

WHY ME? HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HURTING: SECTION THREE

Three Responses That Empower the Sufferer – Submission/The Application

In seeking to personally apply the critical response of submission, it is vital to gain a practical understanding of James 4:6-10 and 1 Peter 5:6-11. Since only James specifically uses the word “submit,” this would be a good place to start. *Hypotasso* was a military term used in that day to describe the condition of being under someone’s authority. The imperative sets in motion a series of contrasts, indicating the intense struggle that can exist within the suffering Christian. He must choose between pride and humility; turning to God or listening to the devil. Neither choice is simple or easy, since the right choice will mean a negative emotional state rather than a positive one; and voluntarily lowering oneself in favor of opting for the status quo.

From these contrasts, we obtain insight into the essence of our struggle with adversity. God’s desire is that we exercise humility and submit to His will for our lives; accepting the suffering He has allowed, no matter how negative and painful it might be. At the same time, the devil is right there stirring up our sinful pride, which cannot tolerate the humbling nature of an adverse circumstance. If successful, Satan can move us toward a response of rebellion rather than submission, so that we turn away from, rather than draw near to God (4:8). This temptation can be incredibly strong since it is launched at us when we are hurting and vulnerable. It can also be highly appealing because who would rather cry than laugh? Who in their right mind prefers misery over happiness? Why in the world would someone give up joy in exchange for mourning, or sunshine in return for gloom? (4:9)

Therefore, James encourages the right response by stating it in the form of a promise in v10 –

“Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

In this way, he challenges us to believe that the trade-off will be worth it! James reminds us of the goal for the entire process. It consists of God “exalting” us to new spiritual heights which would be unattainable apart from the experience of suffering, and our submission to God during the course of our distress. This is precisely the recommended response in 1 Peter 5:6-11. The warning of James to avoid a response motivated by pride in resisting the efforts of the devil, is confirmed in 1 Peter 5:5 and 5:8-9. Even though Peter doesn’t specifically give the command to “submit” as James does, it is strongly implied. God’s ultimate authority over us is mentioned twice. In v6, Peter speaks of God’s mighty hand. In v11, he gives a benediction, affirming God’s dominion. What better choice can we make than submitting to our God, who is in sovereign control of our lives?

Because this initial response of submission is so essential in setting the stage for the fulfillment of the other two, we will continue our consideration of it in one additional segment next week.