

## Submit Yourselves to God

James 4:7a

3/05/2000

James, Chapter 4. The book of James, the fourth chapter. Now in our consecutive expositions through the book of James, we have come now to this fourth chapter, and we're going to read together verses 1 through 7. James, in chapter 3, has been exhorting the believers to control their tongues and to employ themselves, not in that wisdom which is from *beneath*—which is earthly, sensual, and devilish—but rather, with that wisdom which is from above, which produces righteousness and peace in relationships.

Now in chapter 4, he begins to *reprove* them for some of their sins, in which they have followed this wisdom that is from beneath, and then he begins to provide them with a solution for the overcoming of those sins. Follow along then with me, if you would, as we read together James, chapter 4, verses 1 through 7.

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Submission is not something that we find natural to ourselves. By nature, we are rebellious and self-willed and resistant to anyone telling us what to do. Paul speaks of this dynamic in Romans chapter 7, in verses 7 and 8, when he says, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.”

And so what Paul is saying is that the sin within him was provoked and stirred up by the commandment of God, and it was that very commandment of God that, operating in relationship with his sin, moved him to rebellion against that commandment. So the sin within him, provoked by the commandment, moved him to rebellion against that commandment. And so Paul makes it clear that we do not naturally submit. When law comes along and says, Thou shalt, we say, I will not. And when the law comes along and says, Thou shalt not, we say, I will.

It's kind of like an experience I had, I think I related to you before. I went to the zoo one time many years ago, and went to the section where the snakes were. And on the front of the cage of the snakes, the glass front on the cage, it said, Do not tap on the glass. So guess what everybody

does? Taps on the glass. Why? Just because the sign said, Don't *do* it. And so the sign says, *Don't* do it, and so they determine, *I'm* going to *do* it. And they did it.

This rebelliousness within us began with Adam's rebellion in the Garden of Eden. And the result of that fall was that the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed *can* it be. Human depravity sets the heart in rebellion against God and His law. And one of the effects of Christ's redemptive work is to reverse this rebellion and to transform it into submission.

Now Christ does this initially in regeneration, when there is a fundamental change wrought in us from being rebellious to being submissive, as a result of the impartation of the new nature. Our basic tendency at salvation is changed from being fundamentally rebellious to being fundamentally submissive. Jesus said, in John 10 and verse 27, "My sheep hear my voice, and... they follow me." The dominating characteristic of Christ's converted sheep is that they *do* submit to Him and that they *do obey* Him. However, our new nature is not a perfect new nature. And it is still subject to the influence of remaining sin that is in our *flesh*. And the result is that we still, from time to time, have episodes of rebellion against God that need to be subdued.

Now James has been speaking to some of these episodes of rebellion in verses 1 through 5 of this chapter 4. The sinful desires that arose in these professing believers caused them to act contrary to God's law and in rebellion *to* it. And James rebukes them severely for these sins and sets forth the remedy for them, beginning at verse 6. And we saw last Lord's Day that the remedy for our sinful rebellions against God is in fact the grace of God. Having *described* their sins in verses 1 through 5, he says, "But He," that is, God, "giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

So last Sunday evening, we considered together the fact that *God gives grace*. We saw that this grace is greater than any sin we may struggle with. It is *more* grace; that is, it is more than the strength of remaining sin in us. And so this grace is able to overcome any sin that may beset us and that we may fall into.

But, we also saw that though this grace is given *freely*, it is given *through* particular *means*. And if we are to have it, there are things we must avoid and there are things that we must pursue. And so we saw, secondly, that pride *hinders* grace. It says, God *resists* the proud. So God resists those who have an inordinate selfesteem, thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think, with the result that they view God and their fellow man with contempt and indifference. He that is of a proud heart is *hateful* to God and will not have any grace *from* God. And so we saw that pride *hindered* grace.

But we also saw, thirdly, that humility obtains grace. In Psalm 138, and verse 6, it says, "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly." And so when God sees *in us* a sense of inability, of emptiness, and of *dependence*, then He pours His grace out upon us. One who *lowers* himself in his own selfesteem so that he sees himself as dependent, sinful, and needy, with the result that he esteems God and others *better* than himself, this is the person to whom

God gives his grace. A humble man is one who has right views of God, right views of others, and right views of himself. It is to such a person that God gives His grace, because he alone is going to be a proper *steward* of it and will use it for the glory of God and the good of others, and not for selfexaltation. When we see how destructive pride is and how blessed *humility* is and what *blessings* that it brings, one is then naturally led to ask the question, How can I shed my pride, and how can I cultivate humility?

