Paul also commands us, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." Pastor Don reminded us that this means keeping short accounts with those with whom we're angry, settling differences as soon as possible — indeed, we actually should avoid going to bed for the night with animosity in our hearts! Because if we don't, you know as well as I that negative emotions can fester and grow — and Satan loves to stoke that fire and make things worse and mess us up.

We must also remember, Pastor Don said, that righteous anger is a God-given emotion that can help us when we process it biblically. Examples include when Christians face ungodliness and unholiness and say, "Enough is enough." But the other side of the coin is loving those with whom we're angry, just as Christ would. When Jesus was suffering on the cross and onlookers reviled him, he asked his Father in heaven to "forgive them, for they do not know what they doing."

Above all, Pastor Don said, we must not allow righteous anger to devolve into bitterness, clamor, and malice — otherwise sin creeps in. Therefore, we must be on guard

constantly, doing everything we can with the Lord's power to avoid letting our anger become sinful and be used by Satan. What's more, we should never take revenge out on others – but instead, as Scripture commands, recognize that it's up to the Lord. Thankfully we can unburden our ungodly anger and give it God and let him deal with the source of that anger – on his terms, not ours.

Pastor Don said this is all helped by recognizing the source of our anger and realizing God is permitting the situation to occur, as he's sovereign over all things. Then he said we must get out of God's way and consciously "repay evil with good." How? Well, we can do things like giving our enemies food when they're hungry. In other words, meeting their needs – whatever they may be. Of course, every fiber of our being may be against the idea, but we do have the power to ask the Lord to help us carry out such a Christ-like response!

As for Paul's shift toward reminding us to not steal, Pastor Don said Paul is enhancing the well-understood eighth commandment, as not stealing and instead earning a living can, in the end, benefit those in need. Stealing, Pastor Don added, can mean a lot of other things: What non-material things are we keeping for ourselves or taking from others? Time? Compassion? Attention? Love?

Pastor Don also told us that when we steal – in every kind of manifested way – it demonstrates our lack of faith in God, who, at the core of things, is the one who provides everything we've ever had and ever will have. So what are we holding on to? What are we taking for ourselves? Let us stop focusing on ourselves and instead purposely be others-centered!

Finally, in the passage's last verse, Paul tells us we must be honoring with our words. Of course that means avoiding obscenities, but it doesn't stop there! Pastor Don added that we should avoid using all kinds of destructive words: name-calling, insults, inaccurate labeling, sarcasm, ridicule, mockery, blaming, exaggerating, slander, deception, gossip, and dirty jokes.

Rather, he said, we should replace such words with those that exude encouragement, praise, appreciation, thankfulness, kindness, gentleness, loving correction, Scripture sharing, and prayer. (And let us not forget that sometimes it's not just WHAT we say but HOW we say it!)

This week let us look into how we can reboot our way of thinking and heed the Lord's command to be angry without sinning, end our selfishness and shut down all the ways we may steal, and guard our words and choose ones that benefit others.