

Resolving Conflict By Becoming Truly Humble

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Epistle of James

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Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 4. We come to our last message in the first section of James 4, 4:1-10 that we've been looking at for a number of weeks under the title "Resolving Conflict." The title of today's message again begins "Resolving Conflict," each one has begun with "Resolving Conflict By" doing something and so today "Resolving Conflict By Becoming Truly Humble." Resolving conflict by becoming truly humble, we see that's the point of verse 10 of James 4, which is really the culmination of repentance, the outcome. We've been talking the last few weeks resolving conflict by cultivating repentance and we've seen how repentance is a doctrine that is so very important and that is lost in so much of the church today, but that is an essential part of Christian life, truly biblical Christian living. We heard it today in Peter's sermon when he preached at Pentecost, "Repent." What do we do? Repent and repent means to turn from sin to God. There has to be a turning. It's not just believing. Believing, yes. Believing, you must believe but the flip side of belief or trust is repent, repentance.

So repenting and believing, that's the picture of what conversion truly is and we've noted that it's to be something that's not just a one-time event. Repentance and faith are not a one-time event. Yeah, you get saved when you truly repent and you truly believe at a moment in time. Yes, you're saved forever if you have come to true repentance and true faith in Christ. Nothing can change that. But if you have truly come to true repentance and true faith, repentance and faith will be a part of your life. This is a part of just faithful Christian living because we keep on repenting, we keep on believing, we keep on turning from sin, we keep on trusting in Christ. It's something that we should seek to take all the way to the gates of heaven, as Philip Henry said. Our repentance, take it all the way to the gates of heaven. In heaven we won't need to repent anymore but until then we should be repenting, turning from the sin that God continues to show us in our hearts.

So he comes in this last verse to the idea that he's been talking about repentance in verses 7 to 10, though not using that word. We've explained that in the previous three messages, that we turn from sin to God, but it culminates with this tenth verse where he talks about humbling ourselves and this truly is the capstone of repentance. This is what the goal, the end result of true repentance is real humility.

Real humility, that's something that's actually elusive in itself. Charles Spurgeon said that the person who is truly humble – now listen to this – the person who is truly humble is grieved over his great pride. Did you hear that? The person who is truly humble is grieved over his pride. The person who thinks they're humble has not yet discovered what humility is because they don't see themselves, and we are all conceived in iniquity, brought forth in sin. We came into this world of our father, the devil, who is at his essence, pride is his defining characteristic. When you read about Satan's rebellion in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, what you see is that he exalted himself. He wanted to be like the Most High. This was the essence of Lucifer's rebellion, the greatest angel that had been created, rebelled against God because he wanted to be like God. He didn't want to stay in his position and so he wanted to be like God and that was the essence of his sin. Then what was the essence of the temptation that he gave to Eve? What is the essence of sin itself? He said, "You shall surely not die." Remember in the garden? God said, "In the day you eat of it, you will die." Satan said, "You surely will not die for God knows in the day that you eat it, eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will become like God." So he's saying, "Don't you want to become like God? Eat of the tree. Sin."

So the essence of sin is a desire to be like God. The very heart, the very inward principle of sin is itself pride. It is a desire to exalt self. This is why people who, we can think that we're humble and we can make a show of humility, we can even say things like, "I'm the chief of sinners," we can quote Paul in that. Paul meant it when he said it. We can sometimes say that and sound like we're humble but the rubber meets the road when somebody then confronts you with a sin. I can say, "I'm the chief of sinners, I'm really humble, but now you're telling me that I did something wrong? I'm sorry, I don't accept that." That's not humility. That's false humility. True humility is willing to receive and to be corrected. To be humble, that is what humility is, to be lowly.

So James ends up, we're going to see this passage, saying that the tenth imperative in verses 7 to 10, we've noted there are 10 commands. As we read these verses again, listen to them, 10 commands, the tenth command there in verse 10 is what we're going to focus on this morning. Resolving conflict by becoming truly humble. We're going to read the whole passage. James 4:1,

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 together.