Well the answer to that question is given in the following verses that we will begin to consider this evening. In verses 7 through 10, we are told how to become *humble*. He says, in verse 7, “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 double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.” In other words, “*Humble* yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” And so we see, he talks about humility in verse 6; he talks about humility in verse 10; the content of verses 7 through 9 describe what that humility *is* and how it may be cultivated and obtained.

Now this evening, we want to consider together the first of these directives. There are several imperatives in this passage, which are commands from God to us that indicate to us how we can cultivate humility. And we want to consider the first of them today, found in the first part of verse 7, when it says, “Submit yourselves *therefore* to God.”

Now these people to whom James was writing were obviously *not* submitting themselves to God, because they were filled with wars and fightings and ungodly desires and worldliness and spiritual unfaithfulness. And the grace that they needed to overcome this sinful behavior would be *obtained* from God when they *humbled* themselves, and the first step in humility is submission. And so we want to consider together this matter of submission this evening.

In the first place, then, let us consider together the subject of submission—the subject of submission. Now who is it that is to be submitted to God? The answer is that it is *ourselves*. Our text says, “Submit *yourselves* therefore to God.” Now those of you who have the New King James Version will not find the word “yourselves” there. It reads, “[For you] therefore submit to God.”

The word “submit” here is a second aorist, imperative passive, and it is translated as a *middle* voice, and that’s the reason why the word “yourselves” is inserted into the Old King James. It is not uncommon for passives to be translated as middles when the force of the context and of the phrase demands that. We have similar constructions in First Peter 5, and verse 5, and First Peter 2, and verse 23. Suffice that for an explanation for the *justification* of the insertion of the word “yourselves.”

Now we often think that we need to submit our decisions to God, or that we need to submit our possessions to God, or that we need to submit the use of our *time* to God, or that we need to submit our children to God. And while all of this is true, all of these things are peripheral to us and they are outside *of us*. One may submit all of these things to God, and yet still reserve *to*

himself the core and the essence of himself. And this is the reason why James says, Submit *yourselves* therefore unto God. The kingdom of *self* may yet be preserved even when all outside of us has been given over to God.

You see, what James is calling upon us to do here is that we are, in our very essence, to be submitted to God. It is *what* we are *in* our very essence that is to be submitted to God. *Ourselves*, the very center of our being, our selfconsciousness, our existence, is what is to be submitted to God, so that the very *core* of our individuality is given over to Him. No man has ever become truly humble until he has yielded the totality of *self* to God.

We often content ourselves with yielding a portion of *time* to God, in observing the Lord's Day; in yielding a portion of our *money* to God, in giving a tithe; in yielding a portion of our *decisions* to God, by *praying* about them; and yet we can still maintain a personal sovereignty in our hearts, contenting ourselves with a *yielding* to God in the *external* areas of our lives, while still maintaining an internal *self will*. And what James is saying is, this will not do. He says, Submit *yourselves* to God. The essence of submission is submitting the *essence* of *ourselves* to God, and nothing less than this is what we are called upon to do. Our very heart of hearts must bow before Christ and give over and yield and wholly capitulate to Him. Submitting our time or our talents or our money to God is *not* sufficient. We must submit *ourselves*.

Psalm 119, and verse 10, says, "With my *whole heart* have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments." And the psalmist recognized that there was a direct connection between wandering from the commandments and a lack of *wholeheartedness* in the submission of oneself to God. So this, then, is the subject of submission. We must submit *self* to God.

And that brings us to our second point this evening. Having considered together the subject of submission, consider together, secondly, the *nature* of submission. He says, "Submit yourselves *therefore* to God." Well if we are to submit ourselves to God, we ought to ask ourselves the question, What is submission? What does it mean to submit? Well the word here means to arrange oneself *under* another—to *subordinate* oneself to another. It is a military term used to speak of soldiers *arranging* themselves under the authority of an officer with the intention of carrying out his will.

Now in the Bible, this word that is used in James 4, in verse 7, is used of children submitting to their parents in Luke 2:51, when it says, Jesus "was subject" to his parents. It is used of citizens submitting to their government, in Romans 13:1, when it says, "Let every soul be *subject* unto the higher powers." It is used of wives submitting to their husbands, in Ephesians 5:22, when it says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands." It is used of the church submitting itself to Christ, in Ephesians 5:24, when it says, "as the church is subject unto Christ." It is used of employees submitting to their employers in Titus 2 and verse 9.

