

Submission is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as the action or fact of accepting or yielding to a superior force or to the will or authority of another person. Human tendency is to think of it in negative terms. The word “beaten” is often connected with it: He was beaten into submission. But it is also used in beautiful ways such as, “She submitted to his loving advances.” We should look at the word in that sense because in verse five James tells us that God *yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us.*

The Greek word translated as submission is a compound of the words under and appoint. It is someone designated to carry out the will of the one in authority. It is not passive but waiting for orders and ready to serve. We are to be waiting for God’s orders and always ready to serve our Lord (Matthew 7:21ⁱ). Motyer says the word is *an ‘enlistment’ word, the taking up of allegiance to a great Superior in order to engage in the fight under his banner.*ⁱⁱ Wisdom, which is an analogous to Jesus, says in the Proverbs, *³⁴ Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.* Proverbs 8:34

Our passage for today begins with the instruction to submit. *⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* James 4:7 In the Greek it is written in an imperative way and implies a lifelong condition. In other words, submit to God from this point onward. The reason we are instructed to do so is in the previous verse. *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.* So, it is imperative that we humbly submit ourselves to God if we are to receive His grace. And we all need grace!

This is a beautiful use of submission, for *God is love* (1 John 4:8ⁱⁱⁱ). He wants to bestow His grace on us. Our heart has a need that is only met when we surrender to His love. We try to meet that need with relationships or things or experiences, but as Augustine stated, *“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”* The perfect husband and wife relationship is just a hint of what God has in store for those who are in Christ (Ephesians 5:31,32^{iv}). That is why He calls us the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7,8^v). Marriage in this life is but a whetting of the appetite for the deepening relationship we have with the Lord (1 Corinthians 2:9^{vi}).

Why then is the whole world not submitting to this love and grace that is so fulfilling? The verse before tells us the answer. It is pride. Like Eve, we want to be our own god (Genesis 3:6^{vii}). We want to go our own way. Add to that the most prideful being of all lies to us and tells us that is the way to find satisfaction. Or it may be that we find ourselves angry with God over our circumstances. We live in a fallen world, but inwardly we blame God for the effects of sin. How great is the pride that blames God for the things in life that one does not want to accept! It reminds us of Adam blaming God for his fall because God blessed him with Eve (Genesis 3:12^{viii}).

Verse seven gives us another imperative command, *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”* It is a command with a promise attached. The word “resist” was used in combat to take a stand against an enemy. We are reminded that we are in a war over the souls of mankind. *The devil, aka Satan, sees his primary purpose as separating God and man.*^{ix} That is why we should respond to his attacks by drawing near to God, which is most often in prayer, but also by reading the Word, being in fellowship, and singing

praises to God. The devil is powerful, but Christ in us is infinitely more powerful (1 John 4:4^x). Put on the armor of God and stand your ground (Ephesians 6:11^{xi}).

What is your weakness? What does he tempt you with? When he throws those darts into your mind, first realize that what he is promising is a lie. The satisfaction of whatever he offers is short-lived and will cost you more than he lets on. Know that blaming God for what your old nature and Satan cause is exactly what Satan would like. Then remember this promise. Tell him, “You are the father of lies (John 8:44^{xii}). I resist you in Jesus’ name and the word of God declares you must flee.” That is swinging the sword of the Word of God accurately. That is humbling ourselves and submitting to God. Do not get into an argument with Him. Tell Him the Word is your authority and you spoke in faith, “so go!” Then pray, “Lord, thank You for your promises. Thank You for the grace to resist the devil. You are my satisfaction. What You have done for me is more than enough. No one could love me more. I am yours!” In doing so you are yielding to a superior force, to the will of God which is the definition of submitting. When we pray God’s will, He hears us (1 John 5:14^{xiii}).

Peter gave us a very similar instruction. ⁸ *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* ⁹ *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.* 1 Peter 5:8,9 We know that our brothers and sisters in nations closed to the gospel are standing their ground despite threats to their lives. Some are even giving their lives up to stand for their Lord. What is our excuse?

