

RESISTING THE DEVIL

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“Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

This brings before us an aspect of the Truth concerning which many Christians are largely ignorant. Oftentimes they are unaware that it is “the Devil” who is attacking them and needs to be resisted. Many suppose that Satan’s assaults are confined unto tempting us to sin. Not so; in many cases his object is to oppose and hinder us in the doing of that which is good. Frequently he makes use of human beings to annoy and harass us. For example, he will send a caller to the door, or someone to ring on the telephone, when we are engaged in prayer. He will move worldly relatives to visit us on the Sabbath-day and thus prevent our spending the time quietly with the Lord. Or, he will shape our “circumstances” to hinder our spiritual good, multiplying our duties and tasks so that we have not leisure or are too weary for study. Few of God’s children appear to know that it is their privilege and right to be victorious over Satan’s attacks. The Lord has not left His people here at the mercy of their great Enemy, helpless to overcome him. No, He has told us in His Word how we may defeat him.

To begin at the beginning: “Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.” This is a Divine command, it is a duty which the Lord has laid upon us. Our first responsibility concerning it is to give it our best attention, to fix it in our minds, to ponder its terms, to desire and determine to obey. Probably some will say, I wish that I could, but I know not how. Then our second responsibility concerning it is to *acknowledge* this, asking God to enlighten, begging Him to teach us how to obey it. Tell Him you want to do as He has bidden, and for Him to grant instruction and enablement thereunto.

Yet necessary and important as this is, it is not *enough*. Prayer was never designed by God to relieve us of our responsibilities and encourage laziness. It is not sufficient for me to pray that God will grant us a fruitful garden this summer—though I *should* pray about this, as about “everything”: Philippians 4:6. No, I must dig and plant, water and weed it. So it is here: the *answer* to my prayer for enlightenment for heeding the exhortation of James 4:7 must come to me through the Scriptures. Hence, my third responsibility is to *search* the Scriptures, asking the Holy Spirit to graciously guide me into the Truth. This means that I must come to the Bible with a *definite* object, aiming to discover just what it teaches about the Christian’s “resisting the Devil” so that he “flees” from him.

Let us begin our “search” of God’s Word on this important practical subject by looking closely at the immediate *context* of the command found in our text. First, we note that it is found in the second half of the verse: “Submit yourselves therefore to God; resist the Devil.” Ah, how can I expect to do the second until I have done the first? To “submit” myself unto God means that my own wisdom, will and wishes must be entirely set aside, and His Word and will rule me in all things. To submit to God means that I recognize His *claims* upon me, that I am His creature, His child, to be controlled by Him as One having absolute right to my complete subjection.

But let us look more closely at and ponder the first half of this verse: “Submit yourselves *therefore* to God.” This at once tells me that I need to look back to the previous verse, for the word “therefore” always points to a conclusion based upon and drawn from something going before. Turning back, then, to verse 6 I read, “But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” Ah, that is encouraging, that stimulates faith and hope. The One unto whom I am to “submit” myself is no harsh Tyrant, no merciless Despot, but the “God of all grace.” He has already given me *saving* grace, and “He giveth *more* grace” to the humble, and “more grace” is exactly what I need, if I am to *successfully* “resist the Devil.”

“Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” God resisteth the proud, because the proud resist Him. The essence of pride is self-sufficiency: it is that spirit which disdains help from another, confident that I am fully able to manage for myself. Spiritually, pride is that awful conceit that I can get along without God. It is a fearful delusion begotten and fostered by the Devil. Contrariwise, “humility” is a being emptied of self-sufficiency: it is the heart realization that I am completely dependent upon God for everything. Humility, grace, and victory over the Devil are inseparably connected! But nothing is more offensive to Satan than humility, for he is a proud spirit, and his desire is to puff us up and get us to walk and act independently of God.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God.” The word “submit” signifies to place myself under another. There

must be a subjection of the whole man to the whole law of God; a giving up of ourselves to be governed by Him; our thoughts, desires, actions regulated strictly by the rules laid down in His Word. Submission to God also denotes an unrepining acquiescence to the dispositions of His providence, an un murmuring disposal of ourselves to His sovereign pleasure. Thus, there must be a complete surrender of myself and my life to God, to be ordered and disposed of by Him.

