

Resolving Conflict By Cultivating Repentance Part 2 sermonaudio.com

Epistle of James

By Ty Blackburn

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Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of James. James 4. Just to be clear, we do have a church, we have a number of people that have a slight mental problem that they like to go camping and a couple of times a year they camp together and they have a worship service up there when they camp and I'm more of the mind of one of the comedians that says, "Camping was what everyone did before they had houses." He also says, "If it's so great being in the outdoors, why do all the bugs want to get in my house?" So anyway, but if you're a camper, then feel free, let someone know and they'll definitely let you know in the fall and in the spring they do that. Anyway, so we praise God that we're able to worship and they're worshipping without rain today and the Lord has given us a beautiful week and today we'll be having some more rain but he knows what's best.

Anyway, we're in James 4 and we've been titling the messages "Resolving Conflict" throughout the entire section, "Resolving Conflict," and today the title of the message is again "Resolving Conflict" and it's the same exact message as last week, "Resolving Conflict By Cultivating Repentance." So this is "Resolving Conflict By Cultivating Repentance, Part 2." We're going to have three messages on this title because James's focus in verses 7 to 10 of James 4, those four verses are really about describing for us repentance and what it really looks like. He's calling us to repentance. James as he writes to the believers he's writing to, he wants to call them to repent of the problems that they have, not just to know about their problems but to really make a change. So his whole aim in the section is to call his readers to repentance and repentance is something that is often very much under-emphasized. Certainly in the world it is. It's a complete foreign thing to the world, but even in the church repentance is something that is under-emphasized.

Now, to repent, the biblical concept means to turn from sin to God. It means to be going in one direction, the Old Testament words, the two Hebrew words we talked about last week, one is "sorrow" and the other is "turning" and these two words are both translated with the English word "repent" in the Old Testament. So it means a sorrow for sin and the idea is sorrow for sin not just in the consequences earthly, humanly speaking, but a sorrow for sin before God; a sense of the odiousness of our sin to God and a desire to turn from sin to God for cleansing.

So that's what repentance is, turning from sin to God. It's something that we shared again last week, that Luther in his 95 theses that started the Protestant Reformation, the first two are about this issue, repentance versus penance, the Catholic misunderstanding and perversion of this doctrine, this important doctrine. Luther said in his first thesis: when our Lord and Master Jesus said, "Repent," he wanted the entire life of believers to be one of penitence. That's penitence not penance. That is an attitude of repentance. Our whole lives are to be an attitude of turning from sin to God. And I mentioned that wonderful quote by Philip Henry, the father of Matthew Henry, who said he intended to carry his repentance all the way with him to the very gates of heaven. There will be no need in heaven but until heaven, there is a need for repentance because we still, as believers, sin and the mark of the believer that is pursuing God is this attitude of continually turning from sin, mourning over sin and turning to God.

So James is saying now, resolve conflict, because that's the focus of this whole section is the conflicts they're having, resolve conflict by cultivating repentance. This is what the action points are in verses 7 to 10. We've noted as we read it again in a moment, you'll see there are 10 commands, 10 imperatives in these four verses, and these commands, these imperatives are basically aimed at describing for us what repentance really looks like, what it really is. So he's telling us what repentance looks like and, thus, how to repent in these verses.

So let's read verses 1 to 10 and we're going to be focusing on verses 7 to 10. James 4:1-10.

1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for speaking to us in your word, for giving us everything that is necessary for life and godliness, for giving us a book which is sufficient to thoroughly equip the man of God, the child of God, to live a life that is pleasing to you. Now may you apply your word to our hearts for the glory of your Son and we pray in his name. Amen.

Resolving conflict by cultivating repentance. That's what he's dealing with in these four verses, 7 to 10. He's wanting us to repent and to turn from being people who are characterized by conflict, wars and battles, we said the Greek words could be translated for conflicts and quarrels, really wars and battles. You're having these relational conflicts and they come from your hearts. The problem is not the people, that you're surrounded by difficult people. That's what we think it is. "If I just had some better companions. If the people in my life were not such a mess, I wouldn't be losing my temper, I wouldn't be having all the problems I'm having relationally." It's like the poster I heard someone saw one time in one of those stores that said the one consistent reality in all of your relational problems is you. That's what God is saying. The one common denominator in all of our conflicts is us. So he says that the problem is really your heart. It's not the people in your life that make you the way you are, it's not the circumstances in your life that make you the way you are, it is your heart that makes you the way you are.

