

A Conditional Promise

James 4:7

This past week we were presented with some challenges because of the storms. Despite the power outage we had a great evening with David and Rosa Smith sharing with us about their work in Spain.

Thursday, I drove down to church and found that we were still without power, so I grabbed a few things and headed home to work on the sermon. I sent a quick text to Robyn to let her know my change in plans for the day and that I would be sermonizing at home. Autocorrect told her I was demonizing at home. I'm here to tell you there is a big difference between the two.

Beginning with **verse 7** there are 10 commands given to the believer. We are challenged this morning to consider two of them and while we touched on the first command two weeks ago, we need to look at it again in the context of the verse. In the previous verses we noted that God gives grace to the humble and opposes the proud.

Without humility we will not receive grace.
Without humility we will not submit to God.

If we were to go back all the way to **chapter 1**, we would see as we come to **James 4:7** that the believer is in a perpetual battle. When you became a Christian, your allegiance switched from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Light; from Satan as your king to God as your King. So it's no wonder that the very first order of business we are called to according to **verse 7** is to submit to God. While we looked at this two weeks ago in the context of humility and grace, we need to consider it again in the context of being able to resist the devil and so gain victory by which our enemy flees from us. If we don't first submit to God, then we will not be able to resist the devil.

To begin with, then, I want us to see that we have an action to pursue.

I. WE HAVE AN ACTION TO PURSUE

The very first command given is to submit

obediently to God.

A. Submit Obediently To God

The word submit is a compound word or two words put together. It simply means to arrange under. It comes from a root word that means to be subject to or to be in subjection to. It is a military word meaning to rank under. There are a lot of variations to this, but essentially it boils down to the word obey. For those of you who served in any of the branches of the armed forces, if you disobeyed a direct order from a superior officer, what happened? It probably wasn't good. You may have been singled out or the whole squad may have been given a reminder of what it means to obey an order.

Now the word is also an imperative meaning that it is a command. It's not a suggestion. It doesn't mean you can alter it in any way. It doesn't even mean that you can decide when to do it.

Chuck Swindoll puts it this way: "don't fight, resist, push. Instead, surrender, resign, and relinquish." In the context of what preceded in **verse 6**, God gives grace to surrender and submit. But while the word is an imperative making it a command, it is in the passive voice making it voluntary. In other words, it's a matter of the will. **Are you going to assert your will or will you submit to God's will? Are you going to do what God commands and do it right away or are you going to balk at it and choose whether and when to obey?**

King Saul learned a couple of hard lessons about submission. The first is found in **I Samuel 13**. The Prophet Samuel had instructed Saul to wait for him so he could bless the army with a sacrifice before they went out to face the Philistines. Samuel didn't show up at the designated time and the troops started to get antsy. Some decided to leave and return home. Saul was in a bit of a panic fearing that the army would abandon him. To keep the troops rallied, he decided to take matters in his own hands and offer the sacrifice which was only to be done by the priest. When Samuel finally arrived, he confronted Saul with his actions. Saul excused the matter away by blaming Samuel for being late

feeling compelled to make the sacrifice himself. His disobedience cost him the kingdom as Samuel told Saul that God was seeking a man after His own heart, someone who would submit to Him without question and hesitation.

The second incident of disobedience occurs just a couple chapters later in **I Samuel 15**. God had given orders for Israel to completely wipe out the Amalekites for their attack on Israel after their exodus from Egypt. Nothing was to be spared. Saul attacked but spared the king and some of the best livestock and herds. Once again Samuel confronted Saul with his disobedience and once again Saul excused away his actions. He claimed that he had obeyed the word of the Lord, but Samuel asked why he heard sheep bleating. Saul put the blame on the soldiers who insisted that they be allowed to keep the best animals as an offering to the Lord.

I Samuel 15:16-23

In both passages Saul thought that he could gain God's favor by sacrifice. Samuel put it into proper perspective by saying that obedience is better than sacrifice. Obedience or submission is placing complete trust in the one who has given the order. Because God is both sovereign and omniscient, He's completely in control of the events surrounding the thing He has asked us to do. If we choose to ignore it, we are saying we know better than God and that God can't be completely trusted. That's essentially what happened in the garden. And lest we think that our disobedience to God is not a big deal or of little consequence, notice something very important in Samuel's words. He says that disobedience stems from pride, which is idolatry or the worship of self and because we worship self our pride rejects the authority of others and we found from **verse 6** that God is opposed to the proud. He then makes a startling comparison by saying that disobedience is just like the sin of witchcraft.