Now there is a double relation or connection between the two halves of James 4:7. First and most obviously, I must “submit” to God if ever I am to successfully “resist” the Devil. How can it be otherwise? I cannot prevail over the great Enemy in my own strength, and God will not give me of His “*grace*” while I am resisting Him! Thus, I must cease resisting God before I can hope to resist the Devil—chiefly to make me proud, self-sufficient, independent. The prayerless soul is a proud one, for his refusal to receive strength from God is tantamount to saying that he can get along through the day without Him. It was by pride Satan fell, and he would feign have more company, and draw us into his snare. His bait is easily swallowed, for it is *natural* to us. Our first parents caught readily at the suggestion “Ye shall be as gods.”

But what is meant by “*resist the Devil?*” First, that I am not to be terrified at him. Satan has no enforcing power: he cannot prevail over me without my consent. Second, that I am not to even listen to his suggestion: “resist” *actively*, saying “I will not”: take that attitude, and firmly stand your ground. Third, *quote Scripture to him*, a pertinent and suitable one which meets his particular suggestion. Count upon the power of God’s Word, *expect* it to drive him away. Fourth, *plead God’s promise* in the text: “resist the Devil and he will flee from you.” Yes, he will “flee,” for he is not only a conquered foe, but an arrant coward as well. “Flee from you,” yet only, “for a season”; he will return and renew the fight; *and so must you*.

But let us now resume our searching of God’s Word to find out what it has to teach us on this subject of resisting the Devil. We have already discovered enough to encourage us, so let us continue our quest for further light and help. This means that I must turn to a concordance and look up, slowly and carefully, every verse having in it the word “Devil” or “Satan.” This calls for patience, but if it be prayerfully exercised, God will reward it. I come now to 1 Peter 5:8 and read, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist, steadfast in the faith.” Surely this is very graphic and impressive. If you knew that a lion had escaped from a local circus, that it was a fierce and hungry one, that it was loose and roaming the streets, and your daily duties obliged you to go abroad, how cautiously and carefully would you proceed! Ah, dear friends, my supposition is neither imaginary nor overdrawn. There is one, more powerful and cruel than any animal lion, which is abroad, seeking to devour your soul and mine. How little we really believe this! How halfhearted is the heed we give to this Divine warning!

Let us glance for a moment at the context of this verse: “Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Here the tried and troubled children of God are invited to roll upon the Lord the whole burden of their anxiety, being assured of His compassion for them. Yes, but that privilege and assurance of His tender care must not tempt us to be careless and reckless. Here, as every where in Scripture, the promise and the command are joined together. Note what immediately follows. First, “*Be sober.*” In common speech “soberness” is the opposite of drunkenness. But let us bear in mind that there are many other things besides wine and whiskey which intoxicate. “Be sober” means, Be temperate in all things, put a curb on your every desire and appetite, particularly be “sober” in your use of and expectations from the world.

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). If the eye of faith measures earthly things in the light of God’s Word it will be seen that they are temporary, unsatisfying, worthless. The pleasures of sin are only “for a season” (Hebrews 11:25), and a brief one at that! Remember too there must be “soberness” of mind, before there will be soberness of body. O the importance of forming right estimates of earthly and heavenly things. If I truly receive into my heart the declaration of God’s Word that “*all under the sun*” is but “vanity and vexation of spirit,” soberness will indeed be promoted.