That's what he's saying to all of us. The reason we have problems is because we have sinful hearts, and he makes this powerful clear in the first six verses and he tells us how awful it is that it's not just that we're murdering and that we're doing violence to other people in envying, it's that we are committing spiritual adultery, we are setting ourselves up as enemies of God, and he tells us how bad it is and now he says, "What are you going to do about it?" And essentially, it's repent, verses 7 to 10. You've got to repent. You've got to change your mind and change your heart and change your direction and change your life, and this is what repentance looks like, verses 7 to 10.

The first three imperatives we could say really summarize one part of it. "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Which we looked at those two last week, number 2 and 3 imperatives: resist the devil, draw near to God, and we said that essentially the message there is, "Go to God." Repentance begins by going to God, by like the prodigal son, remembering to go back home to my father. You can't fix yourself. Go to God first and that's really the essence, the starting point, the genesis of repentance. That's the first step.

Now the next step is contained in the next two imperatives, number 4 and 5 of those 10 imperatives that we see in the passage. The first, "Submit to God." The second, "Resist." The third, "Draw near." And the fourth and fifth imperatives also in verse 8, "Cleansing and purify." I think they together say basically the same thing again. Two parallel clauses that say basically the same thing which is, "Cultivate repentance by seeking cleansing." The issue is cleansing.

So repentance involves cleansing from sin and so we're going to look at this morning the concept of repenting by cleansing, washing, and we cultivate repentance by pursuing this

cleansing. That's what he's telling us, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." And there are three points that we're going to consider the outline under this morning, this passage, this section of verse 8, and the first is, now what we can say is remember, it's we're cultivating repentance and repentance is, first of all, going to God. That's what we saw in the first three imperatives, but today it's going to God for cleansing. That's really the theme of today's message, going to God for cleansing. Repenting is going to God and it's not just going to God and just saying, "Here I am," it's going to God for cleansing. That's what these next two imperatives say.

It's interesting that the idea of going to God just permeates the whole passage, but particularly when you understand that you go to God, draw near to God, and as you draw near to God, you're going to need to be cleansed. These two words for "cleanse" and "purify," these next two imperatives in verse 8, cleanse and purify, have strong overtones, the rich overtones of ceremonial cleansing of the Old Testament. These two Greek words that are here in our New Testament for "cleanse" and "purify" are found often in the Old Testament, the Greek version of the Old Testament, that is the Septuagint. That's the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic but translated into Greek in the 2nd century BC, and when it was translated, these are the words that the translators used to translate Old Testament concepts related to ritual purification, ceremonial cleansing. These two words are rich with that imagery. They are found in places like Leviticus and Exodus and when you're describing what needs to happen for you to come in the presence of God, and the idea is to come into the presence of God, you've got to be clean. So they would have to wash themselves; they would have to purify themselves; go through ritualistic purification because you just don't go into the presence of God as you are. You must be clean.

So James is saying when you're repenting, now you've got to go to God but remember, as you go to God, he's not going to not deal with your sin, you've got to be ready to deal with your sin. You've got to be ready to be cleansed. Don't cleanse yourself before you go. You can't do that. That's completely the opposite of the Gospel. That's a man-centered self-righteousness kind of based religion where you clean yourself up to go to God. No, if God is dealing with your heart, go to him. You can't cleanse yourself. "Can a leopard change her spots? Can the Ethiopian change the color of his skin? Neither can you who are wicked do righteousness." You can't. You need God to do it.