In each case, the one who is doing the submitting places himself under the authority of another, so that the will of the authority becomes *his* will in whatever areas that authority happens to

*express* himself. Now the idea is that we are to put ourselves *under* the authority of God. *His* will is to become our will, wherever and however He expresses that authority.

Now the effect of placing oneself under the authority of another is to *lower* oneself in relationship *to* that person. He becomes the leader, we become the follower. He is the authority, we are the ones who obey. His judgment is supreme, ours is subordinate. His will prevails, ours is sacrificed. And this is what humility is—it is a *lowering* of ourselves in relationship to another, and this is exactly what *submission* does—it *lowers* ourselves in relationship to *another*.

We previously, in verse 6, talked about the need for *grace* in order that we might be enabled to overcome the world and the flesh and the Devil. And we further saw that the means to *obtain* that grace was to avoid pride and to cultivate *humility*. Notice verse 6. It says, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble,” and then he says, *Therefore*, submit yourselves to God. That is, the submission to God is directly linked with overcoming pride and cultivating *humility*.

Submission is the means to humility. Anything that lowers oneself achieves humility, and submission is certainly a means of *lowering* oneself, and therefore, a means of becoming humble, and *therefore*, a means of obtaining grace. God gives His grace to the humble, verse 6 says, and the submissive person is the *humble* person in relationship to God because he has *lowered* himself *down below* and *underneath* the Person of God. So this, then, is the nature of submission. It is a placing of ourselves *under* the authority of another, thus a *lowering* of ourselves in relationship to that authority.

And that brings us then to our third and final point this evening. Having considered together the subject of submission—it is *self*; having considered the nature of submission—a placing of ourselves under the authority of another, thus *lowering* ourselves in relationship *to* him; in the third place, let us consider together the *object* of submission—the *object* of submission.

Now our text says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God.” God is the object of submission. He is the one we are to submit ourselves *to*. Now we oftentimes find submission very hard, and we find it hard for several reasons. First of all, we find submission hard because we oftentimes do not feel that the one to whom we are submitting has any *right* to rule *over* us. We find it hard to submit to those whom we don’t feel like they have a right to rule *over* us.

For example, you’re at work. A fellow employee starts telling you how to do your *job*, and it’s like, Well, who are *you* to be telling me how to do my job? You don’t have any *right* to give me *direction* and *correct* me. You’re not my boss. We find children doing this to their siblings, do we not, and in many other situations in life. But God has every *right* to rule over us. By right of *creation*, we owe Him obedience because we owe our very *existence* to Him. And therefore, He who *made* us and He who continues to *uphold* us by the word of His power certainly has every right to rule over us, because we owe our very *existence* to Him. And so by right of creation, He has the right to rule over us.

But He also has the right to rule over us by virtue of *redemption*. By right of redemption, we owe Him obedience. Having forfeited the favor of God by our sins, and justly deserving His wrath and judgment, God devised a means to deliver us *from* that wrath and judgment. And that *means* was to pay the ransom to His violated law and justice by the death of His own Son in order that we might be set *free* from its curse and from its punishment. Having then *bought* us *out of* the slavery to sin, He now *owns* us, body and soul, so that First Corinthians 6:20 can say, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” So the totality of our being belongs to God by right of *purchase* in His redemptive work.

And so by right of *creation* we owe Him obedience; by right of *redemption* we owe Him obedience; and one of the ways in which we glorify His sovereignty over us by right of creation and His *love* to us by way of redemption is by submitting to Him. And so God has the right to rule over us, both by reason of creation and redemption.

And so we cannot say, Well, God, why are you trying to run my life, and who are you to run my life? You see, that was Pharaoh’s question—Who is the Lord that I should obey *Him*? Answer—He’s your Creator. He is the one who is sustaining your very next breath and heartbeat. He holds your life in His hands. Ought you not to obey such a one, who brought you into existence and sustains that existence moment by moment?

And then of course, for the believer, there is the additional reason that this gracious God has saved our *lives*. And so we owe ourselves to Him because of His redemptive work. And so, submission is often hard for us when we *feel* that the one to whom we are to submit doesn’t have any right to rule over us. But this is not the case with God.