Father, how mindful we are of our own poverty of spirit. Except you bless your word, except you bless us with your Spirit, except you open our minds, we cannot understand, we cannot obey. We ask you to bless now our time in your word. We also pray for our brother Jess as he's ministering the word in Athens. And everywhere the word is going forth where the people of God are meeting, preaching the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, would you lift up the glory of your Son? Humble your people so that we might in your time be exalted by you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Resolving conflict by becoming truly humble and we're exhorted here to true humility and I'm going to use the word "lowliness" as a synonym for that, because the word translated "be humble; humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord" which is related to the same word from verse 6 in the promise where James quotes from Proverbs 3:34, that's what the quotation you see in James 4:6, "He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" The word "humble" there and the word "humble" in verse 10 are the same Greek root and the word means "to be lowly." So really he's calling us to make ourselves lowly; to resolve conflict by becoming truly humble means to resolve conflict by becoming truly lowly-minded; to be a person characterized by lowliness. N

Now this is very counterintuitive to what we naturally seek. None of us wants to be truly lowly. People that appear to want to be truly lowly will say things like, "I'm just so bad or I'm so terrible at this," and when people are having pity-parties and if you find yourself doing that, "You know, I just really screwed up and I messed up and I'm so bad," and you're going on and on, a lot of times you're doing that because you want somebody else to say, "No, you're not so bad. You're really okay. You're great," or whatever. It's actually a desire to lift up self. True lowliness is the fruit of the Spirit. It's the work of grace and this is what James is saying. Listen, he's looking at his believers, remember he's writing to Christians here, this passage is written to Christians, and he says, "Look at your lives. Look at the conflict in your lives. Look at your relationships." He says, "Look at your relationships in the church, look at your relationships in your home. Think about all the times that you're having conflicts that are grieving God."

That's the first question he asks here, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" We said those words could be translated more literally actually, "What is the source of wars and battles among you?" Using that strong language to say, "You're having these conflicts, these battles in relationships." You know, you're losing your temper and you're yelling at your child or you're losing your temper and you're yelling at your spouse, or you're losing your temper and you're yelling at another driver, where does this come from? Why is this happening? And we need to be reminded again what we said

before. We tend to think the problem is out there. It's the crazy drivers. "If I didn't live in Atlanta, I wouldn't have this problem. If there weren't so many crazy drivers in Atlanta, I wouldn't be having the anger issues that I have." Not biblically. That's not the problem. "If my children would do what they're supposed to do, I wouldn't have the anger problem that I have. If my spouse treated me properly, I wouldn't have the anger problem that I have. If. If. If. If. If I could fix the people and the circumstances in my life, I wouldn't have an anger problem." Well, there is a measure of truth. If you could actually get everybody to do everything you wanted all the time, you wouldn't get angry that much. Why would you? But what you're actually asking is for everybody in your life to worship you; to put you at the center of their lives. That's why we get angry. I mean, we wish somebody else was thinking about us. I mean, you get angry driving sometimes, someone pulls out in front of you, like they should be thinking about you. "I've got to get somewhere and I can't believe that you had the audacity, you in that blue Buick, to not be thinking about me." Once you just look at it, it's ridiculous, isn't it? Maybe they're thinking about what they've got to do.

Well, James says the problem is not out there, the problem is in here so we have to turn our guns not on the people around us but our hearts, the desires in our hearts. We want things, we want wicked things and we also want good things and we want them too much and when we don't get them, we murder, that is, we get angry and we insult people. That's what he's talking about, "You lust and do not have so you commit murder. You're envying and you want something and you can't obtain it so you fight and you quarrel." So the problem is the lust in our hearts.

So that's the issue is our hearts and so we've looked at how he works through this process. He exposes, unmasks the spiritual adultery that's going on, the murder that's going on. He shows us the presence of the Holy Spirit. If you're a Christian and this is happening, this is happening in the very presence of the living God. How unthinkable that is. And then he tells us what repentance looks like. It looks like submitting to God; resisting the devil; drawing near to God; cleansing your hands, sinners; purifying your hearts, double-minded. Then be miserable, mourn and weep. We looked at last week the call to brokenness. And once you are doing that and you're setting your heart to that, what's going to happen, the fruit of that is lowliness, humility, true humility.