So we must go to him, but when you go to him, he's not going to leave you as you are, and so the first point he's going to say, our urgent need of cleansing. Our urgent need of cleansing. As we go to God, the first thing that becomes clear is we need to be clean and we're dirty, we're filthy. The urgency of it is really clear in the way that James makes this statement, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." Do you see the parallel? It's real clear, the verb "cleanse hands, sinners; purify hearts, double-minded." In fact in the Greek, it's only three words. It actually reads literally, "Cleanse hands, sinners." It doesn't say, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners." There is no pronoun there. "Cleanse hands, sinners. Purify hearts, double-minded." I think, again, one of the ways he expresses with kind of his blunt confrontational style. "Cleanse hands, sinners. Purify hearts, double-minded." Go to God, yes, but you're going

to have to be ready to cleanse yourself. It's not a light thing to go to God, into God's presence.

You see this and I encourage you to read Exodus 19 sometime this week. Exodus 19 describes what happened when the nation of Israel had come out of Egypt through the exodus, had been delivered through the Red Sea, now they come to Mount Sinai where they're going to receive the law, and God speaking to Moses says, "I want you to tell the people that I've brought you out of Egypt on eagle's wings, I've set you apart as a kingdom of priests to myself. You're a holy nation. You're a kingdom of priests that belong to me and so I want to appear to the people and I want you," and what he says, "I'm going to appear to the people and so go and make them wash themselves and purify themselves," Exodus 19:10. Actually "consecrate themselves" is the word that's used in Exodus 19:10, but the word "consecrate" in the Greek translation of the Old Testament is the same word as "purify" here in James 4:8. Consecrate and purify, the same Greek word. "Consecrate" means "set yourself apart from that which is common; set yourself apart unto God; separate yourself from the things that are not of him." That's what it means to consecrate and purify is the same idea. Purify and cleansing is the idea of getting rid of the things that don't belong in the presence of God so that you can go into the presence of God.

And the way James says this, "Cleanse hands, sinners. Purify hearts, double-minded," is just emphasizing that. I mean, this is kind of just forceful, almost like blunt, "I'm going to be as blunt as possible and clear and direct as I can. You need to be cleansed. You have an urgent need for cleansing." In fact, that's heightened by the fact that he calls us sinners and double-minded. I mean, think about that. He says, "Cleanse hands, sinners," and it's really striking when you put it in context of the whole tone of the letter.

Now I said he's blunt and he is, right? He's vivid. He uses lots of word pictures and he's very direct in his language, but throughout this letter, this epistle, he is constantly referring to the people to whom he writes as his brethren, his brothers, his brothers and sisters. "Listen, I'm writing to you who are my brothers and sisters." Over and over again, "My brethren. My brethren. My brethren." I mean, just look back in chapter 3, verse 10, "From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." Chapter 4, verse 11, right after he gets past this section that we're dealing with, verses 1 to 10, look what he says in verse 11, "Do not speak against one another, brethren." Hey, don't speak against each other, brothers. But here when he says you need to repent, he says, "Repent, sinners. Repent, double-minded." And it's appropriate in the translations for him to say, "You sinners. You double-minded," because he's talking to us. He's not talking to somebody out there.

Sometimes the church can be that way where you can actually get so caught up in what's going on in the culture that we preach and we just talk about all that's wrong out there, but that's not the way that God does it in his word. You don't hear Jesus taking up the topics of the day or Paul taking up the topics of the day that much. Now I'm not saying that you never can and there are times you ought to, but the focus should always be as you look at those things, to say, "We must follow Christ." That's the tone of Scripture.

So James is saying not, "Look at how bad the sinners out there and the double-minded out there. Look how double-minded they are, how sinful they are." No, he's saying you and me, we're the sinners. We're the double-minded. And I think he has this force because as you go to God, as you are supposed to do, you run to him. Just like we said last week, the prodigal son, remember he left the pigsty and he went home to his father. He felt, "That's where I've got to go. I've got to go to my father. He's my only hope." That's where repentance starts but as you go in the presence of God, he's not going to leave you as you are.

