

The Full Course of Repentacillin

War & Peace Part 7
James 4:8-10 7-26-2015

Summary: Last week we saw the parts of repentance that faced God (submit to God and return to God), now, toward self, there are two more: wash and wail. Wash your hands (take action against sin) and your heart (deal with the sin beneath the sin - forsake the thoughts, attitudes, etc.), and be broken in sorrow. Not every sin calls for the extremes of this, but if there is lingering guilt, distance from God, lack of joy, lack of willingness to do right, repetitive failure, lack of fruitfulness, or unforgiveness, then it may be due to inadequate repentance. Bring full sorrow by humbly accepting the Word, confessing to God and people, and realizing what has been forfeited.

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James 4:5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he caused to live in us? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Introduction

We have been studying through the book of James, and last week we left off right in the middle of this very helpful passage on how to deal with sin in your life. How do you handle guilt? What should you do after you sin? How do you overcome those sins that just keep getting the best of you? The answer is – repent. That is how we deal with sin in our lives – we repent. That is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever – we repent. And in this passage James takes out his scalpel and dissects true repentance for us so that we can see all the various parts. And one thing we learn here is that repentance is

a two-sided coin. One side of it faces toward God, and the other side faces toward your heart. Last week we studied the part that faces toward God. When you sin, submit to God, and return to God. Submitting means letting go of your own self-will and doing what you know is God's will. Our self-will is like a horse – it needs to be broken so that it is responsive to the rider, and it submits to the rider's will. And that makes it useful. Our self-will must be broken so that we become responsive to God's will. That is submitting to God.

Returning to God means making a decisive break with the devil, and coming to your senses so that you realize that happiness and joy and fulfillment are found in your Father's presence, not in the pleasures of this world – so you return to the Father, like the prodigal. You fight against Satan using the truth of God's Word to expose his deception, and you devote yourself to righteousness. Then Satan will flee, and you will be able to draw near to God, which is your only hope in the war against sin. When you are not near to the presence of God, you try to fight even the slightest, smallest temptation, and you fall.

So drawing near to the presence of God is both the means and the end. Nearness to God helps me resist sin, which enables me to draw even nearer to God. If you are fighting against sin just so that you don't have the painful consequences of sin in your life, you are not really fighting against sin. Atheists do that. True repentance is slamming the door on sin for the purpose of turning back to your Father in heaven so that you can be near to His presence.

So, those are the two things you do with respect to God – submit to Him and return to Him. Now let's look at the two things you do with regard to yourself. The first one has to do with purification.

Wash Your Hands

7 ... Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Cleansing Yourself

There are two different ways that Scripture talks about cleansing from sin. One is the cleansing that God does.

Psalms 51:2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

That is one kind of cleansing. But when the Bible talks about cleansing yourself, that's something different. Cleansing or washing yourself means letting go of the sin.

Isaiah 1:16 Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong.

Only God can wash the stains away after we have rolled around in the mud. But our part in the cleansing process is to stop rolling around in the mud.

And, of course, the power to do that comes from God as well. As you walk by the Spirit, He gives you the power to resist sin. So it is God's power, but it does involve effort on our part.¹

So James calls us to take action against sin – in two areas: hands and heart.

7 ... Wash your hands ... and purify your hearts

Hands have to do with actions, and heart has to do with what is on the inside.

Hands

So washing your hands means physically doing something to distance yourself from sin. If it is drunkenness, maybe you dump out on your alcohol. If it's your computer, maybe you install some accountability software. If it's Netflix, you cancel your subscription. If it's your phone, you have an

¹ It is God who works in us, but the way that He works in us is that He works in us to will and to act (Php.2:13). So when God works in us, He does not just do everything for us while we sit back and do nothing. It involves our will and our actions.

accountability partner put a password on it so you can't download an app without them present. If it's overspending, maybe you set up a budget or cut up your credit cards. You call your prayer group leader or one of your pastors and ask, "What passages of Scripture would be good for me to study to overcome this sin?" You listen to some sermons on that subject. You find a helpful book on that subject. You set up an appointment for biblical counseling. True repentance goes way beyond just, "I'll try harder next time." It takes whatever action it can take to wash your hands of that sin.

