

Me, Resist the Devil by Mario Digangi

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of resisting the devil through submission to God, reliance on His Word, and the support of the Christian community.

Duration: 49:29

Scripture: James 4:7

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Resisting Temptation"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the presence and tactics of the devil, highlighting the importance of resisting him by submitting to God, drawing near to God, and standing firm in faith. Various Bible passages are explored to illustrate the devil's ways, the call to resist him, and the means to overcome his works through the power of God's Word and prayer.

Transcript

And the French are well acquainted with le diable and the English word devil. There are many demons according to scripture, but only one devil. Sometimes he is compared to a roaring lion, at other times to a slithering serpent, still other occasions to a fierce dragon, and then also as an angel of light.

The devil's ways are multiple. He can intimidate, he can terrify through persecution, and he can also deceive and destroy. The main work of the devil is to divide us from God, and God from us.

And nevertheless, we are called upon to resist the devil. In northern Italy, in the Alpine region, you had a very terrible situation during World War II. The German troops, retreating up the Italian peninsula with the Allied advance, destroyed bridges, burned buildings, exploded roadways and railways, carted off women for slave labor, lined up and killed men by way of reprisal, and yet the people of the area erected a memorial which said, you have ruined our roads, you have bombed our bridges, you have plundered our cattle, you have taken our women, you have destroyed our men, you have orphaned our children, there is only one more thing we can give you, and that is our continued resistance.

You and I are called upon to resist the devil, and there are several passages of the New Testament where this exhortation is given to us with great clarity and force. The first of these is found in the letter of James, chapter 4. The fourth chapter of James, and this James of course is not the brother of John, or the son of Zebedee, this James is one of the brothers of our Lord. The evidence in the New Testament is that he was not a Christian during the days of our Lord's ministry, but became a Christian when his brother Jesus,

risen from the dead, showed himself to be the true Messiah and the son of the living God.

Now in James, chapter 4, verses 7 and 8, we have this exhortation. Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you devil-minded. The theme of resisting the devil is very plainly put by James, and he also tells us how we are to resist the devil.

We resist the devil by submitting ourselves to God. Now this manner of submission is not very popular in our day, but it's certainly biblical, and we can't dismiss it as being Old Testament stuff because it occurs repeatedly in the pages of the New Testament. Romans 13, citizens, unless you want anarchy, submit yourselves to legitimate government for the powers that be are ordained of God to maintain justice and order in the community.

You cannot have a civil order without submission to lawful governmental authority, nor can you have a family without submission. Wives, submit to your husbands. Children, submit to parents.

If the order is destroyed, there is anarchy and not the beauty of order and peace within the family. Again, believers are told to be submissive toward those who exercise authority governing the flock of God, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. And here we are told that we are to submit to God.

The one way of resisting the devil is to submit to God. There's a struggle here, and we cannot be neutral. We either submit to the devil and do his will, or submit to God and resist the devil.

So what's called for is a humble submission to the authority of God, to put him first, to put his command as having absolute priority in our lives. To resist the devil, we must submit to God. Again, to resist the devil, we must approach God.

We must come near to God, and we will find that he has come near to us. Those who are taken captive by the devil are those who drift away from God, or worse yet, who run away from God because of a proud and disobedient streak that will not submit to the authority of the Lord. If we do not drift from God, if we do not desert God, if we do not become vulnerable by a stupidity that turns away from God, but rather approach the Lord and have fellowship with him, we will become strong to resist the enemy.

So if we submit to God, if we bow to his authority, if we draw near to him and hold communion with him who draws near to us, if using the stream of the grace of God, we cleanse our hands and we purify our hearts, we will be able to resist the devil. Now what we have in James is echoed by what we find in the first letter of Peter, 1 Peter 5, verses 8 and 9. 1 Peter, the fifth chapter, verses 8 and 9. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. Now remember who it is that is telling us this, and who is it? I say Peter, of course. And what is there in Peter's background that makes this something to be underlined? In the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, and remember behind Mark the author, there stands the strong personality of Peter who is dictating his reminiscences of his life with Jesus.