Just ask Isaiah, what he experienced when he went in the presence of God. Remember Isaiah 6 where he recounts for us the testimony of his calling to be a prophet? He starts off kind of just straightforward, he says, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. The same year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on his throne high and lofty and the train of his robe filled the temple. I saw the Lord." He's telling us his experience of seeing God and he tells us what he saw and he tells us what he heard. "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne high and lofty and the train of his robe filled the temple. The smoke filled the temple. The foundations of the temple shook and the angels, I saw the seraphim and with two wings he flew, with two wings he covered his eyes, with two wings he covered his mouth. And the seraphim were saying back and forth, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.'" He sees that and Isaiah, what's Isaiah's response? "Woe is me! I am undone for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the Lord. Woe is me, I'm coming apart at the seams." That word is so strong, "I'm undone." I am disintegrating. I feel like my soul is coming apart as I've stood in the presence of God's holiness and now I've become completely amazingly aware of how sinful I am.

I don't think Isaiah was a guy that had a problem with foul language, vulgar language. He was of a priestly family and a man who, I think, already loved the Lord, but what happened was this man who loved the Lord came into the very presence of God. He was overwhelmed with how sinful he was. To see God in his glory is to see ourselves, his light exposes our darkness.

So that's what James is saying. "Listen, if you're going to seek God, you will have to deal with your sin because God will deal with it." Now the wonderful thing is, though, don't deal with it before you go to him. No, go to him and in his presence he will deal with it. Don't forget that. The first step is go to God. That's what he said, "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Now cleanse hands, sinners; purify hearts, double-minded."

But it's an urgent need. That's the force of this. And the fact that he calls us sinners and double-minded, let's just stop there for a moment. There is a tendency in the church, the evangelical Bible-believing church to mistakenly focus too much on our identity in Christ, that we've been adopted into his family, which we are, I'm not saying...these are truths, I'm saying it's a balance issue, that sometimes folks will teach that because we

have been washed in the blood of Christ and saved, we don't have to, we should never call ourselves sinners.

I remember being in a group of people who were praying. It was just a time, we spent some time praying and there was a minister in the group who after the prayer reproved a woman that she had prayed and she had prayed, "Lord, forgive me of my sins and I'm a sinner. I need your forgiveness." And he basically said, "No, you don't ask for forgiveness anymore because we don't need to be forgiven anymore because Christ has taken care of all of our sins. You just thank God for your forgiveness." Well, I said, I didn't know about it, I didn't see what happened, I heard about it later. I said, "Well, that's just not sound teaching." Jesus said that when you pray, remember when they said, "Teach us to pray," and he taught them to pray? He said, "Our Father which is in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses. Forgive us our sins." We are to ask for forgiveness because we need forgiveness and because we need to acknowledge that we're still sinful. True biblical theology is that, yes, we are forgiven but we're still sinners, and sometimes people will say things like, "We're saints who occasionally sin." They're just over-emphasizing. I mean, the reality is, yes, we're saints. The Bible calls us saints. We're saints positionally. If you've come to repent of your sins and place your faith in Christ, if you've experienced initial repentance and saving in initial faith, you saw yourself as a sinner, you repented, you turned to God in faith in Christ and you realize that his blood was shed in your place, he paid for your sins, then you are now a saint in the eyes of God. That's true and it will never change no matter how bad your behavior is if you truly know him. I mean, this isn't an excuse to sin and if you really know him, you won't take it as an excuse to sin. If you take it as an excuse to sin, that calls into question the reality of whether you really know him because when he saves you, the mark of the saved person is a desire to be holy, not to live in the pigsty anymore. But if you have been saved, he calls you a saint but the reality is you are still in and of yourself a sinner. You're at the same time justified and a sinner. This is what the Reformers worked out. At the same time, a saint and a sinner. Not one or the other.

So you're not a saint who occasionally sins. Don't call yourself a sinner. No, you can call yourself a sinner and you can call yourself a saint, both are true at the same time if you're in Christ which means you can always be thanking God for the wonder of his forgiveness and you can always be repenting for the ugliness of your sin and that's what healthy spirituality of the Christian life looks like. There should be a growing repentance.