And that includes taking steps to cut off access to that sin in the future, or to reduce exposure to temptation. How about sending a report to an accountability partner every morning? How about confessing it to your spouse or someone else? Is there anything you could do to make it less likely that you would fall to that sin in the future? If there is something you could do that would make a future stumble less likely, but you won't do it, how can you claim that you have repented?

So that is what **wash your hands** means – take some action to put distance between you and sin. Next he says **purify your hearts**.

Heart

That means deal with the problem on the inside. All the external efforts in the world will get nowhere as long as your heart is still in love with that sin. You can dump out the booze, install the porn filters, put your TV in a garbage dumpster – none of that will keep you from that sin as long as your heart is still enslaved to it.

And even if it did, what good would that be? What good would it do to clean up your actions if your heart is still filthy? That's worthless. The goal is to draw near to God, and if you have clean hands but a dirty heart, you still cannot draw near to Him.

Psalm 24:3 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

That is why James keeps on pointing us back to the heart. If you have a temper problem, you will never overcome it just by trying to control your temper. You have got to get down to the heart level and ask, "What is causing this anger? What is it that my heart desires more than fellowship with Christ?" Or "What wrong attitudes do I have about suffering?" Or "What areas of pride need to be dealt with?"

All Sin Comes from the Heart

"What if there is no heart issue behind the sin? It was just a momentary stumble or force of habit – but there's no sin beneath the sin that caused it?" The answer that is simple – that never happens. All sin originates in the heart. Every sin you ever commit has been an inside job.

Mark 7:21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'

If you are ever wondering, "Is my repentance genuine? Is it adequate?" Ask yourself this – Have you done anything to deal with the heart issue behind the sin? If you haven't done anything about the heart problem, and you haven't done anything about the sin and you are not repentant.

This is an important thing to teach your children. When they are really little you are just showing them the difference between right and wrong. But the older they get, the more you need to instruct them and teach them about how to discover the heart problem that caused that sinful action. And then teach them how to change their heart in that area. That is how you bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord. But if you don't do that, all you'll do is raise children who are either hypocrites and pretenders, or who are weighed down with guilt and self-condemnation because they don't know how to deal with their sin. If you find yourself saying, "How many times do I have to tell you..." the answer is probably that it's not a matter of the number. They are hearing what you are saying, and they

understand it, and they may very well want to do it, but they can't overcome the flesh because all you have ever talked to them about is their outward actions, so they are oblivious to how to even discover what's wrong inside their heart, much less how to fix it.

And if you need help with understanding what the Bible says about how to diagnose the heart and recover from heart problems there is the biblical counseling literature. If you go to biblicalcounselingcoalition.org and look at their Books list, you can find reviews on some of the most helpful books on whatever heart problem you are dealing with. Or if you want a basic overview of how to do it in general, you could check out chapter 4 in the book *Wise Counsel*. That chapter talks about how to trace things back to the will, desires, inclinations, your thought life, values, motives, attitudes, etc. Sin always needs to be dealt with down at that level, otherwise you're just picking the heads off of dandelions.

Forsaking Thoughts

Very often someone will appear to do a big 180 on the outside, but in his thought life he is still gripping onto that sin as tightly as ever. It is possible to take all those external actions that I mentioned a few minutes ago, so that on the outside you are doing everything you can, but on the inside, you have thoughts running in your head that, if you ever caught your kids watching something like that in a movie they would be grounded until the Second Coming. You have attitudes in your heart about that person who hurt you that, if someone were to carry out the actions that came from those attitudes they would go to jail. It is so easy to trick ourselves into thinking we have repented when we turn from the actions, even though our hearts are still clinging to the thoughts. But true repentance rejects both the actions and the thoughts.

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts.

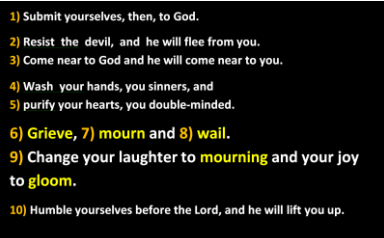
You haven't turned off of that sinful path until you have let go of those sinful thoughts. And those are the hardest sins to give up. That is where your flesh will really react. You take away that sinful action, and your flesh won't like it. But you try to take away the sinful thoughts, and your flesh will have a fit – "No! No! Don't take those away for me!" But true repentance forsakes both the actions and the thoughts.