In the Gospel of Mark, remembering that it's dictated to Mark by Peter for the most part, the words of Jesus are recorded, watch and pray lest you enter into temptation. And before the 14th chapter of Mark is

over, we have that shameful episode where a Peter who failed to watch, a Peter who failed to pray, fell into temptation and denied his Lord not only once but again and again. It's out of that kind of experience that Peter now tells other Christians, be alert, be self-controlled, keep a firm grip on yourself, have the eyes of your understanding wide open to the risks and the dangers in a non-Christian world.

I failed to watch, I failed to pray, I fell into temptation and denied my Lord, and now out of that bitter experience I am telling you, be self-controlled, beyond the alert, because your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. So the exhortation of Peter is not some abstract advice, it comes out of his own personal experience. He encourages us to do what he failed to do, and for that he experienced heartbreaking repentance.

So he says be self-control, keep a firm grip on yourself, and be alert, have the eyes of your understanding wide open to the dangers that you face in a non-Christian world. Remember that the enemy, who sometimes masquerades as an angel of light, also prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him.

Resist him, standing firm in the faith. Now what does the devil do? Let me suggest that according to the scriptures there are several things that he does and does with a great deal of expertise. First, he loves to insinuate doubt.

Isn't that the way that he approached Lady Eve? Has God really said that something terrible will happen to you if you disobey? In other words, doubt what God said. And that is where it always begins, doubt concerning what God has revealed in his word. To insinuate doubt in the mind is the beginning of the driving of the wedge to separate us from God.

Then there is the spread of heresy. You begin by denying or doubting the authority of the Bible, and then you begin to be fascinated by weird ideas and deviations from sound doctrine. The third tactic of the devil is to sow discord.

For he knows that if Christians remain together they can encourage one another in fighting the enemy. But if he can divide, he can more easily conquer. Divisions in churches among those who claim to believe in the same Lord, those divisions are works of the devil.

For the devil not only insinuates doubt and encourages deviation from sound doctrine, but he sows the tares of discord among the weak in the field of God. And if there is anything that the devil loves to do more than all of these, it is to displace the centrality of Jesus Christ. If he can get the eyes of our faith off of Jesus and onto something else, he is already three quarters of the way onto victory.

We must behold no man saying Jesus only. To keep the eyes of faith fixed on him, that is the way to resist the devil. Notice that Peter says that we stand firm and we resist the devil in the faith.

What does that mean? It means that when the enemy would insinuate doubt, we keep on believing the promises of God. We keep on taking seriously the commands and the warnings of God. We remain bound to him by faith in his promises, in his precepts, and in his person.

Well, that is, of course, the statement of Jesus to Peter, who was advising him that there might be a way to glory without going the route of the cross. And our Lord would have nothing at all to do with a deviation from his father's will. So we can resist the devil, according to Peter, if we have our eyes wide open to the dangers that we face, and if we are onto the devices of the devil.

As Paul puts it, we are not ignorant of his devices, of his mode of operation, of his tactics and his strategies. We will fight doubt. We will refuse to deviate from sound doctrine.

We will be onto him when he seeks to sow discord among brothers and sisters. And above all, we will never let anything displace the centrality of Jesus Christ in this church. So we have the statements in James and in Peter.

Now there are several passages in 1 John. 1 John, chapter 5, and verse 19. 1 John 5, 19.

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. And by world here, he doesn't mean the planet, on which we live. But by world, he means that whole simple system of things which gets along without the authority of God.

A lifestyle that ignores God, a lifestyle that disregards his warnings, a lifestyle that will not conform to the Father's will. That is the world. At every level where God is disregarded, you have an evidence of the control of the evil one.

He defiles the world, he dominates the world, and ultimately will be the cause of the world's destruction. So 1 John 5, 19 reminds us that we are in the world, but we are not of the world. We are children of God, and we know that we are to be distinct from and separate from the world which is under the control of the evil one.

Continuing in 1 John, turning back to chapter 3 and verse 8. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. Christ came into the world to nullify the work of the devil.

He came to annihilate the devil and all his works. But whoever does what is sinful shows that he is a partisan under the command of the evil one. For the devil is a sinner from the beginning, and all who sin show that to that extent they are under the devil's influence.