A second reason why we have a hard time submitting is because we do not feel that the one to whom we are to submit is *wise* in his actions. We do not feel that the one to whom we are to submit is *wise* in his actions. Oftentimes, for example, a wife will say, Well, yeah, he’s got the *right* to rule over me because he’s my husband, but I don’t feel like he’s very smart. And so we don’t want to follow his direction because we don’t feel like he’s very wise in his choices.

Well it’s true, no one likes to follow and obey a fool, and wind up implementing choices that turn out to be futile in accomplishing their stated *goals*. We don’t like to submit to authorities we believe to be *unwise*. But once again, *God* isn’t *like* that. God is *infinitely* wise in His choices, and no one who submits to his will and *does* His commands will ever be found to have spent *one moment* in either futility *or* in *foolishness*. Those who do the will of God will never learn later on that there was a *better* set of choices that could have been made had they just *not* followed God. In fact, it is precisely when we *start* following our own will that we start making choices that we *do* later on regret, and find ourselves doing *foolish* and destructive things.

Perhaps we could illustrate the point by saying none of us attempts to do our own surgical procedures. We follow the advice of experts and doctors who are far wiser than we with reference to those matters. And if we attempted to do it ourselves, we would make a *mess* of it

and only *harm* ourselves and others. And so in medical procedures, we are *happy* to follow the directions of others because we know that they will make *far wiser choices* than we ever could.

And so it is with God. We should be *glad* to receive His direction and to *follow* His counsel, for He is far wiser than we, and He will make far better choices for us than we could *ever* make for *ourselves*. We have only to compare the lives of those who follow their *own* wisdom with those who follow *God's* wisdom to see the validity of the point.

Thirdly, submission is often hard for us, not only because we wonder if the person we are submitting to has the *right* to rule over us; not only because we wonder if the person who is ruling over us is *wise*; but thirdly, submission is often hard for us because we do not *feel* that the one to whom we are to submit is making choices that are in our best *interest*. We feel like oftentimes, the one to whom we are submitting is *not* making choices that are in our best interest.

Now it is very often true that those who rule others do so for their *own* best interest, and at the *expense* of those that they rule. We have but to consider the many examples of politicians to see this to be the case. Rather than rule for the blessing of those they have authority over, they rule at their expense and they rule to their injury. No one wants to submit to a leader when they believe they are simply being *used* by him for their own profit, pleasure, and blessing, while in fact having no concern whatever for those that they are using. But once again, *God isn't like that*. God always rules His subjects with a view towards *their best interest*. His rule is *selfless*, His rule is *altruistic*, His rule is *benevolent*.

We have but to read the Twentythird Psalm to see the benevolence of the rule that God has towards His people. "The Lord is my shepherd." Therefore, He takes advantage of me and uses me. Now that's not what the text *says*, does it? That could be said of many *politicians*. That could be said, unfortunately, of many *husbands*. It could be said of *pastors*. But it will never be said of the Lord.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and they staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Now does that sound like someone who is ruling in the best interest of those that He rules over? Christ *always does* what is in the best interests of His sheep. And His goodness towards those that He rules makes Him a perfectly suitable object of submission. And so when we consider that the object of submission is God, every reason for *not* wanting to submit to Him is *removed*. And every inducement *to* submit to Him is supplied. He has the *right* to rule, He has the *wisdom* to rule, and He has the *goodness* to rule. We need never fear that if we submit to *His* rule that

somehow our *humbling* of ourselves before Him in this regard will make us *vulnerable* to somehow being used and taken advantage of, or led into unwise choices.

That's why we're afraid to submit to other people. We're *afraid* that will be *used*, we will be taken of advantage of, we will be led into unwise choices. And this is often the reason we do not become humble before others. It's because of *fear*. We are *afraid* that if we *lower* ourselves in relationship to others that they're going to just *walk* all over the top of us. Unfortunately, sometimes that happens when you submit to corrupt humans. But I tell you, it will *never* happen to the person who submits *self* to God.

We cannot run our lives half as well as God can. And our greatest *fear* should be *self*rule, not God's rule. When you think of all the messes that have happened in your life, and all the *bad* decisions that were made, who were you following when you got into those? Well, you were following self, weren't you? God leads *His* people into *green pastures* and beside still waters, and in the paths of *righteousness*. He doesn't lead them into turmoil and conflict and misery and unhappiness and destruction. Let us therefore submit ourselves to God. And as we do so, we will find an *abundance* of grace poured out upon us.