So how do you deal with sin in your life? Regarding God, you submit to Him and you return to Him. And regarding yourself, the first thing you do is wash your hands and purify your heart. Forsake that sin and take some actions to wash your hands of it altogether. Now one final point: break your heart.

Break Your Heart

1. Submit to God
2. Return to God
3. Wash your hands
4. Break your heart

I told you there are 10 commands, and so far we've covered six of them. The other four are all in verse 9.



9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Grieve

First he tells us to **grieve**. That word refers to the way you feel when you are being tormented. James is saying, “When you repent, you should feel tormented in your soul.”

Joel 2:13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God

The word **rend** means to rip or tear. In that culture they would rip their clothes when something horrible happened. And the Prophet says, “Instead of just shredding your clothes – shred your heart.”

There are two ways this can happen – either you can do it to yourself by rending your heart, or you can wait for God to bring chastisement that will reduce you to misery and agonizing grief. But one way or another, it is going to happen. When you sin, there is going to be devastation and heartbreak and sorrow and pain. That is just the nature of sin. It is going to happen, but it’s better to inflict it on your own heart rather than to wait for God to do it.

1 Corinthians 11:31 If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

Mourn

The next word is **mourn**. That is the typical word used to describe the kind of mourning that comes at the death of a loved one. It is the kind that brings tears.

Wail

That is the next word – **wail**. That word means to cry, but with a special emphasis on the sound that you make when you cry - wailing. It is the word used in in Matthew 26 when Peter disowned Christ.

Matthew 26:75 ... he went outside and wept bitterly.

Grieve, mourn, and wail – any one of those three words would have been plenty to describe the idea. James uses all three because he is making a point. And he’s not done yet.

9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

That’s really a sharp rebuke when someone tells you to stop laughing. James is not being gentle with us here. When we indulge in worldliness, we do it to feel good. And so many times we are laughing it up when we should be crushed in brokenness and sorrow. That word for **gloom** is literally *with downcast eyes*. It means to be dejected or downcast or gloomy in how you feel.

The Whole Course

Why so many words to one point? Because it’s a hard point. And it is the part of dealing with sin where we are most prone to want to take shortcuts. If James just gave a single command in this verse like he does in the others, our tendency would be to just blow right over it. So he slows us way down. He is showing us that you can’t just quickly and easily do this part. Probably the biggest problem with our repentance over sin is that it tends to not be thorough enough - especially when it comes to this part. So often we want to just do the first three parts – submit to God, return to God, wash my hands, and get on with my life. We don’t like pain and sorrow. But it is necessary. Why? For the same reason doctors always tell us to take the full course of antibiotics. Very often people will start taking an antibiotic, pretty soon all their symptoms go away and they feel just fine, so they don’t finish the whole course. The problem is, the remaining bacteria not only survive, but they become resistant to that antibiotic, so not only do you get sick again, but now it’s harder to treat. Quitting before you take the full course does more harm than good because it just makes the disease resistant to the cure.

And it works the same way when it comes to dealing with our sin. If we deal with it in half measures, we can do more harm than good because we just inoculate our soul from grace and that sin becomes resistant to the cure. The last chapter and a half or so in James have been brutal. An accurate diagnosis is priceless, but painful. Especially when it turns out that what you thought might have been a minor little problem ends up being a systemic, terminal disease that is in your bloodstream and is infecting your whole system. That is what James has been showing us all along in this book. And finally now he is giving us the cure. This medicine is more powerful than penicillin or amoxicillin or Cephalexin or any of that. The name of this medicine is ... *repentance*. It is a course of spiritual antibiotics that comes in 10 doses in verses 7-10. And one of the biggest reasons why we struggle with certain sins in our lives over and over is because very often we don't finish the full course. We don't take all 10 doses. We get half way through, we feel better, it seems like the problem is gone, and we leave traces of the bacteria of that sin floating around in our system, and they come back with a vengeance. The pills that Dr. James is giving us today are bitter ones. They don't feel good going down. They are hard to swallow. But it is essential that we finish the whole course so we can be healed.

