



Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you (James 4:7b–8a).

Devotional

Regrettably, in much of the world today it is difficult to observe any difference between those who call themselves Christians and those making no such claim at all. Different surveys show that many church members have become double-minded, professing faith in Christ while embracing the lifestyle of this fallen world.

Being double-minded was also indicative of the original audience to whom James wrote his epistle. In 1:6–8, James warned his audience against coming before the Lord in a double-minded manner. This audience needed this warning because of its reluctance to be doers of the Word (v. 22), shown by exalting the rich (2:1–7) and misusing the tongue (3:1–12), which indicated that they might be Christians in name only, lacking true faith (2:14–26).

Yet, this audience was not without hope. Some, if not all, were true “brothers” (1:19; 2:1; 3:1) and could once again receive the wisdom and grace of God that ensures perseverance (1:2–4; 3:13–18; 4:6). Today’s passage tells how this is done. The first step is to submit to God and to resist the devil (4:7). Until Christ returns to consummate the kingdom, the devil has the power to lure God’s people away from submission to Jesus’ rule. Therefore, we must stand daily against the enemy and eagerly embrace God’s rule over our lives.

Such submission demonstrates the humility that we must possess if we are to receive the grace that restores us (v. 6). Moreover, this humility also requires repentance and cleansing. We must draw near to God, purifying our hearts and cleansing our hands (v. 8) by turning from our inward and outward sins and asking God to cleanse us.

Verse 8 does not tell us that we initiate our relationship with God. In fact, God must come to us first (John 6:44). Yet His regenerative work in our hearts is demonstrated as we draw near to Him. On this point, John Calvin says, “if anyone concludes from this passage, that the first part of the work belongs to us, and that afterwards the grace of God follows, the Apostle meant no such thing; for though we

ought to do this, yet it does not immediately follow that we can. ... The very thing he [the Holy Spirit] bids us to do, he himself fulfills in us.”

CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

All Christians can find at least one area in their lives in which they have sought to follow their own understanding instead of the standards of the Lord. God has promised to forgive us for this behavior if we would but draw near to Him. Go before the Lord today in the confidence we have to enter His presence, asking for His forgiveness (Hebrews 10:19–22). Find a friend who will hold you accountable for going before God in prayer and who can help you resist the devil.¹

Open it

1. What is your current job (or last job you held)? Tell your group about your immediate supervisor. What is it like to work under his/her oversight? (Be nice. ☺)

Read it

JAMES 4:7–12

Explore it

2. To whom must every Christ follower submit?
3. Who do we need to resist?
4. What two areas must we seek to clean?
5. What shouldn't we do against other believers?
6. Who is the only lawgiver and judge? And what power does he have?

¹ <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/resist-devil/>

9. What makes submission to God such a difficult proposition? In what areas have you learned, through the book of James, that you needed to submit to God?

The rule of God is so beneficial that He ought readily to be obeyed. He never commands us to do that which, in the long run, can be injurious to us, nor does He forbid us anything which can be to our real advantage. Our God is so kind, so wise, so full of loving forethought, that it is always to our best interest to follow His lead.⁴

10. How can submitting to God be a freeing and restful experience for the believer?

The word “submit” means “to put yourself in rank under” someone, implying a hierarchy of authority. It is used of the obligation to submit to government authorities (Romans 13:1, 5; 1 Peter 2:13); to elders in the church (1 Peter 5:5); of mutual submission of husbands and wives to one another, and of wives to husbands, in marriage (Ephesians 5:21, 22; 1 Peter 3:1, 5); and of slaves to masters (1 Peter 2:18). Of course, God is the ultimate and only sovereign authority in the universe, and it should be obvious to everyone that it is most unwise to rebel against His authority. Since He is “opposed to the proud” (James 4:6), verse 7 infers, “Submit therefore to God.” It is the only sensible thing to do!⁵

11. A major way we exercise submission to God is by submitting to anyone in authority over us. Which area of submission comes easiest/hardest for you and why?

12. In what ways did Jesus manifest submission and humility? How do these different examples help us in expressing our submission to Him?

