

How to Resist the Devil

- James 4:7-10
- Think of this text today inside brackets. On the left side, put the last part of verse 6: God gives grace to the humble. We talked about that last week and the amazing gift that grace is. God gives grace for our battles, for our burden, and for our beginnings. And to say that you don't know if God's grace will be enough is to stand under Niagara falls and say you don't know if it will quench your thirst. God gives grace to the humble. That's on the left side of the bracket. Then on the right side of the bracket is verse 10: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, and he will exalt you." The therefore refers to what is in the middle, as James tells us what humility before God looks like, but the admonition is plain: humble yourselves. God gives grace to the humble. So, humble yourselves.
- So the first thing we need to see about our text today, verses 7-10, is that they cannot be taken out of context. We sometimes hear people say, "Submit yourselves to God and resist the devil, and he will flee from you," as if it is a formula for exorcism. It's a two-step process, they might say, and the first step is submit yourself to God. They usually don't tell you what that means. Then, they might say, you resist the devil! THEN, he has no choice but to flee. I wouldn't be so sure. Remember the seven sons of Sceva? Luke wrote about them in Acts 19. Their idea of "submitting to God" was to learn some of the lingo, get familiar with Jesus-speak. Their idea of "resist the devil" was to find someone with a demon and use their Jesus-speak on him. So they found a good candidate, he really was possessed, and they went to work with their words, throwing their Jesus-speak at that demon and expecting him to flee! One of the seven sons, maybe the oldest and most cocky?, said, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." You remember what happened next, right? You can't make this stuff up. The demon speaks and says, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" Then that demon whooped those boys seven ways to Sunday, so that the seven sons of Sceva ran out of the house naked and wounded. I would say their little formula didn't work. The demon was singularly unimpressed.
- Look, there are demons, and they are real, and we are not to be ignorant of their devices. Paul said that demons even masquerade as angels of light. CS Lewis said in his book *Screwtape Letters*, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." Let's make sure the Bible is the judge of what we believe about demons.
- This text is not a formula for praying for deliverance from demonic control, but it IS a powerful passage about living in such a way that the devil will continually flee from you. Walking in submission to God includes ongoing and deliberate resistance to the devil. **Repeat.** The two work together. Submit to God, and as you do, resist the devil. We know how he operates, as we have a picture of it in Genesis. He told Eve that if she ate the fruit she would not die. That instead, she would be like God. And that she would know things that He knew. In other words, she would finally have access to all that He was keeping from her. Each were lies, and Jesus said the devil is the father of lies. But Eve fell into his trap because she didn't know what God said. She submitted to the devil's lies instead of to God and His Word of truth. Unless we know what God says, unless we keep up a resistance movement against the devil through submission to God and His Word, we too will fall into temptation and suffer a shipwreck of our faith. How can we walk in humility then before God and by doing that, resist the devil? James gives us four important steps to take, not once and for all but daily.

1. **Submit to God.** (vs. 7)

- This is the defining characteristic of humility. The word in Greek is *hupotasso* and it finds its roots in the military. It means to “be placed under the authority of another.” This is counter to the culture. Everything in society is telling us to go big or go home. Be your own boss. Don’t let anybody tell you what to do. In fact you can sign up for hundreds of seminars that will teach you to look out for #1, learn to assert yourself, make a name for yourself, beat the competition. And people sign up for these seminars in droves. I wonder... how many would sign up for a seminar on “Submitting to God.” The brochure would say something like, “Learn to be the least, the last and the lowest! Learn to be a servant of all!” What do you think? Good seminar idea? Not by the world’s standards! Submitting to God is counter to the culture. But even worse, submitting to God is counter to our own nature! Our souls crave attention and yearn for the spotlight. That’s why the Bible is filled with admonitions like, “Let another praise you, and NOT your own mouth.” – Prov. 27:2 Or, “Let no one seek his own good but the good of his neighbor.” – 1 Cor. 10:24 (B the way, your wife or your husband is included there. Don’t seek your own good, husband, but the good of your wife!) Or, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” – Philippians 2:3. Count others more important than ME?! OUCH! Someone said, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”
- This is the necessary first step to humility, to submit ourselves to God. To volunteer, day-by-day and moment by moment, to be under the authority of God, and to let that reality control everything we say and do. James will expand on this idea in the next passage, verses 11-12 as he deals with how we talk about and judge one another. Do you speak evil against a brother and judge a brother, or sister? Not if you are submitted at that moment to God. And then in the final passage of this chapter, James will appeal to this principle again, this time with reference to how we make presumptuous plans. Planning is wise and needed, as long as we are submitted to God and allowing Him to order our steps. But making plans out from under the authority of God is a recipe for disaster. Oh, how important is this bedrock principle upon which we build a life and a family and a church and a ministry: submit to God!