When you really repent, then you will be humble and lowly, and when you're humble and lowly, it's virtually impossible to engage you in an ungodly fight. The reason that there are quarrels among us is that we tend to both want what we want so much and in our pride, our desires cause conflict. I want something and you want something and they're mutually exclusive and so we fight, but when one person is humble and lowly and the other person is sinning in their attitude, this person doesn't strike back. It takes two to really have a good fight. I mean, you turn on a boxing match and if one guy is sitting there, just standing there and the other guy just hitting him, you know, turns the other cheek, that may be what we should do in certain circumstances but not in a boxing match, right? No, you should be fighting if you're in a boxing match and it's not going to be a very interesting match to watch. But if you're not coming back, it does make it a boring

fight and so it's amazing how that undoes conflict. So we can resolve conflict if we become humble, truly humble, truly lowly.

So I want us to look at verse 10 and we're going to consider it under three points today and the first is the practice of lowliness. We're using lowliness as a synonym for humility. We're saying we resolve conflict by becoming truly humble or becoming truly lowly so I think lowliness is a better image to put in our minds because that's really the essence of what this word means. The practice of lowliness.

He says, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord. Make yourselves low in the presence of the Lord. Make yourselves lowly." The word here means "to be brought low; to be abased; to bring to a condition of having no dignity and no honor." God says, "I want you to make yourself in a condition where you have no dignity and no honor in your own estimation," and this is actually the requirement throughout the Scriptures for the blessing of God. If you want to know the Lord, you have to become like this. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That's the first Beatitude. How do you get to the kingdom of heaven? You have to know that you have nothing before God; that you are absolutely impoverished before the Lord; that you're not looking at your life, touting your works, touting your resume, you realize you have nothing to commend yourself to God; that our righteousness is filthy rags in his sight. The very best we can do is disgusting in the sight of God. That's what the Bible says and Jesus says, "O how happy are you when you realize that." That's what "blessed" is, "O how happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

And we see this throughout the Scriptures. We see it in the ministry of John the Baptist. When he came and he preaches in the Gospels, Luke 3:4-5, he says, "Listen, I'm the one who was talked about by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight the way of the Lord.'" Well, what does that look like? How do you make straight the way of the Lord? How do you make it so that the Lord can come in, a highway for God to come in and bring blessing? You must make every mountain lowly. You must tear down the high places and bring them low and bring the low places up and that makes a highway for the Lord. This is what's required. God blesses the lowly. He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble as we see in verse 6. He's echoing what he said there. "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." We must make ourselves low in the sight of God.

We're called to that. This is what the Christian is called to do. It's to be a practice in our life to become more and more lowly in our own estimation, and it's to see ourselves rightly, to see us as we really are. The more we really see our sin, the more we should realistically look and say, "Yes, it's all of grace. Whatever is good in me is the grace of Jesus Christ because I keep seeing more and more of the ugliness and the sin, the sinfulness in me." And this is the calling of the Christian and if you're not willing to walk that path, then you will not know the Lord or you will not grow in his grace. I mean, to become a Christian, Jesus said, "If any man would come after Me, if any man would be My disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me." And this is

what happens through growing in grace. We become more and more aware of our sinfulness.

We talked about this with the dimmer, remember? The more that you grow in grace, it's like the light in the room turns brighter, and you see the dirt in the room more clearly, and you clean up a little more, and you actually become a little cleaner, the room becomes cleaner and yet you turn up the light more and you see that it's still filthy. You didn't even know how filthy it was. It's even filthier than you thought. You're now seeing. At the beginning you're just seeing big things like, you know, if you're in a completely dark room and then you turn the light on, you get saved, you see the big things that are out of place and so you start putting those away, then you turn the light up a little more and now you start seeing the really disgusting stuff, the stain, like, "What is that?" Have you seen a stain and you're like, "Oh, really, what? That cannot be good. Whatever it is, I can think of a lot of things it could be but that is not good. That is nasty."