One of the helpful illustrations, the most helpful illustration I've ever heard was one that Jerry Bridges uses in one of his books. I think it was "The Discipline of Grace," his book. He's got several wonderful books. That's a really good book, "The Discipline of Grace." And he says that the Christian life, describing how it's an ongoing repentance in the Christian life, he says what happens when a person gets saved is that the lights come on in their life, and suddenly they see things they never saw before. They see how awful their sin was. As an unbeliever, you don't have a concept to really seeing your sin. You may see sin in the fact of its human dimension. You can see that you're really messing up your life, you're hurting people, but to see it in a God-ward way is a grace that can only

happen by God's power. He gives you eyes to see and ears to hear and so now you see it in a God-ward way and you see, now you see yourself differently. It's that the lights have really come on.

He says the lights have come on, it used to be a dark room but the lights have come on but the lights are on a dimmer switch and so the person who is saved and repents, they see some things in their life because it's like, imagine you're in a filthy wreck of a house, unimaginably filthy and a wreck, it's like hoarding plus, you know, you have like 80 cats living in your house, dogs, whatever, birds, just nasty. So they've left their mark everywhere but you can't see it because you're in the dark and you've grown immune to the smell, apparently too, if you've been living there that long. So suddenly the lights come on and now you see and so you begin to realize, "Oh, I can't believe I'm living in this!" And so you clean up some things and by God's grace, God's helping you, you repent of things and so you clean up the house.

Well, the closer you walk with God, what happens? The light turns up and so the next level of light, and this should be a progressive day-by-day increasing growth in light. What happens is you see more and more of the things you didn't see before and you're appalled at what you now see, even in a sense in a greater way than what you saw before because you now see God in a greater way and you see the ugliness of sin in a greater way so that even though – now think about this – the room is getting progressively cleaner. You understand that it's growing from really filthy and foul, to not so foul and filthy, to a little less foul and filthy, but it's really markedly different but the believer who is now getting to this level where now they're looking at stains on the carpet.

You know, have you ever had that experience where you see a stain and it's been there for a long time. I mean, you ladies don't have this problem probably, or not many of you as much. Some of us guys, you know, it's like you're used to it and it kind of blends in. If you stop and think about it, "Hmm, I wonder what that is." But I just never stop and think about it. Why waste time doing that? I might have to then clean it up. No, but you see something that you haven't seen before and you're really thinking, "Man, that really is kind of nasty. What would that be? I need to clean that." So what's happening is God is progressively sanctifying you so that what you see, you're even more appalled at, so you're even more broken and more repentant though it's over less heinous sins. Do you see that? Because every sin is heinous in the sight of God.

So the most humble, when we're in our 80s or 90s, if we're following Christ rightly, we ought to be the most humble that we've ever been, the most broken that we've ever been because we're carrying our repentance all the way to the gate of heaven. So there's this urgent need of cleansing. James is saying we need to talk to ourselves this way, "Cleanse your hands, you sinner; purify your heart, you double-minded." We need to be ruthless with ourselves by God's grace but in the presence of God. Always in the presence of God. Always seeking him. It's a fruitless thing to try to cleanse yourself apart from his presence and his enabling. So go to him. Go to him. Go to him, but in going to him, be willing to be ruthless with yourself. "Lord, I want you to cleanse me. I want you to show

me how ugly this is so that I can hate it more. I know I don't even see the half of it, Lord. Help me."

So our urgent need of cleansing. Now the second point: the only source for cleansing. We're cultivating repentance. We're going to God for our cleansing, first of all by seeing our urgent need for cleansing, and secondly, the only source for cleansing. I mentioned the words "cleanse" and "purify" connote, or even denote, I mean, they speak of the ceremonial cleansing of the priests going to serve the Lord in the temple, the tabernacle. To serve the Lord, to go into his presence, they had to go through ritual washings and they had to not only wash themselves but sacrifices were always involved. You know, to become a priest, there had to be a sacrifice and when you went back on duty, there had to be a sacrifice. And for the high priest to go in, there had to be sacrifices for him before he could even go in and take sacrifices for the people.

