

SERMON

SUBMISSION

James iv. 7-10

“Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.”

THE soldier must know two things, whom to fight for, and whom to fight against. If he is not sure, then at the least he will be “double-minded”; at the worst he may become a traitor to both sides by deceit and double-dealing—his “hands” will not be “clean.”

St. James gives directions to us as soldiers of Christ; he tells us (1) whom to fight for—“submit yourselves to God” (literally, “range yourselves under God”); and (2) whom to fight against—“resist the devil.”

(1) We are to fight for God. And first we must choose: we cannot be neutral; we must take one side or the other.

And to fight for God means submission to Him, placing ourselves unreservedly in His hands,

under Him as our Leader. It means firstly submission to His grace — “He giveth more grace,” He gives grace and strength, spiritual strength and *armour*, spiritual weapons which we cannot do without. And it means secondly submission to His authority, to His law: He gives directions, He is in command; He tells us how to fight, and when, and where, and what for; He sets each in His place, under leadership, *in order*; so that we may fight in our place and not out of it; for God’s army is organised like any other army, with one supreme leader and many subordinate ones.

“Submit yourselves therefore unto God.”

(2) We are to resist the devil — by every means in our power, with all our strength, at any time and in every place.

And there is a promise of victory given: “Resist the devil, and *he will flee from you.*” If we do not resist him, then sooner or later we shall find that we are overcome by him. But we **MUST** resist him, utterly and entirely; we may not temporise with him, we may not take the easy course of simply letting him alone, letting him do as he likes; we must **RESIST** him.

On the other hand we are to draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to us — to help and succour, to encourage and commend. Let us draw nigh to Him by every means that is open to us — by prayer and meditation, by study of His word, by public worship — and all *through Jesus Christ.*

We have enlisted under God’s banner and have **PROFESSED** to submit to Him: in the baptism service it was said to us, “Dost thou unfeignedly

submit thyself wholly unto the will of Christ, and wilt thou obediently keep God's holy will and commandments?" and the answer was made, "I do submit myself and will obey." It is for each of us to *carry out* that promise, sincerely and completely; no half measures will suffice.

Now whenever we sin, we are drawing away from God, and drawing near to the devil, ceasing to resist him, having dealings with the enemy—double-dealing: hence the call to "cleanse your hands, ye sinners." Whenever we sin, our hearts are falling away from their true allegiance, we are becoming "double-minded"; therefore the injunction, "purify your hearts, ye double-minded."

It is this insincerity of acting and this double-mindedness, that makes us so weak as Christ's soldiers, so unsuccessful in our warfare, so often overcome. We are not honest in our resisting of the devil. Too often we allow him to influence us, we let him reason and argue with us, instead of driving him away at once; we suffer him to draw nigh to us, we persuade ourselves that he will not harm us. And then before we know it we are ensnared.

And our hearts and minds are constantly turning to the world; we are wanting to make a truce with it, to be friends with it; but "know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever is minded to be a friend of the world, maketh himself an enemy of God" (James iv. 4). PURIFY YOUR HEARTS, then, ye double-minded. Say with the Psalmist, "*unite* my heart to fear Thy name": be single-minded, of

one purpose, and that purpose to serve God alone. Receive His grace, listen to His commands, SUBMIT to Him.

But we do not like “submission”; we want to be independent. Satan tempts us to think we CAN be independent; he hides from us the fact that such seeming independence means submission to him; he disguises his influence and power. Often we are too prone to rebel instead of submitting—we doubt and question and murmur; and then Satan takes advantage of us and encourages us. To submit to God, we must sink our pride and be humble: it is to the humble that God giveth His grace—to them alone He CAN give it. But He resists the proud—just because they make themselves His enemies; He resists them because they are resisting *Him*: but it is the *devil* that we have to resist, and above all to resist his temptation to pride (through which he fell himself). And if we resist him, if we show him that we will have nothing to do with him, then he will flee from us and God will draw nigh to us.

Now all MUST submit to God sooner or later—all, even the devil; if not voluntarily, then by destruction as His enemies.

What madness, then, to fight against Him who has all power! Submit to Him now:—“Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way”; “agree with thine adversary quickly whiles thou art in the way with him”—only God is not an adversary, unless we make Him so; but He is “in the way with us,” companying with us, and will continue with us if we will agree with Him.

“Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” We cannot continue to walk with God and He with us, unless we are agreed, unless we submit to Him.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God.” Give up your own will; put yourselves under God’s will, wholly and unreservedly. And submit willingly; not sullenly and as of compulsion, but freely and lovingly, as trusting Him and recognising His wisdom; submitting, not as slaves to a tyrant, but as children to a father in whom they have perfect confidence. And that, whether in spiritual or earthly things—whether it be in matters pertaining to our bodily health, or our worldly standing, or our position in His Church, or our place in His kingdom.

We may apply the precept to our present spiritual conditions: “submit yourselves therefore to God.” Let us be assured that He knows best, that He is dealing with us in love, that He is dealing with ALL and leading ALL as He sees to be best *for us and for all*. Let us remember that WE are not ALL: His purpose is with His whole Church, nay, with all mankind. The more we understand His purpose, the easier will it doubtless be to submit; but if we do not see, if we cannot understand, still let us submit ourselves, *in faith*.

And in order that we may submit the more readily, let us consider and remember and acknowledge how much we have failed to submit to Him in the past; how we have resisted Him and provoked Him; how we have been like a broken reed in His hand, and have hindered His purpose in us;

how we have failed to DRAW NIGH to Him; how our hands have become unclean and our hearts impure, how we have been "double-minded." "Be afflicted and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness." The admonition has its general application to the world, but it also applies to us in particular; it is what is required of us now, in our individual spirits and in our public worship. In former days we could say with the psalmist, "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream: then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing"; but now the laughter and the singing are in great measure hushed. True, we can always rejoice, even in tribulation: we can always thank God for what He has done for us; but the voice of weeping and sorrow should be more evident among us, as being more appropriate to our present low estate.

Let us then submit to God. Let us draw nigh to Him — in humility and abasement, but still let us draw nigh — draw nigh to Him in our daily lives, draw nigh to Him in His house. He will still draw nigh to us, He will still draw us nigh to Him, till He take us into His very presence and we behold the face of Jesus Christ.

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."

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