⁸ *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.* James 4:8a What do we do when tempted? What do we do when the enemy of our soul presents to us what seems to be irresistible? When what our old nature craves is set before us on a silver platter where do we turn? If we have submitted ourselves to God, we rebuke the thought, strip the lie down to expose the damage it would do to us and those we love, and raise the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16^{xiv}). Then we draw near to God and grab hold of the Word and swinging the sword of the Spirit, we command Satan to be gone. Think of all Jesus has done for you. Think on the cross and the price He paid so that you could resist the devil. Think on the goodness He has brought into your life and the glorious future we have in Him. Let Him remind you of His promises and hold you close.

Hughes writes, *Inch toward God, and he will step toward you. Step toward God, and he will sprint toward you. Sprint toward God, and he will fly to you!*^{xv} We draw near in prayer. We fight with spiritual weapons that are mighty through God (2 Corinthians 10:4^{xvi}). There is no need to watch the enemy flee. He will. Count it done. This verse promises it. Just keep your eyes on Jesus. He is seated at the right hand of God and has all authority (Hebrews 12:2^{xvii}; Matthew 28:18^{xviii}).

Look at His hand! He has engraved you on His palm, declares the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 49:16^{xix}). C.H. Spurgeon comments on this verse, *O unbelief, how strange a marvel thou art! We know not which most to wonder at, the faithfulness of God or the unbelief of his people. He keeps his promise a thousand times, and yet the next trial makes us doubt him. He never faileth; he is never a dry well; he is never as a setting sun, a passing meteor; or a melting vapour; and yet we are as continually vexed with anxieties, molested with suspicions, and disturbed with fears, as if our God were the mirage of the desert. "Behold," is a word intended to excite admiration. Here, indeed, we have a theme for marvelling. Heaven and earth may well be astonished that rebels should*

obtain so great a nearness to the heart of infinite love as to be written upon the palms of his hands. "I have graven thee." It does not say, "Thy name." The name is there, but that is not all.

"I have graven thee." See the fulness of this! I have graven thy person, thine image, thy case, thy circumstances, thy sins, thy temptations, thy weaknesses, thy wants, thy works; I have graven thee, everything about thee, all that concerns thee; I have put thee altogether there. Wilt thou ever say again that thy God hath forsaken thee when he has graven thee upon his own palms? C.H. Spurgeon

Who could reject such a great love? The prideful! That is why God must resist them. That is their choice to reject such great goodness and love. He will not force His love upon us. He may bring calamity into our lives so we might open our eyes to our true condition. That would be a blessing! But if we continue to harden our hearts, He will have to let us have our way. *There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of that way is death* (Proverbs 14:12^{xx}). It is the love of God that brings us to our knees to change our direction.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. James 4:8b,9 James confronts us with this call to repentance. It is a call to open our eyes to reality that we either avoid or have not yet seen. In our prideful arrogance we do not realize our true condition or do not want to consider it. It is as Jesus said to the Laodiceans, *¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.* Revelation 3:17-19 They thought they were prospering when their goods increased while their souls shrank. Jesus tells us what we really need.

James writes that the outward and the inner person must be changed. The psalmist asks, *³ Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart,* Psalm 24:3,4a Cleanse your hands, you sinners! Purify your hearts you double minded. Sin soils our hands. We still use that expression, "His hands are dirty," referring to someone who had a part in an evil deed. The reason we sin with our actions is because we have allowed our old nature to take the throne in our hearts. Repentance allows God to purify our hearts.

When I was a teenager, I worked in a gas station garage. Working on car engines would get grease and black grime on my hands. We had a special white goo called Gojo. It was pure white but in taking all the black off, the white would turn grey as it absorbed all the grime and oil. Jesus knew no sin. He was white as snow spiritually. But He took our sins upon Himself so that we could be clean (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xxi}).