So what is that saying? Cleansing and purification, this is great need, this urgent need for cleansing. There is only one source for cleansing and that is the sacrifice and it never changes. The one source for cleansing is the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross. So as we go to God for cleansing of the things that we're seeing in our lives today that we didn't see yesterday, it's still to that same fountain, the blood of Jesus Christ. That's the only thing that can cleanse us. That's the only thing that can purify our hearts. It's the only thing that can cleanse our hands, is the blood of Christ. You can't cleanse yourself. Jesus must cleanse you.

Now, you have been cleansed, in a sense, right? If you have been born again, you have been cleansed but there is still this regular ongoing need for cleansing but you're still going to his, you're looking back to his sacrifice and saying, "On account of his blood, Lord, I know I'm clean." It's not because I'm trying to work up a level of sorrow to earn the status. No, I'm always looking to the finished work of Christ and Christ alone. "There is a fountain filled with blood/ Drawn from Immanuel's veins/ And sinners plunged beneath that flood/ Lose all their guilty stains." That's the only place for cleansing.

So we go to God through Christ. It never changes. The cross, that's why the cross becomes so precious as we see, as we grow to understand more of the heinousness of our sin, you see the cross becomes more and more precious. I now see that my sin was so much worse than I ever knew. I'm so much more selfish, so much more prideful than I ever imagined, but his blood is sufficient for even this. He's able to save to the uttermost the one who's hope is in him. So his blood becomes more precious.

So we considered our urgent need of cleansing, the only source for cleansing, and now we come to the third point: the believer's path to cleansing. The believer's path to cleansing. Now it's essentially confession. In a word, it's confession. He gives us the instruction here to confess. He doesn't use the word "confess," but by saying "cleanse" and by saying "purify," he begs the questions: well, what do we do? I mean, the only place we can be cleansed is in the blood of Christ, the sacrifice of Jesus. Of course.

1 John, just turn over a few pages toward the back of your Bible, past 1 and 2 Peter to 1 John 1:7, "but if we walk in the Light," this is 1 John 1:7, "but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." You see, there is only one thing that cleanses, it's the blood of Christ. It cleanses us from all sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." Look here, verse 9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." John is talking to believers and he says, "Listen, if we confess our sins," the word "confess" in the New Testament is the Greek word "homologeō." It means "to say the same thing as." If we say the same thing as God says about our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleans us from all unrighteousness.

So cleansing comes through saying the same thing as God says, and we need that ongoing cleansing. We were cleansed once-and-for-all in an ultimate sense when you repent and believe the Gospel. You are at that time justified and sanctified in a positional sense; set apart from sin; you're a saint forever. Nothing can change that positionally but in a progressive sanctification way or an experiential way, you need to be growing in holiness and you need to be continually washed.

A great illustration of this is John 13 when Jesus, remember when he washes the disciples' feet? He's teaching us this reality even there. Remember, he washes their feet and he comes to Peter. Remember, nobody else has taken the time to wash the feet. The disciples, you know, they're proud, "I'm not going to wash the feet." I don't know if anybody thought of it or not. They probably didn't even think of it. If they had, they would have said, "No, I'm not going to do it. We need somebody. We need a servant." Because a servant, the lowest servant in the family is supposed to wash the feet. Well, Jesus girds himself as a servant and begins to wash their feet and remember Peter's reaction? "Lord, you shall not wash my feet. There's no way I'm letting you wash my feet." And Jesus says, "If I don't wash your feet, you have no part in me." Peter, 180 to the other extreme, "Well then, don't wash my feet only but wash my head and my hands. If I've got to be washed by you to have a part in you, wash everything." And Jesus says, "No, Peter, one who is bathed, one is bathed needs only to wash his feet. And you are clean, but not all of you." He's saying if you have been bathed in the sense of the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, the work of God in saving you once-and-for-all from sins, it happens at a moment in time, you may not always know when that moment is, but it has to happen at some point when you're trusting Christ, truly repenting and truly trusting. Some people can identify a season of life it happened in. But at some point, it became real in the annals of heaven that you were justified. You were washed. That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6, I think it's verse 9, "For such were some of you," talking about all these different terms of sin, you know, adulterers, slanderers, homosexuals, all these other things, and he says, "And such were some of you but you were washed, you were sanctified." That's speaking of that washing of regeneration.