⁴ http://www.preceptaustin.org/james_47_commentary

⁵ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/082805M.pdf>

RESIST THE DEVIL FORCEFULLY

This is evident in 4:7b. James wants us to stop resisting God and start resisting the Devil. It is baffling that, from the lives of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 to the lives of every one of us in the present, each of us believes the lies of the Devil. This is the essence of sin—trusting the Devil while distrusting God. Sin is believing the lies of the prince of this world that say we need some thing or person or status, all the while disbelieving God who says, “You need Me.” Resist the Devil, and he will flee. Whatever power or influence the Devil may have, your life in Christ is far greater. When you are tempted to go to that site on the Internet, resist him. When you are tempted to speak selfishly to your wife or husband or friend, resist him. When you are tempted to anger, discouragement, doubt, pride, or worry, resist him. Resist him, and he will flee.⁶

13. In verse 7 we're told to resist Satan. Why do you think James brings up Satan here, and in what areas did he want us to resist him per the rest of his letter?

Before we can stand before Satan, we must bow before God. Peter resisted the Lord and ended up submitting to Satan!⁷

He will flee. The future tense can speak of certainty. When we submit to God and resist our archrival, then he must immediately flee! This is a golden promise believers should commit to memory so that they are always prepared for spiritual battle. But remember that this promise is conditional and must be preceded by our willing submission to God! **Only then** can we "claim the promise," beloved! And in the context of James 4, we see that **humility** manifested by **submission** is not **weakness** but in fact is our **strength** to live the supernatural, Christian life!

14. What does this promise at the end of verse 7 tell us about the devil and Christ's power that is within us? How does this promise give you peace and hope amidst temptations?

TREAT SIN SERIOUSLY.

Verse 9 can almost sound depressing: “Be miserable and mourn and weep. Your laughter must change to mourning and your joy to sorrow.” Those who live in friendship with this world do not see sin as a big deal. But James tells us not to be trivial with sin. Rather, we should grieve over our sin, mourning and wailing in tears over it. We need to see sin this way.

⁶ Platt, David. Exalting Jesus In James (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (Kindle Locations 1706-1713). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Wiersbe, Warren W. Be Mature (James): Growing Up in Christ (The BE Series Commentary) (pp. 132-133). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

Cornelius Plantinga has talked about how we have lost this view of sin:

The awareness of sin used to be our shadow. Christians hated sin, feared it, fled from it, grieved over it. Some of our grandparents agonized over their sins. A man who lost his temper might wonder whether he could still go to Holy Communion. A woman who for years envied her more attractive and intelligent sister might wonder if this sin threatened her very salvation. But the shadow has dimmed.

Nowadays, the accusation you have sinned is often said with a grin, and with a tone that signals an inside joke. At one time, this accusation still had the power to jolt people. (Plantinga, *Not the Way, ix*)⁸

15. What has caused us today to be more lenient and comfortable with our sin? Is this a good or bad thing? Why?

16. How are we to reconcile James' words where he has said numerous times that we are brothers in Christ who must draw near to God, and yet in verses 9–10 we are told to “cleanse your hands, you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded,” as well as “be wretched, mourn, and weep”? What might James be trying to say to all believers here?

...AND HE WILL LIFT YOU UP

The way down is the way up spiritually. Pride is our biggest spiritual problem. We carry pride of face, place and race. If we humble ourselves, God will not have to do it for us. This phrase is a promise that God will elevate us to new spiritual heights if we humble ourselves before Him. We will find ourselves in a new sphere of spirituality through humility. This is the result, not the cause, of God's lifting us to new spiritual heights... Revival comes when we humble ourselves before the majesty of God. Humility allows God to do His work of grace in us.⁹

⁸ Platt, David. *Exalting Jesus In James (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 1721–1735). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁹ <http://versebyversecommentary.com/james/james-410/>

17. In verse 10, James says that if we humble ourselves, God will lift us up. If our goal is to be lifted up, why isn't this prideful and selfish ambition?

One of the greatest temptations of an advanced, well-informed Christian is to assume an authoritative attitude toward other Christians. If we live close to God, it is sometimes possible that Satan may try to make us consciously or unconsciously act as though we ourselves are little gods and therefore have the right and sometimes the imperative duty to assume the responsibilities that belong to God, especially the responsibility of passing judgment upon others. It is good to remember that there are certain responsibilities and prerogatives that God does not choose to pass on to us, no matter how close we are to Him.¹⁰

18. How do we balance passing judgment at an appropriate time and place with the warning in this passage against speaking about a brother and judging him in a manner that is reserved for God?
19. Why is so important for us to be a doer of the law and not a judge? What will happen to our personal walk if we are too busy judging others?
20. Our passage this week is a difficult one. Why would a God who loves His children so much speak so bluntly to them? What things must change in our lives so that we might experience a close and intimate walk with our loving God?

¹⁰ Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Behavior of Belief — An Exposition of James*. Grand Rapids: MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959.