I think the drug of choice in the church today is levity. We want a pastor who is a stand-up comedian; keep it light – nothing too heavy, nothing too dark – just positive and encouraging. But James is saying, “No, there are times when you should be weeping and wailing in darkness and gloom.”

When is This Level of Repentance Needed?

What times are those? Obviously you are not supposed to be crying and wailing 24/7,² so when? When is it ok to just say, “Oh, I'm sorry, Lord. Please forgive me”? and when do I need a full course of repentacillin? How can I tell if my sin has gotten so infected that it calls for all 10 doses of medicine that James describes here?

I am going to suggest six symptoms of that level of infection. These come out of Psalm 51. I wish I had time to show you, but it would take too long so I put the notes in an appendix in the sermon manuscript. But for now I'll just give you the list. These symptoms are when you know your current level of repentance needs to go deeper.

1) Lingering guilt feelings and lack of intimacy with God (God's face is turned away from you)

When we sin, there is a sense of being dirty and repulsive in God's sight. When there is thorough repentance, and then God restores us, then we can have confidence that the sin is dealt with, God has forgiven, and intimacy with Him is restored. But when we deal with sin in half measures with inadequate repentance, the guilt lingers and there is still distance between you and God.

2) Lack of joy in your salvation

God does not remove His presence altogether, but He does withdraw enough to where you lose your joy. And that joy doesn't return until you take the full course of repentacillin.

3) Lack of willingness to let go of some sin

Indulging in the pleasures of sin makes your soul resistant to holiness. You might get yourself to knuckle under and say no to some sin, but your soul is fighting you all the way – that is a sign of inadequate repentance.

² In David's prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 David is sorrowful and broken, but he prays for joy to return.

Psalm 51:7 ...let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ... 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation ... 14 Then ... my tongue will sing. Evidently, there are some times when it's fitting to be crushed with sorrow and other times when there is joy and rejoicing.

4) *Repetitive failure (the sin just keeps coming back)*

You make all kinds of commitments and resolutions, “I’m never doing that again!” – and a couple days or weeks later, and you are right back into that same sin. You can’t seem to get any long term success. Going a long period of time without true repentance damages your ability to persevere and remain steadfast in righteousness.

5) *Lack of fruitfulness and effectiveness in ministry*

6) *Unforgiveness*

You don’t have a sense of having been forgiven a lot, so you aren’t able to forgive others.

So how do you know when the sin that you have committed is so devastating that it calls for this deep, extreme, crushing brokenness and sorrow? If you have lingering guilt feelings, distance from God and lack of intimacy, lack of joy in the Lord, repetitive failure, and ineffective ministry.

How to Bring the Sorrow

“Yeah, I have some of those symptoms - I definitely have the infection. I need more thorough repentance, but how do I make it happen? I know I should feel brokenness and contrition and sorrow, but I don’t feel it. What can I do to bring about this kind of sadness?”

Scripture has a lot to say on that. One way is through fasting – Psalm 35:13. Another way is to let the sadness and sorrow that come from the consequences of sin serve as training wheels to teach your heart how to grieve over the sin itself.³ Scripture gives us numerous ways to humble our hearts in repentance, but for now, let’s just focus on the context of James. What can we learn from the book of James about how to bring sorrow and contrition to a proud, unbroken heart? There are three things that stood out to me. The first was to humbly receive the Word. We saw that back in chapter 1, verse 21.

Humbly Accept the Word

One of the purposes of God’s law is to convict us of sin. And it will do that if we humbly accept what it says instead of resisting it. Let down your guard and allow passages like verse 8 to do their job.

James 4:8 Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James is not calling us names for fun; he is trying to help us come to a point of sorrow. The double minded are the people who should expect to receive nothing from God (James 1:8). And the word *sinner*s is a word normally used to describe unbelievers. We know this passage is talking to believers because back in verse 4 James called us **adulteresses**. Unbelievers can’t commit adultery against God because they are not the bride of Christ. So he is talking to believers, but he uses these terms because he is trying to wake us up to the startling, crushing reality that we are behaving like unbelievers. If you want to have sorrow over sin, let those kinds of rebukes penetrate your heart. Let the law of God do its convicting