Second, “*be vigilant,*” not careless, nor rash and presumptuous. I must be watchful, alert, wideawake. Here again I must start with the *inner* man: I shall never be “vigilant” about external temptations till I have learned to “gird up the loins” of my mind (1 Peter 1:13), and to “rule my own spirit” (Proverbs 16:32). Let us then seek grace to be “vigilant” over our *minds* and bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Let us seek to be “vigilant” over our *moods*, watchful lest Satan should gain an advantage. If depressed, he will seek and tempt me to despondency and despair. But I must “resist” that inclination. If light and

giddy, he will tempt to fleshly mirth and hilarity, which ill-becomes a follower of Christ. But remember that I must first be “sober,” if I am to be “vigilant”!

Third, “*whom resist steadfast.*” Resist his *efforts to prejudice your heart against God*, and instill into your mind evil thoughts about Him. He will try to make you doubt His love, murmur against the severity of His providences and the strictness of His commandments. Resist his enticements to draw you unto the place of temptation, remembering that God has said “Have *no* fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). Resist his efforts to lead you into active sinning: saying with Joseph, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!” (Genesis 39:9).

Our resistance must be *earnest and zealous*. If a madman attacked and you were fighting for your very life, you would put forth every effort. So it must be here: it is your own soul he is seeking to destroy. Eve’s resistance was faint and half-hearted: she dallied with his evil solicitations. Be warned from her fall. By “earnest” I mean, Be indignant at his first suggestions—for example, to laze in bed on the Sabbath morning. Our resistance must be *thorough*. The approaches of Satan to the soul are gradual: he asks us to yield but a little at first. Many promise themselves they will stop after they have conceded a trifle, but when a stone at the top of the hill starts rolling down, it is hard to stop. We see this principle forcibly illustrated in the case of gamblers and drunkards. Take heed unto thyself. Our resistance must be *constant and continuous*: not only against his first attack, but his whole siege. The Devil is very persevering, and we must be so too.

Let these three considerations bestir unto this imperative duty of resistance. First, the Devil cannot overcome without your consent: but where there is not a powerful dissent, there is a virtual consent. Take a *positive attitude* against the great Enemy of souls. Second, think much of the blessedness of victory: this will more than compensate you for all the diligence and strenuous efforts you make. The pleasures of sin are only for a season, but the pleasures and gains of self-denial are eternal: read Mark 10:29, 30. Third, remember that God’s grace is promised unto the one who resists. God delivers, but we “keep ourselves” (1 John 5:18). It is via our watchfulness and prayer that God makes such resistance effectual. There is no promise that God will keep a careless and lax soul.

“Whom resist steadfast in the faith.” Probably there is a double reference here in the expression “the faith.” First, the analogy of faith, or Word of God—compare Jude 3; second, the exercise of the grace of faith. Satan is “the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53), and only the light of God can expose and expel him. Satan uses error to deceive souls, and the truth of God is needed to deliver us. We are to resist him in the faith, by believing, receiving, and acting out the Holy Scriptures. We are also to resist the Devil by the exercise of the grace of faith. Our hearts must lay hold of the precepts and promises of God. A blessed example of this has been left us by Christ: “*He* resisted the Devil steadfastly in the faith,” using against him naught but the Sword of the Spirit.

“Whom resist steadfast in the faith.” When we stagger through unbelief, we are powerless to stand before our great Enemy. It was through doubting God’s threat that Eve fell. But we can only successfully resist the Devil “steadfast in the faith” as there is a personal appropriation of Christ’s victory. It is written, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11). Plead that blood before God for deliverance from Satan’s temptations. Count upon its efficacy to deliver you. Shelter beneath it when you realize that Satan is shooting his fiery darts at you.

Finally, let it be pointed out that, either we must overcome the Devil, or be overcome by him. There is no third alternative! If we are completely overcome by him, the result will be fatal. He is not merely seeking to wound us, but to “devour” (1 Peter 5:8)! And how is this to be harmonized with the eternal security of God’s people? Easily: if we be real Christians, we shall, by Divine grace, resist and overcome the Devil. But if we continue heeding his suggestions and yielding to his temptations and are thoroughly overcome by him, then no matter how much Scripture we know in our heads, or what our profession, we belong to the Devil, and are his lawful captives.