So Jesus says, "You must be washed. You must be bathed, but if you've been bathed, you still need to wash your feet." Do you see that? You still need Jesus to wash you, to wash your feet. The feet are that which comes into contact with the world in the same way that

the hands do. You need to wash your hands even though you've been born again and washed eternally, and you need to regularly wash your hands. I mean, think about that. As a little kid, how many times did you hear, especially if you were a boy, some girls maybe liked to do it on their own, but, "Wash your hands. Have you washed your hands?" No, I just was outside in the dirt and why would I wash my hands before I pick up my sandwich? "Wash your hands." You need to wash your hands regularly.

That's what James is saying, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, double-minded." Now what he's saying, then, the Christian's path to cleansing is confession, in a word, but there are two types of confession I think he's calling us to. Two parts, really. Not so much types, parts. First part, this is 3A, the Christian's path to cleansing is point 3, A is we must confess our sins. Plural. We must confess our sins.

He says, "Cleanse your hands." The hands are representative of that which we do, in the same way that feet, washing the feet, it's that which touches the world. So the deeds that we've done, he says, "Look at the deeds that you've done. As you come into the presence of God, in repenting you're going to have to deal honestly and transparently with the things that you've done." The words. The actions. What have you done and how does it violate God's holy law? The Lord wants you to deal with those things. He wants you to confess those things. He wants you to say the same thing as God says about them, homologeo.

This means that he wants me to call my sin what he calls it. So if I got angry and sinned in my words to someone and I say, "Hey, I'm sorry. I'm really frustrated." I shouldn't have gotten frustrated. Well, it's good that I'm saying I'm sorry but it would be better if I said, "You know, that was sinful anger and in my tone of voice, I had a murderous intent in my heart, according to the Scriptures. Would you forgive me?" Because when you sin in anger and you have an attitude of looking down on someone, Jesus says that's the essence of murder, according to Matthew 5. So call it what God calls it. You know, not, "I should have not said that. I shouldn't have lied." Try to say what God says about it.

Now, I'm talking about horizontal confession which is a key part of it, but the first thing is go to God because we're talking about going to God and repenting. So when you go to God in repenting, you do the same thing, try to speak and call it what he calls it. Don't try to minimize it. That's such a basic part of our nature, isn't it, to try to explain away our sin. I struggle with it. I remember years ago in ministry, I said on a number of occasions, I don't know how many times I said this, but I would say, "You know, I tried to call you," and I really didn't try to call them. I thought about calling them. So if you would say, "Well, I tried to think about, I tried to call," but what I really imply, "I called you and I got a busy signal, or I called you and I couldn't leave a message." Because there was a time, you young people, when you could call someone and you got this thing that went bah, bah, bah, and that meant they were on the phone. Can you believe that? This is before call waiting. Remember? Some of you can remember that. You testify and tell them that I'm not lying. Or everybody didn't have voicemail and so you might have it ring and ring and ring and ring and ring and finally you hang up.

"I tried to call you." I had to repent of that and say, "No, I lied." You know, I should have said, I should have said at the time, "I thought about calling but I didn't. Or I meant to call and I didn't. Please forgive me." You see, I'm trying to explain away my sin. That's the ugliness of the sinful human heart, to minimize sin. Humility calls it what it is. "No, I can be a liar. I lied. Please forgive me. I've asked God to forgive me, I want to ask you to forgive me."

That's what cleansing your hands is. So we go to God and we say, "Lord, you see me as I am. This is what I think I've done." But it's a sense that really since you can't, and I think this is so helpful, it's so good to know God wants us to be clean more than we want to be clean. And remember what happened with Isaiah? He said, "Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips." But he didn't have to cleanse himself. Do you remember? He just knows he deserves to die. He can't believe he's still alive. Remember, the Lord commands the seraph to get one of the tongs from the altar and takes a coal and puts it on his tongue? And he's cleansed.