And the reason why the strong Son of God appeared upon this earthly scene was to destroy the devil's work. So there's a war going on, and we either side with Christ who came to destroy the works of the devil, or we side with the evil one and make ourselves enemies of the Son of God. In other words, there simply is no room whatsoever for neutrality in this war.

We either side with the devil and his works, or we side with the strong Son of God who came to destroy the devil and his works. We make the work of Christ counterproductive. When we give our allegiance and obedience to his enemy.

First John chapter 2. And here John gives us the secret not only of how to resist the evil one, but how to overcome. First John chapter 2, beginning at the middle of verse 13 and going on into verse 14. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong.

And why are you strong? Because the Word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Strength to overcome the evil one, and this goes beyond resisting and repelling, it means winning, comes about when the Word of God lives in us. Remember that famous statement in the Psalms? Thy word have

I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.

If what we hear goes in one ear and out the other, then when we are tempted, we have nothing to draw on with which to resist and overcome. But if when we read the Word of God, or hear it read and expounded, we retain that word and it lives in us, then in the hour of need we can draw on it, and we can cite it, and we can resolve to stand by it, and to believe what God has said, and to obey what God commands, and so we resist the enemy, and we actually end up winning. After all, John had a great precedent for this kind of exhortation.

It is found in the fourth chapter of Matthew, in a passage we all know, where Jesus is tempted by the evil one in the wilderness. And every time that Satan brings from the outside a suggestion to the mind of Jesus, that he should not submit to God, but take matters into his own hands, that he should do the sensational and spectacular rather than the superficial, rather than the spiritual and sacrificial, but whenever the devil comes to him with this external solicitation to sin, how does Jesus deal with it? He refers to the scripture that lives in his heart. It is written, it is written, it is written, and he takes the Word of God and puts it in the devil's face, and resists, and wins.

Young men, that is new converts to the faith, I write to you because you are strong, and what is it that makes you strong? It is the indwelling, enlivening Word of God, and that enables you to resist and to overcome the evil one. It is extremely important that we, with the reading and the hearing of the Word of God, should let it find lodging within us and live within us, so that in the evil hour we may draw on it and win. The last passages we are going to look at are found in the letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians chapter 4, the fourth chapter of Ephesians beginning at verse 25. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin.

Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. Do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, along with every form of malice.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Notice that statement, buried as it were in the middle of all these exhortations. Do not give the devil a foothold.

How do we give the devil a foothold? We give the devil a foothold by speaking what is untrue concerning another member of the body of Christ. Lies, slander, idle and malicious gossip are very effective in destroying a sense of community, and that gives the devil more than a foothold. Or you take the matter of anger that turns out to be prolonged and sinful.

The Bible does not say that anger is always wrong. If there were an anger about child abuse, there would be no reform in that line. If there were no anger against the injustices of racism, there would be no reform along that line.

If there had been no anger on the part of abolitionists concerning the slave trade, it would still continue. There is a righteous indignation which we must experience in order that there might be reform. But most of our indignation is not righteous, it is self-centered.

And too much of our indignation spills over beyond sunset into the sunrise of a new day, creating resentment, bitterness, and a spirit of vindictiveness. Be angry about the things that really matter, and let it be constructive anger that issues not in the destruction of the opposition, but in the reform of a bad situation. Don't get angry.

That's it, be angry, but do it without sinning, which means you know when that anger should have limits, and it should always be for a constructive and reforming purpose, not because our ego has been flattened. Also, we are warned about grieving the Holy Spirit through a pattern of conduct which is not in conformity with the will of God. We either grieve the Spirit and gladden the enemy, or we gladden the Spirit and cause the enemy to sulk.

The last passage we're going to look at in this hurried look at the devil and his works, which we must resist and by God's grace overcome, is found in the second half of Ephesians chapter 6. And we're compressing here what some others have expounded at considerable length. One of my prized volumes is by a Puritan named William Gurnall. He had the parish in Lebanon, in Suffolk, and one of the finest examples of English Gothic architecture.

