

**James 17 – Wisdom about Warfare**  
**Pastor Joe Oakley - GFC – 9/17/23**

We are continuing our journey through the book of James in our series Wisdom for Everyday Life. Today I'm preaching a message entitled Wisdom about Warfare. Our text is just one short verse – James 4:7

*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

I learned as a young believer – when you see the word therefore in the Bible – see what's it's there for. In other words – check the context – see what was written right before that.

Please understand that **the Christian life is a life of warfare**. And we all have the same three enemies – the world, the flesh and the devil. James address all of these in the first few verses of James 4.

James 4:1-3 addresses the war within us – the war with our flesh.  
 James 4:4-6 addresses our war with worldliness.  
 And James 4:7 addresses our war with the devil.

We must know who we're fighting and have a strategy for each enemy.

**Faith overcomes the world** - 1 John 5:4-5

*...everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

**Dying to self overcomes the flesh** - Romans 6:11-12 says:

*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.*

Galatians 5:24 says:

*Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

**Spiritual warfare overcomes the devil** – but actually he is already defeated.  
 Colossians 2:15 says:

*Having disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

So, James is telling us how to overcome our three enemies.

That's what verse 4 is there for.

*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

We must never get this order reversed! Before we resist the devil, we must first submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In fact, **our ability to resist the enemy is directly proportionate to our submission to God!**

You must submit to God before you resist the devil.  
 You must say yes to God before you say no to Satan.  
 You must stand for God before you stand against Satan.

Too many people forget who they are fighting. Instead of fighting Satan, they are fighting God. How? By not submitting to His will and His ways.  
 Some people resist God's call to salvation.  
 Some people resist God's call to be filled with the Spirit.  
 Some people resist God's will to be water baptized.  
 Some people resist obeying the commands of God.  
 So instead of resisting Satan, they are resisting God.

Let me give you some help: **if you fight God, you will lose!** You can't fight demonic spirits and the Holy Spirit at the same time. So make sure you are standing for God before you stand against Satan. If not – you will be like the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16 who tried to drive out evil spirits by using the name of Jesus without submission to Christ. One day the evil spirit answered them:

*Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you? Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.*

The devil knows if you know God or not! The devil knows if you are submitted to God or not. So, stop resisting God! Submit to God and resist the devil.

The word submit in the Bible literally means to come under authority. To be subordinate. To obey. "**Submit**" is a military term that means "**get into your proper rank.**" When a buck private acts like the general, there is going to be trouble! That's why God's Word Translation of James 4:7 says:

*Place yourselves under God's authority.*

To submit is to be subordinate to, to be obedient to, and to put yourself under the authority of someone, in this case God. To submit to God is to be absolutely obedient to God's will.

**Complete surrender to God is the only way to complete victory over the enemy.** If there is any area of your life that is not submitted to God, you are set up for defeat!

The Amplified version of Ephesians 4:27 says:

*Leave no room or place or foothold for the devil (give no opportunity to him).*

When we do not submit to God, we give Satan a foothold in our lives. If we do not submit to God and resist Satan, that foothold will become a stronghold that controls our lives.

The way to resist the devil is to first submit to God. Your ability to resist the devil is determined by your submission to God.

The biblical definition of resist is to take a stand against, to oppose, to withstand. When we receive Jesus as our Savior – we are born again and are now new creations in Christ. But we have an enemy – Satan – who wants to keep us from following Christ. He wants to keep us from being saved in the first place, but when we are saved – He wants to keep us from growing in Christ – from becoming a mature disciple of Christ.

So, he constantly resists every step we take to grow in Christ. He resists you going to church – reading your Bible – praying – giving – serving – He resists your praise and worship – he resists you sharing your faith. So, **you must learn to resist the resistance!**

To be a disciple of Christ we must first know Him as our Savior and confess Him as Lord. When we do – He gives us the keys to the kingdom. Those keys represent authority - the power to bind and loose. Jesus gave all believers authority over the enemy. Jesus said in Luke 10:19

*I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy.*

The word authority in the original Greek is exousia – which means the right to exercise influence and jurisdiction over others. The word power is dunamis – which means strength or force.

Get it out of your head that you need to be stronger than the enemy! Demons have power – but you have authority over their power and **authority trumps power every time!** It's like when there's a traffic accident and a policeman has to stop traffic. He does not have the strength to physically stop a vehicle. But he has the authority to stop every vehicle. The issue is not how powerful the vehicle is – the issue is how much authority the policeman has.

And the issue in spiritual warfare is not how much power Satan and demons have. It's irrelevant! God has given us authority over all the power of the enemy! Not just over some power – but over all the power of the enemy! Are you exercising your authority over the enemy in the name of Jesus? I submit to you that many believers are not – either because of spiritual ignorance – they just don't know how to take authority over the enemy –

or because of spiritual passivity. Passivity is the opposite of activity – it means to do nothing. To offer no opposition or resistance.

Passivity causes people to do nothing even though their marriage is falling apart. Passivity causes people to do nothing even though their career is dying. Passivity causes people to do nothing even though they are under constant spiritual attack by the enemy.

There are different reasons for passivity –

- Sometimes it comes from physical, emotional or mental exhaustion.
- Sometimes it comes from fear or worry.
- Some people are passive because they are spiritually lazy. It's too hard for them to pray and read the Bible and do warfare.
- Usually passivity comes from wrong doctrine – a wrong view of God – a wrong view of His part and our part in life.

They forget we are co-laborers with God. James 4:7 says

*Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

Some people get the first part right – they submit to God – but they don't go on and resist the enemy. I've actually heard people teach - all you need to do is submit to God and the enemy will flee. Well – sorry – but that's not what it says. It does say submit to God – but it goes on to say resist the enemy and he will flee.