³ There are a lot of built-in consequences to sin, and one of the purposes of those consequences is to train the heart to grieve. Sometimes people doubt the genuineness of repentance when the sorrow only comes after the consequences it. They say, “He never felt bad about his sin until he lost his job.” Or “He never felt sorry about what he did until it cost him his family,” or “until he went to jail.” And so they assume he’s not sorry about the sin – he’s only sorry that he got caught. Sometimes that might be the case, but don’t assume it is always the case just because he never confessed until after he was caught. Remember, David never confessed until after he was caught, and yet his confession after being caught is the model in Scripture for true repentance. You see, this is part of God’s purpose behind consequences. The pain of consequences is designed to train the soul to grieve. They are like training wheels for sorrow. First you feel sad because the consequences, but then, the Holy Spirit can take those feelings of sorrow and apply them to sorrow over having dishonored God. If you are crushed and broken and sobbing and weeping because you lost your job or your wife or your family because of sin, it’s easy to move from weeping over consequences to weeping over disobedience to God. It is much easier to make that shift then to try to shift from no sorrow at all to brokenness before God. The tears we should shed over the pain and consequences of sin aren’t automatically true repentance, but they can be training wheels to teach the heart how to grieve over offending God.

work. Let go of the excuses, get rid of the justifications or comparisons with other people who are worse than you – get rid of all that just submit to the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit through the law of God. Very often we don't feel proper sorrow over sin because we have racked up so many excuses that the sin really doesn't seem all that bad to us. Let God's Word demolish the excuses.

Confess

Secondly, confess your sin. The Greek word for confess literally means *to say the same thing*. When you confess sin, you speak about that sin the same way the Bible speaks about it. And that also has an awakening effect on the conscience. It wakes you up to the seriousness of the matter in the ugliness of sin. If instead of saying, "God, I blew it again," you specifically state what the sin is in biblical terms, and what the Bible says about that sin, that has a very powerful effect on the soul. And until you do that, the guilt of that sin will eat away at you.

Psalm 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. **4** For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. **Selah** **5** Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"— and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Forgiveness did not come until there was confession.

And don't just confess to God. If you really want to bring your heart to a point of deep sorrow and contrition over sin, confess your sin to other people. That is when the healing will come.

James 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Confessing your sins, not just to God, but to other people, awakens the conscience. The feelings of shame that come when you confess your sins to another human being will assist your conscience in doing its work of convicting you.

And the fact that those people that you confess to now know about that sin – they know what you did, and from now on they are going to have that knowledge about you, that can help keep you from pride.

Realize What Has Been Forfeited

Another way to teach your heart to grieve and mourn over sin is by thinking carefully about what has been forfeited because of that sin. Back in verse 6 James says that God gives grace to the humble which implies that when you're not humble, you forfeit grace.

Jonah 2:8 Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

Sometimes people rationalize their dry eyes after sin by saying, "I'm just not an emotional person. I feel bad about it, but I guess there's just something wrong with my crier." Chances are, your crier works just fine. If you suffer a big enough loss, the tears will be there. Tears and sorrow are simply an indication of how precious the thing is that we lost. If you lose your favorite pen, you might feel a little bit sad. You lose your house and all your possessions, that hits you a little harder. What if you lose your health? The doctor says, "It's cancer – you have six months, and it's going to be the most painful six months of your whole life." That will affect your emotions. Or what if it's your 5-year-old child who gets that diagnosis? You lose something precious enough, and the grief and sorrow and tears will come.

So what do you do if the emotions you feel don't properly reflect the value of what you lost? If that happens, the goal is not to just try to adjust your level of emotion. All your emotions are doing is telling you the truth about how valuable that thing was in your heart. If there is not enough emotion, it just shows the thing isn't very valuable. And if there is too much emotion, that shows that the thing is too valuable. If you lose your favorite pen and become suicidal – the solution is not to try to adjust your emotions. The solution is to adjust how much value that pen has in your heart. That thing is way too important – it

shouldn't have that much value. On the other hand, if someone dies and it has no impact on your emotions, that just shows that that person's death wasn't that much of a loss to you.

When I sin, I lose progress in sanctification. I lose effectiveness in ministry. I lose access to grace. I lose God's blessing in my life (Ps.1). And most disastrous of all – I lose intimacy with God for a while. Maybe a long while.