He was minister there for 35 years. He lived from 1616 to 1679. Well, he wrote a book called *The Christian in Complete Armor*, and here's the full title that takes the page.

The Christian in Complete Armor, a treatise of the saints' war against the devil, wherein a discovery is made of that great enemy of God and his people in his policies, power, empire, and wickedness. And the Christian is furnished with spiritual arms for the battle, held on with his armor, taught the use of his weapon, together with the happy issue of the whole war, period. That's the title.

The book is in two volumes. Volume one takes 589 pages of close type, and volume two takes an even 600 pages, making 1189. William Gurnall, G-U-R-N-A-L-L.

He was a Puritan who stayed within the Church of England when they had the Great Disruption in 1662. Now, obviously, we're not going to go at this in the same kind of detail that Gurnall did, but I do want to point out the highlights, and they are all found in Ephesians 6, beginning at verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. That is, you've remained resistant successfully. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore, since you've got a fight on your hands, put on the full armor of God. Why? So that when the day of evil comes, you will be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to still stand. Stand firm, then, with the belt of truth buckled about your waist, the breastplate of righteousness in place, your feet fitted with the gospel of peace as a firm footing.

That's one pair of shoes that they won't have in the Battle Museum. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, and pray.

Pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. What's he saying here? He's saying that we face a supernatural kingdom, which is determined to hinder us in our quest for holiness, in our witness to Jesus Christ, and in our service to others in need.

We're not fighting against flesh and blood, we're fighting against the powers of darkness and the forces of evil. The enemy wants to keep us from being holy, from being like Jesus Christ. The enemy wants to hinder our witness and compromise it, so that we lose credibility.

He tries to detract us from the goals that Christ would set before his church, and the enemy seeks to hinder our service to others by turning us inward on ourselves and becoming egotistical. But this supernatural kingdom of darkness against which we fight is matched by the supernatural power that comes from our risen living Lord. We are to be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power.

So if there's a supernatural kingdom of darkness, there is also a supernatural power that comes from the Lord of righteousness and light, and we are to draw on his strength for this struggle. Jesus put it very plainly, deflating our ego. Without me, you can do nothing.

That's why Paul resolved in Philippians to say, I can do all things through Christ who makes me strong. Did we in our own strength confide, all striving would be losing? Martin Luther knew that. We're not the right man on our side, a man of God's own choosing.

So we are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. And instead of panicking in the evil hour, instead of surrendering, instead of stupidly trying to negotiate with the enemy, we are to take our stand, refuse to budge. That is the way of resisting the enemy.

We take the shield of faith. What God has said, we will not deny. What God has said, we will not doubt.

What God has said, we will resolutely do. That is the way of resisting the enemy. And above all, realizing our weakness, realizing our lack of self-control and alertness, realizing our foolishness in thinking that we can negotiate favorable terms with the enemy, we are to pray, to pray for ourselves, to pray for others who are also involved in the same spiritual struggle, to be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

These are the ways in which we can recognize the enemy, resist the enemy, and ultimately rout the enemy. Now there's much more that I could have said had we had the time, but the race of the human race along St. Clair and a few other places, with my patience to the test, but we got here. We got time for one question.

All right, is there a question from this side of the house? Boys are going? Yes. But his purpose is always the same, to slander us in the sight of God and to slander God to slander us so that we are divided. That's his work.

He's telling God, the reason why Job serves you is because you've given him a bumper crop and a fat bank account and a high rate of interest. Take those things away and see how he's going to curse you to your face. He is misrepresenting Job to God, and then he'll turn around and misrepresent God to us.

His purpose is to drive a wedge between us and God, and we must resist that, and we must overcome it so that nothing separates us from the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Absolutely. Remember, we have the Holy Spirit in opposition to the evil one.

Ultimately, it's not merely that we have the Holy Spirit, but that the Holy Spirit has us. That's what does it. Now let's conclude prayer.

Lord, we thank you that in our weakness, your strength is made perfect. Enable us to be aware of the strategies of the evil one and not to be preoccupied with Satan, but with Jesus Christ. He might ever remain central in our hearts and minds, and that his word may live in us and enable us to stand firm and win.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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