To me that means if you submit to God but don't resist the enemy, he will not flee. I've actually heard people say, "I'm tired of fighting. I hope the devil just leaves me alone." Oh really? Does the Bible say, "Hope the devil goes away and he will"? "If you're tired of fighting, the devil will leave you alone?" NO – the Bible says, "Resist the devil and he will flee."

During our trip to Israel we went to the Mt. of Temptation outside Jericho where Jesus was tempted by the devil. Jesus overcame every temptation and when it was over Luke 4:13 says:

*When the devil had ended every temptation, he [temporarily] left Him until another more opportune and favorable time.*

It doesn't say the devil gave up attacking Jesus so why do you think he will stop attacking you?

Some people get passive in spiritual warfare because they have a misconception based on one Scripture in the Bible.

That verse is 2 Chronicles 20:17 which says:

*You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem! Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you.*

There are many battles in the Bible – and God usually gave specific and different instructions for each one. For instance – He told the Israelites to march around Jericho for seven days and on the seventh day shout and God would give them victory. He never told them to do that again. They could have made that their all-time plan of attack, but it would not have worked because God only told them to do it that way once.

So – we cannot take God’s orders for one battle Israel fought as the all-time strategy for spiritual warfare. David understood this, so he sought God for directions for each battle. 1 Chronicles 14:8-16 says that when David became king, the Philistines attacked.

*So David inquired of God: "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" The Lord answered him, "Go, I will hand them over to you." So David and his men went up to Baal Perazim, and there he defeated them... Once more the Philistines raided the valley; so David inquired of God again, and God answered him, "Do not go straight up, but circle around them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. So David did as God commanded him, and they struck down the Philistine army.*

The point is, we do something that works in warfare and assume it works every time. **The key is to pray and seek God for discernment and direction.**

But some people have taken the one verse on standing still and they have become passive about spiritual warfare. If God tells you stand still, the battle is not yours - then you better stand still. But in lieu of a specific prophetic word from God, we must go by what God said regarding spiritual warfare. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says:

*Stay alert! Watch out for your enemy the devil. He walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him and be strong in your faith.*

Our enemy is not passive, complacent, not lazy. He is always on the prowl seeking for an opening to steal, kill or destroy. So, we can never let our spiritual guard down. We cannot take spiritual vacations – our enemy does not!

By the way, when God told Israel to stand and watch the salvation of God, He was not saying, “Be passive and do nothing!” In 2 Chronicles 20 when a vast army came to make war on King Jehoshaphat, verses 3-4 say:

*Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord.*

So, instead of being passive, they prayed and fasted. As they prayed, God gave them a prophetic word in verses 14-17

*Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah... a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.*

*He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.*

*Tomorrow march down against them... You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.'"*

After this a praise and worship service broke out in verses 18-19.

*Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. Then some Levites stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud shout.*

They then got a prophetic word to sing and praise and God would defeat their enemies. So they did and He did. 2 Chronicles 20:21-22 says:

*He appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the Lord, For His mercy endures forever." Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.*

So – when we hear that verse about standing and seeing the salvation of God – remember that standing involves praying and fasting and seeking God and hearing a word from Him and obeying that word from Him.

And by the way – what do you think would be easier – to send out an army against an army or to send out a choir against an army? These people were anything but passive!

In spiritual warfare, we must act like first responders! When there is a fire – first responders run to the fire not away from it. When there is a shooting – first responders run to the shooter, not away. That's what David did when fighting Goliath. 1 Samuel 17:48 says:

*As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.*

The whole Israeli army ran from the battle – but David ran to the battle. And the man who ran to the battle won the battle.

But because the passive army of Israel ran from the battle, they accomplished nothing. That's the same thing many of us accomplish when we are up against huge obstacles – nothing. And when we do nothing we reap a great big harvest of nothing. But one man with faith in action accomplished a miracle in the power of God.

God blesses faith in action – not faith without works, which is dead. So – stop running from the battle! Stop doing nothing! God’s command is followed by a promise. When you submit to God and resist the devil, the devil must flee!

It’s time for YOU to stop being passive and instead go on the offensive! No one else can do it for you. It's up to you! You must make your personal declaration of war.

Yes, you may be in a terrible struggle. Yes, you may feel discouraged, alone, and perhaps abandoned. You may find yourself today just hanging on, hoping for reinforcements to arrive. However, the struggle you are in is a struggle God fully intends for you to win. You may have lost a battle here and there, but you are going to win the war!

Did you know that Satan is scared of you learning these truths and putting them into practice? He knows that if you submit to God and resist him, he must run! So, get the devil running!

It’s not about you being strong – it’s about exercising the authority you have in Jesus’ name! It’s about knowing who you are in Christ and what you have in Christ! In Christ, you are a powerful, dangerous, and deadly warrior and most of you don't even know it! Satan wants to keep you from that truth. The Kingdom of God resides within you! The Greater One lives within you and the gates of hell cannot prevail against you!

Satan cannot trespass into your life and rob you unless you allow him. So, don't allow him. Shut the door in his face by binding the strongman. Put him in his place. Remind him of his past defeat and his future doom.

God has given you everything you need to resist the devil.  
 You have the full armor of God, so wear it!  
 You have the weapons of God, so use them!  
 You have the word of God, so speak it!  
 You have the name of Jesus, so walk in the authority of it!  
 You have the power of prayer – so pray it!  
 And you have the cross of Christ where Jesus shed His blood which defeated the enemy and disarmed the enemy!

So, remind the enemy of his ultimate defeat and punishment. Remind him that He was defeated by the blood of Jesus and do not back down one inch ever for any reason!

Today, your mission must be the same as our Lord’s mission – to destroy the works of the devil. YOU can do this beginning today.

So submit to God, resist the devil, and he must flee in Jesus’ name!