'Cleansing' and 'purifying' stem from the Old Testament provisions for priestly purity in ministering the things of the Lord, but both had also come to be used of ethical purity. Also stemming from the Old Testament is the juxtaposition of hands and heart to denote both deed and disposition. The Psalmist required 'clean hands and a pure heart' for those who would stand before the Lord (Psalm 24:3,4^{xxii}); James asks the same of those who would 'draw near to God'.^{xxiii} Like the Old Testament priests who entered the inner sanctuary, we enter the heavenly sanctuary in prayer. We better be clean!

How do we do that spiritually? We repent (1 John 1:9^{xxiv})! Which means we turn from doing what we know is wrong. We determine to let God help us change direction. That is the next phrase, “*purify your hearts, you double minded.*” It is literally two souled, trying to love the world and God. That just is not possible. Jesus said one will win out (Matthew 6:24^{xxv}). The white righteousness of Jesus takes all the grime of sin upon Himself and leaves us clean. We no longer waiver between Jesus and the sin that entices us. Our hearts are set on Him to be our sole satisfaction, our everything. We submit our body to His service in holy living (Romans 6:13,14^{xxvi}). That turns our mourning into dancing with joy (Psalm 30:11^{xxvii}).

Repentance is not just simple remorse for mistakes. Sin is deadly serious! The heart must realize how pride and going our own way is spitting in the face of our Creator. **We must realize that sin is turning our back on the goodness and love of God.** It is a revelation of how we cause such grief to the heart of God and the pain Jesus went through to pay that debt we owe. When we see how gracious and good He has been to us, we realize how hard-hearted we have been toward Him.

James is writing to the churches. Does he think some of them are not born-again? What we have seen so far is that some of the people in the churches show partiality, curse others, cause division, covet leadership positions, and have fits of anger as well as bitter jealousy and selfish ambition (3:14^{xxviii}). He is encouraging believers to recognize their sin and the seriousness of it. He wants them to quit making excuses for their sins and to mourn and weep over the error of their ways that they might receive grace, be humbled, and thereby receive the exaltation that God longs to give us all. Could there be a greater exaltation than being a child of God, destined to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29^{xxix})?

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. James 4:10 Jesus set the example. *⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him* Philippians 2:5-9a This is the need of every believer. The old nature is naturally prideful. The new nature is humble. When you find yourself defensive, having to have the last word, thinking you must correct others, coveting a leading role, thinking you can contemplate temptation, or just do life on your own, know that God opposes the proud. Know that grace is given to the humble. Realize where your heart is and draw near to God by repenting with your whole heart. Realize how weak you are and how much you need the Lord.

It is a strange thing that when you no longer seek to be exalted, and indeed know you are not worthy of exaltation, it is then that the Lord will exalt you. Humility knows God alone is worthy to lead, direct, and be honored (Revelation 5:12^{xxx}). It knows how short we fall (Romans 3:23^{xxxi}). That is why God can exalt that person, for He knows they will depend completely on Him and not on their own abilities as earnest as they may be. Remember the tax collector whose prayer was heard. He beat his chest and asked God to be merciful to him, a sinner. Jesus said he went away justified and commented that ‘everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted’ (Luke 18:14^{xxxii}; Matthew 23:12^{xxxiii}). It is an often-repeated theme.

Let us consider a few examples in Scripture of lives that demonstrated this truth. One great example is Saul. God had Samuel pick Saul as the first king of Israel. When the people gathered to anoint him as king, he hid (1 Samuel 10:22^{xxxiv}). He was humble and did not think he could do the job. But after a few victorious battles, he started to think highly of himself. He even took the priests role before a battle because he thought if he did not act his army would dissolve. Who was he trusting? Himself! He went on to disobey a command of God and Samuel prophesied that the kingship was taken from him and given to another (1 Samuel 13:13,14^{xxxv}). In humility he was exalted, and in his pride, he was brought low.

It was true of David as well. He did not want his father to know Samuel's prophecy of him becoming king. He asked, "Who am I, that I should marry the king's daughter" (1 Samuel 18:18^{xxxvi}). He was humble even though he knew he would become king. But like Saul, after many successful battles and fame, in his pride he thought he could take any woman he wanted. He even had Uriah killed to take his wife (2 Samuel 12:9^{xxxvii}). But God in faithfulness confronted David. He repented but God still humbled him even more with the rebellion of his son Absalom.