As I see it, obedience boils down to one word. In the Old Testament it's the word trust. In the New Testament it's the word faith.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Hebrews 11:6

One day God called a man away from his extended family, home, and culture and told him he would journey to a land that he did not know, a land that would be given to his descendants. At the time, Abraham and Sarah had no children. Along the way in this journey of faith, they made some mistakes. Like Peter, they sank under the weight of their own decisions and took their eyes off the Lord and onto their own plans. Well after it was a normal time for them to have children, God blessed them with a son who would carry the family name and the promises given to Abraham. The angel of the Lord, who I believe was the pre-incarnate Christ, told them that nothing was impossible with God. Some 14 years passed and God gave Abraham another test of faith, another test of obedience if you will. **Did he trust the promises of God? Was he willing to fully obey without hesitation or question?** Up the mountain they walked and Abraham willingly laid Isaac on the altar, Isaac also willingly obeyed.

How joyful the journey down the mountain must have been for father and son. No matter what the situation is in which God asks us to obey, when we do or because we do, there will be joy and peace.

Let me make something clear that I stated two weeks ago and I want to stress it again as we put **verse 6 and 7** together – you cannot submit to God without humility.

If you weren't aware, the Olympics concluded last Sunday. Ratings were way down this year. I think a lot of people were quite frankly not interested in seeing and hearing all the political activism by athletes who wanted their moment to voice their negative opinions about the very country they were representing. It seems that some of the very inspiring moments by athletes were overshadowed by ill-tempered athletes who showed only pride in themselves and not for their nation.

There are a few great stories from the Olympics that are worth mentioning because they comprise the essence of obedience and submission to God.

[Sydney McLaughlin takes center stage not just because she broke the world record in the 400m](#)

hurdles and won the gold, but more so because of what she said afterward. “What I have in Christ is far greater than what I have or don’t have in life. I pray my journey may be a clear depiction of submission and obedience to God.”

Nineteen-year-old Athing Mu won the gold medal in the 800m race. She’s the first U.S. woman to win the gold since 1968. She made this statement in an interview back in June: “As a follower of Christ, our main goal is to live in the image of Jesus in order to connect with God.”

U.S. wrestler Kyle Snyder lost to his Russian opponent in the gold medal round. In an interview before the Olympics he said “God alone defines me. I’m always consistent with my Scripture study and prayer, and during the pandemic I wanted to continue to grow and focus on God and hear what He wanted to teach me.”

And then who wouldn’t be moved with emotion after the medal ceremony when the Fiji men’s rugby team after receiving the gold medal prayed and then sang the hymn “we have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of the Lord, we have overcome.”

Samuel’s words come to mind “**to obey is better than sacrifice.**” Now let me make one thing perfectly clear before we move on. Submission or obedience to God doesn’t mean you will always bring home the gold or get the promotion or have smooth sailing wherever you go or in whatever you do. It will mean that you will have a settled joy and peace that comes in knowing you have been obedient to God as you rest in His promises, no matter where obedience to Him takes you.

A hymn comes to mind here.

When we walk with the Lord

In the light of His Word,

(Walking with the Lord is another way of saying we are submitting to Him.)

What a glory He sheds on your way!

While we do His good will,

(Is God’s will ever not good? If it is always good, even though we may not understand it, why are we

hesitant to obey it, to submit to Him?)

He abides with us still,

And with all who trust and obey.

(Do you see the link between trust and obedience?)

But we never can prove

The delights of His love

Until all on the altar we lay;

(Nothing is held back. There is no reservation or hesitation.)

For the favor He shows,

For the joy He bestows,

Are for them who will trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet

We will sit at His feet,

Or we’ll walk by His side in the way;

What He says we will do, (present active action)

Where He sends we will go;

Never fear, only trust and obey.

(This ties in with Pastor Jim’s message last week. If we completely trust the Lord and do what He tells us, then our hearts will be at ease because we trust and obey.)

Sing the chorus with me.

Trust and obey, for there’s no other way

To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Pride will keep you from trusting, from obeying, from submitting to God. Humility will lead you to submission and remember from **verse 6** that God gives grace to the humble. God’s grace will help you submit, especially in the difficult things in which God asks for your obedience. He will be with you as you obey. He doesn’t give you an order and then leave you to obey on your own. We learn to submit to God the more we are in His Word, the more we spend with Him in prayer, the more we trust Him.

Without obedient submission, the next action command we are to pursue will be impossible.

B. Stand In Opposition to the Devil

Aristotle once stated that “nature abhors a vacuum.”

I think there are some people who also abhor vacuums. What Aristotle meant was that wherever

there is a void of some kind, something will inevitably come along to fill it.

That is also true of our verse. When we don't submit to God, the devil will come in and fill the void. When we don't submit to God, we cannot resist the devil.

The word resist means to withstand, strive against, or oppose in some manner. **One author stated: "It is a word that demonstrates the attitude of one who is fiercely opposed to something and therefore determines that he will do everything within his power to resist it, to stand against it, and to defy its operation."**

For example, it can be a defensive stance we take against temptation. An army will set up a resistance to the advancement of its enemy. When I played basketball, we sometimes put on a full court press against the opposing team. It was designed to put pressure on the other team to keep them from advancing the ball up the court.