Those are the kinds of things I lose when I choose to disobey God. So what determines how much sorrow I feel? Two factors – first, am I aware of what I'm losing? And second, how precious are those things in my heart?

When Should the Sorrow End?

Okay, so now we understand why sorrow and brokenness are so important, and we understand how to bring our souls to a point of sorrow and brokenness - now one more question: How long should I continue in that condition? When David keeps on asking God to restore the joy of his salvation, the implication is that at some point that happens. You leave the sorrow and brokenness behind, and it's time to be happy again.

Micah 7:8 Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. 9 Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.

The Prophet says, "I have sinned, God is displeased, and so I'm sitting in the darkness for now. But don't gloat over me, because the time is coming when God will plead my case and bring me back out into the light." Right now I am like a child who has been sent to his room, waiting for dad to come in. Dad is angry, and the talk we are going to have isn't going to be any fun. But I know what's going to happen afterward. He will come into my room, there will be discipline, he is going to give me some strong words, and then, when the tears are sufficient, the discipline will be over. And then he will take me up in his arms, and there will be comfort, and encouragement and instruction. He'll say, "Did you learn your lesson?"

"Yes sir."

"Okay then, let's go," and everything will be fine between me and him. He won't be angry, I won't be in trouble, it's okay to laugh now, I can be right there by his side – the whole things in the past.

So how do I know when I've come to that point in repentance? When is it OK to stop grieving? Well, there is obviously no exact science to it, but I would suggest you know that you have come to the point when those things that David prayed for in Psalm 51 are restored. God gives you the ability to enjoy His gifts and His blessings, and His presence and attributes again. He gives you the ability to draw near to Him again. He enables you to read His Word and have it delight your soul instead of boring you.

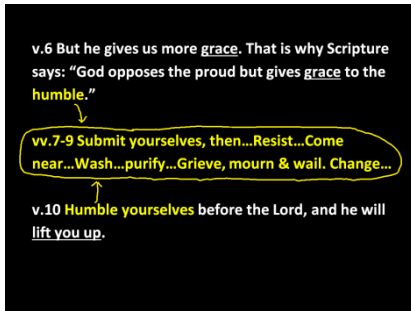
Sometimes that happens immediately – much sooner than you expect. Other times it might be hours or days, or even weeks in some extreme cases. (If it goes longer than that, it is probably not that God is chastising you – it is more likely that you just don't understand how to draw near to God. Because God loves to forgive and He loves to restore when He forgives.)

Humble Sandwich

Well, after all that, James wraps it all up in verse 10.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

That is the bottom piece of bread in the humble sandwich.



Remember – this whole discussion about repentance takes place inside the calls to humility at the front end in verse 6 and at the end in verse 10. Remembering that will guard us from the pitfalls of false repentance. It will keep us from the repentance substitutes:

- *Turning from sin but not returning to God*
- *Trying to return to God without fighting against Satan*
- *Failure to wash your hands or heart*
- *Lack of contrition*

Humility will guard you from those, and it will also guard you from having the wrong kind of sorrow over sin.

Godly Sorrow

Let's close by taking a look at 2 Corinthians 7, because after all this discussion about sorrow, this passage has an important warning for us. In verse 10 of 2 Corinthians 7 Paul shows us that just because you feel really bad about your sin does not mean you are repentant, because there are two kinds of sorrow over sin. One kind drives you toward God, and the other kind drives you away from God.

2 Corinthians 7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

The bad kind of sorrow makes you think things like, "I'm not worthy to talk to God right now. He's mad at me. I'm just going to steer clear of Him until this blows over." With worldly sorrow, you are mad at yourself, disgusted with yourself, disappointed with yourself - you might even want to punish yourself, but from beginning to end the focus is on yourself. Or maybe your sadness is because you have disappointed certain people. Either way, it is a sorrow driven by pride, and that is the kind of sorrow that brings death instead of repentance. And it drives you away from prayer, away from Scripture, and away from fellowship with God's people, and, ultimately, toward death.

A great example of the comparison of worldly sorrow and godly sorrow is Judas and Peter. They both betrayed Christ, and they were both really sorry. Judas felt so bad, he threw the money away. But it didn't bring him to repentance. It brought him to suicide. Peter went out, wept bitterly, and then was restored, because in his case, the sorrow led to repentance. Just because you feel really bad about what you did doesn't mean you are repentant. You can feel sorry enough about your sin to kill yourself, and still not be truly repentant.