We also have the example of Moses. Like David, when God called him to go to deliver the people of Israel, he asked, "Who am I" (Exodus 3:11^{xxxviii})? He was humbled by his failure to deliver the Israelites on his own. He was humbled further by living as a shepherd. That made him a candidate for exaltation. He called down plagues at God's command and led that vast number of Israelites and Egyptian converts to the Promised Land (Exodus 12:38^{xxxix}). But in an unguarded moment, frustrated with the people's demands, he thought that he could do something without God, which resulted in God humbling him again. *"Shall we bring water out of this rock for you?"* Numbers 20:10 For the sin of taking the glory on himself, he was humbled to not go into the Promised Land.

What can we learn from these historic examples of godly men once humble and exalted and yet who needed to be humbled again. We must watch our souls carefully. Pride can take the throne in a heart regardless of how long the person has been with the Lord or how zealously he or she has served Him. It seems the higher we rise, the more likely we are to succumb to pride. We who have our little parts in serving the King can be thankful that we are not called to greater things that may cause us to be prideful and fall as well. If these great men of God succumbed to pride, we should always be wary that our hearts do not lean in that direction. **Always realize that we are but dust with the breath of God in us** (Psalm 103:14^{xl})!

Do you need more grace? Humble yourself! Recognize how desperate you are for God's grace, for His guidance, and realize that without Him you can do nothing (John 15:5^{xli}). Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he *will* exalt you.

Questions:

- 1 Define the word submit.
- 2 How do we resist the devil?
- 3 Review the Spurgeon quote.
- 4 How do we cleanse our hands?
- 5 What else must be done?
- 6 What is the Gojo analogy?
- 7 How serious is sin?

- 8 What is the promise in verse 10?
9 Give examples of that verse in lives?
10 What should we learn from their examples?
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ⁱ **Matthew 7:21 (ESV)**

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

ⁱⁱ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James: The Tests of Faith*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 152.

ⁱⁱⁱ **1 John 4:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

^{iv} **Ephesians 5:31-32 (ESV)**

³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

^v **Revelation 19:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

^{vi} **1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)**

⁹ But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” —

^{vii} **Genesis 3:6 (ESV)**

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

^{viii} **Genesis 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

^{ix} W. Foerster, *TDNT*, 2, p.73

^x **1 John 4:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

^{xi} **Ephesians 6:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

^{xii} **John 8:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

^{xiii} **1 John 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

^{xiv} **Ephesians 6:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

^{xv} R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith That Works*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 187

^{xvi} **2 Corinthians 10:4 (ESV)**

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

^{xvii} **Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)**

² Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

^{xviii} **Matthew 28:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

^{xix} **Isaiah 49:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

^{xx} **Proverbs 14:12 (ESV)**

¹² There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

^{xxi} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xxii} **Psalm 24:3-4 (ESV)**

³ Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

^{xxiii} Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 16

^{xxiv} **1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

^{xxv} **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

^{xxvi} **Romans 6:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

^{xxvii} **Psalm 30:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,

^{xxviii} **James 3:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

^{xxix} **Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

^{xxx} **Revelation 5:12 (ESV)**

¹² saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

^{xxxi} **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

^{xxxii} **Luke 18:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

^{xxxiii} **Matthew 23:12 (ESV)**

¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

^{xxxiv} **1 Samuel 10:22 (ESV)**

²² So they inquired again of the LORD, “Is there a man still to come?” and the LORD said, “Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage.”

^{xxxv} **1 Samuel 13:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

^{xxxvi} **1 Samuel 18:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And David said to Saul, “Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father’s clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?”

^{xxxvii} **2 Samuel 12:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

^{xxxviii} **Exodus 3:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

^{xxxix} **Exodus 12:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.

^{xl} **Psalm 103:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

^{xli} **John 15:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.