The word can also mean to take an active stance or attack against an enemy. The only piece of armor that is used for offensive purposes given to the believer is the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (**Ephesians 6:17**). By knowing the Word of God, we can use it to expose and resist the lies and temptations of Satan. The Word of God is the most effective piece of armor we have to resist and defeat the enemy.

Again, we can only resist the devil by first submitting to God. Otherwise, the believer will not see victory. The point James is making then, is that we as believers must take an aggressive stand against the enemy.

Ephesians 6:10-14a

Verses 14-18 then list all the implements of armor we are given in order to stand with determination against the enemy. We have been studying the armor of God on Wednesdays and I have stated something that is of importance: this is not our armor, it's God's armor that He gives to us to wear for our victory.

You know well the story of David and Goliath. David was willing to fight the giant. Saul thought he was ill equipped because all he had was a sling, so he gave David his armor. David said he couldn't fight with that armor because he wasn't used to it.

I Samuel 17:45-47

We can't resist the devil in our own power. We can only do so in the power of the Lord as we submit to Him. Paul says that our stand against the enemy must be firm, unyielding, and steadfast.

In **Ephesians 4:27** Paul told believers not to give the devil a foothold. In other words, stand opposed to him, dig in and don't give him any ground. There is no middle ground here. You either submit to God and resist the devil or you submit to the devil and resist God. We can't be like Saul thinking we have completely obeyed the Lord even though he only killed most of the Amalekites and kept only the best animals when God said to destroy them all.

So when Paul tells us to put on the armor of God, the phrase "**put on**" is in a tense that means do it now, do it without hesitation or procrastination. Notice the promise given when we put on the armor – **WE WILL BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE ENEMY**. The word "**able**" means to be continually empowered. Here's the thing. Putting on the armor is not a one and done deal. It is something we need to do every day. Every morning as Warren Wiersbe was getting out of bed to start the day he prayed asking God to clothe him with each piece of armor as he prepared to battle an unseen enemy.

In the same way we are to put on, we are also to "**take up**" and then "**stand firm**". It's in the same tense as "**put on**" meaning to do it now, don't hesitate or procrastinate.

What Paul states to the believers in Ephesians is the same as James – resist. It is in the same command given in the word submit. While it is a command it is in the active voice meaning we have a choice whether or not to resist.

Peter gives us this sound advice in his first epistle: "**Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the**

devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...” (I Peter 5:8-9a)

Let me give you two ways to resist the devil.

**1. Know the Word at our disposal –
Matthew 4:1-11**

When Jesus was taken to the wilderness and faced the temptations by the devil, He used the Word of God to counter the attacks. I can't stress enough the importance of having God's Word hidden in your heart by memorizing it and meditating on it.

Even after years of studying God's Word, Uncle Johnnie, who founded Camp Barakel, continued to meditate on it. He never got to the point of saying he knew that and didn't need to read it again. His house was just a very short walk to the garage where Dad was working at camp. Uncle Johnnie would come in all excited with his Bible in hand and he would say "Howard, I was just reading (he'd say the passage) and I saw something new I just had to share with someone. After he began to lose his eyesight, someone asked him about spending time in God's Word and Uncle Johnnie said "I just sit and think about it."

How much do you know God's Word?

The psalmist says that the happy man is the one who delights in the Law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night (**Psalms 1:2**).

Jeremiah 15:16 "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and they were unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart, for I am called by Thy name, O Lord God, most High."

Job 23:12 "I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread."

Know the Word at our disposal.
Know the weapons at our disposal.

**2. Know the weapons at our disposals –
Ephesians 6:10-18**

Every piece of the armor of God is important because they serve different functions. Every piece

is necessary. No piece is optional. They all have an important purpose in helping the believer to stand against the schemes of the enemy. It would serve you well to get acquainted with each piece so you can wield them effectively.

The belt of truth

The breastplate of righteousness

The shoes of the gospel of peace

The shield of faith

The helmet of salvation

The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God
Prayer in the Spirit

But bear this in mind. The armor of God is no good if we don't first put it on. It's not good in the closet. It is no good if we don't know how to use it.

It is no good if we aren't alert to the enemy who is always lurking around seeking someone to devour.

James gives us two actions to pursue:

Submit obediently to God.

Stand in opposition to the devil.

He then reminds us that we have an adversary to ponder.

II. WE HAVE AN ADVERSARY TO PONDER

James doesn't leave us to wonder who our adversary is. He names him. Our enemy is the devil. It's not just enough to know the name of our enemy, we need to understand his personality.

A. Understand His Personality

Now the word devil in the Greek is diabolos from which we get our English word diabolical, a word that means evil. It's a compound word and literally means to cast or throw through or between. From that we get the idea of a slanderer or false accuser. That's a person who makes false charges against us, one who tries to damage our reputation.