So you come to God, in a sense, there's really the posture is we repent, we go to him. And I think this is a helpful image, spiritually with the Lord, think of yourself as like a three-year-old who has gotten in some kind of mess and you're so messy, you've got stuff all over your hands and you just come to your mom and you just show your hands. "I know this isn't how it's supposed to be." The child says, "I can't do anything about it. I don't know what I need to do but I'm just showing you my hands. I need you to cleanse me." So you come to God with a transparency that says, "Lord, here are my actions. Look what I'm doing right here. I was getting sinfully angry again. I don't even know the full depth of how dirty it is, I'm just coming to you. Cleanse me. Show me. Let your word show me what to even call this."

So it's, "Cleanse your hands," then it's, "purify your hearts," but you don't stop at just the cleansing of the hands. He says, "purify your hearts." So the first thing was the Christian's path to cleansing is confession, we must confess our sins. That was the first subpoint we just covered. The second subpoint is: we must confess our sinfulness. Purify your hearts or I almost said we must confess our sin, without an "s." You could say that too. Sin is the problem in my heart.

You see, one of the Puritans I was reading the other day said that this stream of our sins, the filthy polluted stream of our sins that you see flowing away from us, comes from a filthy polluted fountain, the heart. And James is saying, "Don't just confess the things that you've touched and that you've messed up and your dirty hands but take God and be transparent with your heart." Lord, I know these things flows from a wicked heart. And what you can see already beginning confessing but then again, come to him and say, "Lord, I don't even know the half of it. I need you to cleanse me. Help me. Have mercy on me on account of Christ. Here I am in a mess. I can't fix it. I don't know what to do." Because as we purify the heart, that's going to make the change.

So the fruits, in a sense, of our sinfulness are the actions. So you confess the fruit. You call it what God calls it. Yes, lying, murder, adultery, impurity, pride. You call it what

God calls it, the actions, but then you look at the heart, the motives, the idols of the heart. "What I was really wanting, what I was lusting after, what I was desiring was this." We want to get to that and that's what he's been dealing with in this passage. He's been talking about the heart. The reason that I get angry is because I want something I'm not getting. "Lord, look at the words that I said were evil, the things that I said were awful." That's the hands. "Cleanse my hands. But the reason I said those words, I already know part of it. I don't know the full measure of it but I know I was wanting something, I was wanting this more than I wanted to please you. Look at my filthy heart, Lord."

That's the kind of work of repentance God wants to do, and that's the kind of work of repentance that will, as we labor at that, as we cultivate a lifestyle of this, he will change us. This is the key. Repentance is a part of the Christian life and it has to be an ongoing, daily, moment-by-moment attitude of life that we're pursuing, and if we make that our heart's intent, he will transform us into the image of Christ. You know, I said think of yourself as that little child, as a little child that can't do anything for himself, that's just a mess and now if they were in the mud, they were having a good time, right? You were having a good time in the mud but now you realize, "I can't even put my hand," maybe you put your hand in your mouth. Imagine you're a little kid, right? You put your hand in your mouth, dirt, and my eyes are itching and now I've wiped my eye, and now my eye is hurting because I've got dirt in my eye. My eye is itching, my mouth is...I want to get that stuff off my tongue but I can't. I've got these hands like this. So go to your mother. Here I am.

This whole passage is bracketed in verse 6 and verse 10. Look how it's bracketed. "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." Do you see that in verse 6? Look at verse 10, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." It's humility. That word is lowliness. It's to make yourself low before God. You make yourself low, you say, "I'm helpless. I've got no ability to do these things." And you go to God like that, he will give you grace. He will change us into the image of his Son. May God help us do that.

Let's pray together.

Father, we pray that you would help us to grow in repentance. We pray for your Spirit to do the work that is necessary in our hearts to continually help us turn from our sin. Help us hate it in a God-ward sense, Lord. Help us see it the way you see it and because we want to be closer to you, we realize this is hindering our fellowship. Make us long for holiness. We're thankful that Jesus Christ is able to wash us completely; that he has eternally washed us and he's able each day to continue washing us. May the cross become sweeter each day. May we become humbler each day.