

A Study in James
Part 12 – “How to Put Your Life Under God’s Authority”
James 4:7-10

TAKE YOUR BIBLES PLEASE...

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:7-10 ESV).

In today’s text we see a series of brief exhortations uttered with the staccato of military commands expressed by a tense which gives it a note of urgency. It is a call for self-seeking and worldly minded Christians to return to God. Nowhere does James sound more like an Old Testament prophet than here. **The central thought is submission to God. Everything else in the passage indicates the manner in which, or the steps by which this submission is affected.**

The simple question is “Who controls your life?” If there is any doubt about who controls your life, James would ask who or how do we determine what we will do with our lives today or the future? All of us live under the authority of someone. Many would respond by claiming to control their life. They protest that no one makes their decisions for them. All such persons are actually the slaves of Satan. A “self-controlled” man is controlled by Satan.

Our text confronts us with the demand: *Submit yourselves therefore to God.* There is urgency in this demand. It involves placing your life under the authority of God, yielding your life to His control. **Our text closes with the same admonition stated in a different way: *Humble yourselves before the Lord.*** They are two sides of the same coin of commitment. There is a promise associated with the command. The “therefore” points us back to the promise of “more grace.” Simply stated, James is saying, *Fullness of life is found by placing your life under God’s authority.* That which a worldly man seeks through self-gratification, and never finds, is found by the man who submits to God. He finds inner strength, joy, and purpose for his life.

I love the story told by H. G. Cole about a little boy who comes down the hallway of his home buttoning his shirt. His dad notices the little boy has started to button the top button in the second button-hole. When he gets to the bottom of the shirt, he exclaims, “Boy, the people who made this shirt were stupid!” “Why is that?” his dad asks. Not recognizing his own mistake, the little boy said, “They forgot to put a hole for this button!”

We all are quick to blame others, including God, for our mistakes. It is so easy to lay blame at another’s feet rather than to humble ourselves and accept responsibility for our errors. This is the root of coming under the authority of God. **James gives us three basic steps to submit to the authority of God in our lives. Each is presented with a note of urgency. They demand quick and full response from us.**

First, Resist the Devil (v. 7).

If you are to submit your life to God's authority, then you must resist the determined attempts by the devil to bring you under his authority. Ultimately there are only two authorities in the universe, God and Satan. Both of them want to control your life. God wants to control your life for your eternal good; Satan wants to control your life for his own selfish and evil ends. You must make a choice as to who will ultimately control your life. If you choose to be under God's authority, then you must withstand the approach of God's adversary, Satan.

1. *First, note the word "devil" literally translates "adversary."* It is a fitting term for the prince of evil who slanders God to man and man to God. In other places he is called "the god of this world" (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4); "adversary" (cf. 1 Peter 5:8); "wicked one" (cf. Matthew 13:9-38); and, "tempter" (cf. Matthew 4:5) just to mention a few. He refuses to submit himself to God and seeks in every way possible to prevent others from doing so. Peter speaks of him as a raging lion who walks about seeking victims to devour (cf. 1 Peter 5:8). **Our resistance to him must be uncompromising and unceasing.**

We can learn something about the devil and what it means to resist him from the experience of Jesus with the devil in the wilderness. He first presented Jesus with the idea that doing the will of God was too hard. It was not right for him to go without food. He should remedy this by turning the stones into bread. He next tempted Him to take the route of the spectacular rather than the path of humiliation and suffering. He was assured that He could gain the following of the crowds by casting Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Last Satan made a bold attempt to get Jesus to submit to his authority by bowing before him. He promised to Jesus authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. But Jesus resisted at every point. He confronted Satan with the Word of God. His life was under the authority of God and was committed to living life God's way. He refused to yield one bit to the claims of Satan upon him.

Our problem is not that we are too weak and the devil is too strong. Our problem is that we are not persistent in resisting. Persistence pays! Charles Darrow proved this principle in the early thirties after the invention of the game of Monopoly. He took his invention to the commercial manufacturers of his day and all of them scoffed at him. Parker Brothers said their "experts" listed 52 major reasons why the game would not sell. Several years passed, in desperation Darrow finally produced his own homemade copies and convinced Wanamakers Department Store in Philadelphia to accept them on a no-risk consignment. That was Christmas, 1934. Monopoly became an instant sensation and caused an instant memory loss among the Parker Brothers experts. They forgot about those 52 errors and rushed into a contract for production rights! Darrow became a millionaire many times over. Even today, nearly 80 years later, his family still collects royalties from over 100 million copies sold each year. Persistence pays! It pays in our Christian life as we persistently resist the devil.

2. *Second, notice the promise attached to the command.* When we resist, the devil will flee from us. If a person dares take this step, he will find that Satan runs from them. This was the experience of Jesus. He may return for another confrontation, but you have the victory over that one. Satan seeks by deceit to convince us that we cannot resist him. He will try to make us believe that living under God's authority is just impossible, that there is just too much evil in the world. This is a lie! He is always a liar. Resist him and he will flee from you.

Second, Draw Nigh to God (v. 8).

This step is vital. Just to resist the devil is never enough. The person who would have God control his life must “draw nigh.” The phrase was used of the priests in Temple worship. They approached God with awe and reverence in their hearts. For the Christian this involves approaching God regularly in worship and prayer. If our lives are to be lived under His authority, daily fellowship with Him is absolutely essential. Once or twice a week at church simply won't do!

This step also has a promise attached to it. If we draw near to God, he draws near to us. When we seek Him, He will be found. Remember how Jesus illustrated this in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. When the wayward son made his way home, the father came running to meet him.

Remember also that the choice is always between Satan and the world on one side and God on the other. The one you draw near to will be the one that controls your life. So, if you are earnest about wanting God to control your life, draw near!

Third, Repent of Your Sins (vv. 9-10).

The call for repentance is clothed in the language of an Old Testament prophet. This repentance is a vital step as God is placed in control. There is no short cut to putting your life under God's authority. You must repent of your sin. Two actions are a part of this repentance:

1. *First, to repent means that sin is forsaken.* Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. To “cleanse the hands” is to get rid of the defiling element. We cannot come under God's authority as long as we hang on to our favorite sins. To “purify the heart” is to unify our allegiance. The pure in heart is the one who's undivided allegiance is given to the Lord. He is not wavering between two opinions.
2. *Second, repentance also involves an appropriate sorrow.* James says, Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. The man who truly repents sees his sin for what it really is. He recognizes the true nature of sin. This causes deep regret and sorrow.

Let me be quick to add a word about the cost of repentance. It cost God His only Son! I have often thought what it might have been like if God felt like I do. I can't imagine any of my children crying out in pain and not going to their rescue. I can't imagine watching my children suffer and not running to save them. However, not only did God not go to Jesus' rescue, not only did He not save Him, God SENT him. He sent Jesus so that we could repent! That ought to evoke sorrow in our hearts!

Until we see for ourselves what we really are apart from God and repent of it, God cannot be first in our lives.

The basic admonition of James is to “submit ourselves to God.” When we do this we find abundant grace.