Other personality traits include being an accuser of Christians (**Revelation 12:10**) He is a deceiver (**Genesis 3; II Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 20:3**), his native tongue is lying and he is a murderer (**John 8:44**), he is a devourer (**I Peter 5:8**) and he is a tempter (**Matthew 4:3; I Thessalonians 3:5**). He is the opposite of God.

The term devil is sometimes paired with Satan, the transliteration means adversary. There is nothing good about him and his goal is to keep people deceived about Christ and salvation and when a person does become a believer, to keep that person chasing after worldly desires. A good book to read sometime is Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis. In **chapter 3**, James reminds us that worldly wisdom is earthly, sensual or unspiritual and of the devil.

While he was created as the highest angel of God, in pride, he sought to overthrow God and was cast from heaven convincing 1/3 of the angelic host to follow him in his diabolical plan to overpower God. And although he can appear as an angel of light, he is really only all about darkness and evil. That helps us understand his personality. We also need to understand his power.

B. Understand his power

The devil wields enough power that even the archangel Michael was unable to stand against him. As an angel he has more power than man. He is called the prince of the power of the air, meaning he has been given temporary power over the earth, but is limited to only the authority that God gives him. He is the ultimate source behind every false religion. **Job 1** shows us that when given the opportunity, his power can bring destruction on the earth and to mankind, even to inflict disease, but again only because God allows it.

John 14:30, among other passages, says that he is the ruler of the earth.

He stands in opposition to God and truth (**Matthew 13:24-30; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12**).

GotQuestions.com adds that he does everything he can to tempt individuals (**Genesis 3; Luke 22:31; 1 Timothy 3:7**) and larger groups of people (**1 Thessalonians 3:5; Revelation 2:10**). He **“leads the whole world astray”** (**Revelation 12:9**). Satan accomplishes this by various means, including appealing to man’s pride (**1 Timothy 3:6; 1 Corinthians 4:6**), interfering with the transmission of truth (**Matthew 13:18-22, 38-39**), and he even places false believers and teachers within the church

(**1 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; Revelation 2:9; 3:9**).

He is a powerful being that we can’t take lightly we must be very watchful for him in order to stand against him.

We have an action to pursue.

We have an adversary to ponder.

We have an advantageous promise.

III. WE HAVE AN ADVANTAGEOUS PROMISE

Our text gives us a promise.

The devil **“will flee from you.”**

But that promise is conditional.

A. The Condition Of The Promise

We already covered this so let me just mention it once more. We must first submit to God and then we must resist the devil. Those two things combined cause the devil to flee. One author wrote that **“there is nothing more frightening to Satan than a believer who is fully equipped with spiritual armor, beginning with the ‘helmet of salvation,’ which protects our minds, and the ‘breastplate of righteousness,’ which protects our hearts because it is the righteousness of Christ (II Cor. 5:21).”**

When we meet the conditions of the promise, then we can know the certainty of the promise.

B. The Certainty Of The Promise

When we submit to God AND resist the devil, he WILL flee from us.

In **Matthew 4:11** Jesus told Satan to go, and he did, why? because Jesus submitted to God and resisted the devil, who then had to leave.

James doesn’t say the devil may flee, as if he has an option to stay. It doesn’t mean he can take his sweet old time in fleeing by putting it off to some later date. It means what it says. He will flee. Now keep this in mind, just because he flees doesn’t mean he’s gone for good. It means he’ll be back. When Jesus told Satan to leave in **Matthew 4**, it says he left

Him for a more opportune time. He doesn't give up easily. The devil can be overcome because greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. The promise of **Genesis 3:15** has come true. At the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, He crushed the head of the serpent. As a conquering king, he has put his foot on the neck of the enemy and He invites us to do the same because in Christ we are victorious. Satan is already defeated and he must flee when we submit to God and resist the devil. The only power Satan has over us is what we give him. Because we are in Christ, Satan can't hold us against our will. If we submit to God and resist the devil, the devil must flee.

The word flee is in the future tense which speaks of certainty. He must flee immediately when we meet the two conditions of the verse. This is a promise we should all commit to memory.

John MacArthur concludes "When confronted and resisted with the truth of the gospel, he flees, releasing his hold as that repentant sinner who believes is delivered from darkness to light. After salvation he comes again and again through the world systems working on the flesh, but he can be defeated repeatedly by the believer who has the 'Sword of the Spirit' and the rest of the armor."

The question then remains for each of us to ask:

Have we completely submitted to God by surrendering our will to Him in exchange for following His will?

After submitting to God, have we then committed ourselves to aggressively resisting the devil? Do we stand in opposition to the one who seeks to destroy us?

If the devil isn't fleeing from us, we need look no further than either of these two conditions.

Submit to God.

Resist the devil.