And I would say by way of application to those of you who are in any position of authority, be you a pastor such as myself, be you a husband, be you a mother, an authority over children, as you rule them, rule them in imitation of God. Be sure, first of all, you have the *right* to rule, and that right has been given to you by God. And if you *do* have a right to rule, go to God and ask for *wisdom*, and say, God, give me *wisdom* so I can make *right* choices with reference to those that I rule over. Wasn't this Solomon's prayer? God sets him up over Israel after David, and he says, Lord, I am a *child*. I know not how to go out or to come in before this people. Give me *wisdom*, Lord, that I might know how to rule them. And the thing pleased the Lord. And every day, those of you who are in positions of authority need to be praying, O God, give me wisdom that I might make choices that are in the *best interests* of those that I rule over.

A lot of husbands complain about the fact that their wives aren't very submissive. Well, if they were a lot wiser, they would find their wives to be a lot more submissive. No one wants to follow a fool, and if you want people to follow you, then you need to exercise and seek out all the godly wisdom you can, and you'll find people *glad* to follow you.

And then strive to be good in your rule, that is, doing what is in the *best interest* of those that you rule—a selfless rule, a rule that says, I will give this person not what they want, but I will give them what is in their best interest. And while there may be some unhappiness in the shortterm, in the longterm they will thank you. Isn't that true with the way you are with God? You know, you wanted this or you hoped for that outcome, and it didn't *happen*. And yet, years later, you can look back and say, Thank God that He *didn't* give me what I wanted, but He gave me what I *needed*.

But in any event, the calculation on the part of those who are in authority should be this: What are the greenest pastures and the stillest waters and the best path of righteousness I can find for those who are under my authority, and that's what I'll lead them into. And I will surround them



with all the *goodness* and all the *mercy* that I can possibly come up with. That's the nature of a biblical, godly leader.

Well, that's kind of a sidelight. The main point that we have before us this evening is this, is that if we would have the grace of God that would help us to overcome the sin that does so easily beset us, then let us first of all submit "self" to God. And put all away all of the fears that would cause us to resist submitting to God, recognizing that they're *utterly unfounded*. And recognize that when we *lower* ourselves before God and *submit* ourselves therefore to God, God will do that in us and with us which is wise, which is right, and which is good. And if God will do that, then what do we have to be afraid of in submitting to Him—that somehow we're going to *lose* something?

Scripture says, No good thing doth the Lord withhold from His people. And so if He withholds something from you and you miss out on something, just mark it down—it wasn't good. Our God is a gracious, consistent, benevolent, kind, and wise ruler. And do we not recognize that we are not fit to rule ourselves? Jeremiah says, O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man to direct his steps. We are not *fit* to rule ourselves. You just try and rule your own *life* for awhile, and see how it *goes*. Many of you have *done* it, and you've realized, Hah! That's not for *me*. I want *God* to rule my life. He makes far better choices than *I* do. And He doesn't make near the messes that I make. In fact, He doesn't make messes at all.

Well, may the Lord help us then to take this first step in humility in resubmitting ourselves to the Lord *all* over again in each area of our life, putting away our fears, knowing that He has the *right* to rule, He has the *wisdom* to rule, and He has to *goodness* to rule. Shall we pray together?

Father, thank you so much that you have *offered* yourself as a ruler to us. Our nation right now is seeking out a ruler, and the very *best* of them are sadly inadequate to rule us as we need to be ruled as a nation. And the *worst* of them is abominable. And Father, to have good rulers—O, what a blessing! What an inestimable blessing to have good, wise, and righteous authorities over us. But the greatest of all blessings, Father, is to have you. And so we are *glad* that you offer yourself to us as our ruler and call us to submit to your rule. And you have said to us that you will guide us with your eye, and afterwards receive us up to glory.

Father, be pleased to guide us. And Lord, help us to quiet and quell the foolish and silly rebellions in our hearts, and help us to know that you do all things well, and that the Judge of all the earth does right. And not only are your actions right, but they are also wise and good.

Thank you, Father, for the many green pastures and still waters that you have led us to and by. And Father, may we learn to be content with them and not constantly kicking to go our own way. For all we like sheep have gone astray. We, unfortunately, turn everyone to our *own* way. Help us then, Lord, to go in the way of righteousness.

Thank you for your presence with us in the valley of the shadow of death. Thank you for the table you spread before us. Thank you that we need fear no evil, but goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life. And *then*, after all that blessing, we will dwell in the house of

the Lord forever. Father, we pray that you would rule us, and we pray that we might submit to that rule. In Jesus' name, Amen.