2. Draw near to God. (vs. 8a)

I remember the cross-stitched pillow I saw years ago in Cindy’s home when we were dating. It said, “Feeling far from God? Guess who moved?” There is a theological rock that we stand on, that Paul wrote about in Ephesians: “But now in Christ Jesus you who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (2:13) Saints, He will never leave us or forsake us. But there is a practical reality as well: we drift away! We see in Scripture that those who seek Him find Him. Those who come back to the Father, who draw near to him when they have been away, are met with open arms and a loving embrace. When the Father saw his prodigal son coming down that dusty road, the father ran to him. God hasn’t moved and is the same yesterday, today and forever. When I have felt distant from him, or dry and dusty in my soul, the very best thing I can do is go into the little room at home where I pray and close the door and start talking to my Father. The Bible is a record book, in part, of men and women who drew near to God, and what follows is the story of how He drew near to them and blessed them and used them, even if it was through suffering. Humility is on display when we draw near to God.

3. Cleanse your hands and purify your hearts. (vs. 8b)

If drawing near is prayer, then this part of humility is confession. If we submit ourselves to God, come under His authority, and if we draw near to Him, we cannot help but see our sins and be brought to confession. Our hands may signify what we do, our actions. What are we doing that submission to God would bring to an end? Zaccheus was stealing from people, and when he submitted himself to Christ he promised to repay four-fold what he had stolen. Paul said in one passage of Ephesians 5, “Let the thief no longer steal.” Stop stealing from man or God. He said, “Put away falsehood.” Stop lying to man or God. He said, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up.” Cleanse your hands. Examine what you say and do on a daily basis and ask God to give you grace to honor Him with each word and deed.

Purify your hearts. This has to do with our affections. Are we trying to live a double-life, with our heart drawn to the lusts of the flesh on the one hand, and drawn to the Lord on the other? That's being double-minded. Purify your hearts! Stop entertaining sin in your hearts, thinking it won't affect you. Is what you watch or what you read or listen to drawing your affections away from God and toward your own desires?

4. Mourn and weep (vs. 9)

Read this verse! This is serious. One way we know we are in trouble is when we can sin with no remorse and or we can sin and laugh about it. Or we can write off our sin with a flippant, "Hey, that's just the way I am. I've always been that way!" And at the same time, we can look back to a day when we were appalled at the sin that we now don't think twice about. When we get into sin management instead of a pursuit of holiness, then we are in trouble. We are way out from under anything that could be called, "submission to God." Instead of weeping about our sin, we laugh about it. Don't get me wrong, we need to have the joy of the Lord deep in our souls that radiates through our life, informing our conversation and our actions. It's wonderful to laugh! But only when we laugh at the right things and at the right time.

We have come full circle, to the other side of the bracket. Verse 10. God gives grace to the humble, so we by all means need to humble ourselves before the Lord. We need to practice the words that Fanny Crosby wrote in that beautiful hymn, "I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice, and it told thy love to me. But I long to rise in the arms of faith and be closer drawn to thee. Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord, to the cross where Thou hast died; draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord, to thy precious bleeding side."

Prayer