You can tell when your sorrow is godly sorrow because it will always drive you toward God, not away from Him. It will push you to humble yourself before God and draw near to Him. Worldly sorrow will just put you in a bad mood. Or it will make you get discouraged and want to give up.⁴ Or it will make

⁴ What good is accomplished by giving up? None. So why do we have that impulse? Why do we have self-destructive impulses when we sin? I would love to know how an evolutionist would answer that. In a survival of the fittest model, how is it that the

you say, “I’m not worthy to talk to God right now,” so you shy away from prayer and Scripture and fellowship. Godly sorrow is not sorrow over your displeasure with yourself; Godly sorrow is not sorrow over someone else’s displeasure with you; Godly sorrow is sorrow over God’s displeasure with you, and it always drives you toward God, not away from Him.

When Peter went out and wept bitterly after denying Christ it wasn’t because he fell short of his own standard. His bitter weeping didn’t come until he looked into Jesus’ eyes. It was not the sorrow of disappointment in himself for failure, it was the agony of a soul that sinned against the Lord he dearly loved.

Summary

So that’s the full course – 10 commands grouped under four headings.

- Submit to God.
- Return to God.
- Wash your hands.
- Break your heart.

Or if you want the really short version: submit and return, wash, and wail. Teach this to your kids, so they know how to deal with sin in their lives. If you don’t deal with the sin in your life that way, you have a good reason to question whether you are saved. But if you do deal with the sin in your life with those four things, you will have greater victory over sin, greater intimacy with God, you won’t have ongoing, lingering guilt feelings, your joy will return, and you will be fruitful in ministry. In other words, God will lift you up. And that is how James summarizes this whole section.

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

God Will Lift You Up

This process is painful, but I can tell you I have never gone through the whole course without being lifted up at the end. If you are broken and contrite over your sin, the news for you is very good, because Jesus pronounced a special blessing on you.

Matthew 5:4 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says ...I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

The only way up is through the valley. The mountaintop of joy is out there, but between where I am standing now and that mountain peak is there is a deep, dark, painful valley. And there is no other way to the mountain except through the valley. But oh, the glorious joy that awaits on the other side.

most highly evolved species has this tendency toward self-destructive responses when we sin? I can’t imagine how they might try to explain it, but it’s easy to explain from the biblical worldview. We have an enemy. His name is Satan, which means adversary. He is the accuser of the brethren. He came to steal, kill, and destroy. So it is no surprise at all that if you have an enemy whose whole purpose in life is to accuse you, condemn you, kill you, and destroy you, that he would work hard at taking all your sorrow and using it against you. So that instead of fighting against him, you fight against yourself. And so when you sin, and Satan knows that your only hope for restoration is to draw near to God, he immediately starts whispering in your ear (or shouting in your ear), “Whatever you do, don’t try to approach God right now. You’re not worthy. He’s mad at you, disgusted with you, irritated at you – He doesn’t want to have anything to do with you right now. Give it some time. Let Him cool off for a while. Maybe in a few days He’ll forget about it, then you can get back to normal. Why would you go to Him right now? What are you going to ask Him for? Blessing? Forgiveness? Restoration? Mercy? You don’t deserve any of that. You don’t deserve to even ask for it.” – and on and on he goes. Why? Because his only shot at destroying you is if he can prevent you from drawing near to God.

Benediction: Joel 2:12 “Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” 13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Which of the common repentance substitutes are you most prone to? (Turning from sin but not returning to God, trying to return to God without fighting against Satan, failure to wash your hands or heart, or lack of contrition)
- 2) In what area(s) would you like to see more sorrow in your life? Is the lack of sorrow mostly due to undervaluing the thing lost when you sin? Or lack of awareness that it is being lost?
- 3) In what area(s) would you like to see less sorrow in your life (times when your heart overvalues the thing lost)?
- 4) Which of the symptoms of inadequate repentance tend to arise most in your life? (Lingering guilt feelings, distance from God and lack of intimacy, lack of joy in the Lord, repetitive failure, and ineffective ministry, unforgiveness).