So this is what happens in a Christian life, we see more and more, "Look at the motives of my heart." I don't know about you but as we've been studying through James, I've seen more and more of my own sinfulness in this passage these last six or seven weeks. It's like God just keeps showing me stuff that's there that I wasn't aware of. I didn't think I had a problem in that area or it wasn't that bad and the Lord shines his word on it and he shows me this is awful. This is exalted against the knowledge of God. This is hindering God's grace in your life.

So the practice of lowliness. We're called to it. It's a command, "Humble yourselves. Keep working at lowliness." Now let's move to the second point: it's not just the practice of lowliness but the presence that produces lowliness. The presence that produces lowliness. He says, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord." Other translations read, "before the Lord." The ESV and the NIV read, "Humble yourselves before the Lord. Make yourselves lowly before the Lord." The King James says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord." It's actually interesting, I mean, I think all three are fine translations basically but I think maybe for our purposes in our culture it's helpful to think in terms of that last one a little more because the word literally in the Greek, the etymology of this word "before or in the presence of," literally it's "enopion." "En" in Greek, e-n, means "in," i-n like in English. In "op," that's "in the eyes of." Like the word ophthalmologist, optometry, that comes from the Greek word "op" for "eye." So "enopion" means "in the eyes of" literally. So he's saying, "Make yourselves lowly. Humble yourselves in the eyes of the Lord." So the King James says, "in the sight of the Lord," and the idea is in the presence of the Lord or in the sight of the Lord, but I think it's helpful to think about the gaze of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think it's so helpful to me when I reflect on my sin and I ask the Lord to truly examine me and I wait on him to do it. One of the weaknesses that I have is sometimes, some people never apologize, you know, you can't get them to say they're sorry. Their pride manifests itself in that way. I've heard people say in counseling, "In all the years we've been married, he's never said he was wrong." Wow. That's impressive. That's not impressive in a good way. But there's another way that we can also really shortchange

brokenness and repentance and that's more the disposition that I have, is I'm willing to do a quick apology and let's move on. "Yeah, I'm sorry. I was wrong." I don't really want to take time and look at it that well, though. I want to acknowledge it's wrong and now let's move on. There's something that is missing when we don't really look at our sin before we confess it and really it's not true confession if you don't really look at it to the measure of really understanding what you've done. And the word for "confess" is "to say the same thing as; to say the same thing God says about your sin." Well, we don't naturally say the same thing God says about our sin. We minimize our sin. We tend to explain it away. "Yeah, I was wrong but..." That kind of thing. Justify it. And to say the same thing that God says about it, then "forgive" actually means "to release a debt." It's interesting that that's the word for "forgive." So if you ask for forgiveness, you're asking someone to release a debt, well, part of the idea of releasing a debt is to acknowledge the debt in the first place and to be specific about it. "This is what I did wrong. Would you forgive me?" And when they release that debt, they're acknowledging the debt and they're saying, "Yes, I forgive you." Being fuzzy about it hinders that.

Well, before the Lord, one of the things that happens is when we go to Jesus himself and we say, "Lord, search me and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts." Like David says in the Psalms, and we ask him to really look at us, that brings true brokenness because he will with his penetrating gaze and the power of his word, really show us the ugliness of our sin. It takes time to repent and to be broken and to be lowly and to be humble. You have to be willing to linger over the ugliness. You can't just quickly clean up the mess like that. Some messes that you clean up, you have to scrub. You know, it's like elbow grease on something that's really a bad mess and you've just got to work. Well, the working of it is laboring over it in the presence of the Lord and it's really inviting God to show me, "Lord, I know I did something wrong here but I know I don't know the half of it. Will you show me what's going on in my heart? Why am I doing this? What do you see when you look at me?" You know, the Lord Jesus Christ sees everything perfectly and he's the one person we can't fool. We can fool others but we can't fool him. His penetrating gaze sees all.

I want to look at Revelation 1 and 2 for a moment. Turn with me to Revelation 1. James is saying, "Humble yourselves in the eyes of the Lord. The way that you're going to humble yourselves is to think about your sin before the eyes of the Lord; to bring your sin before the eyes of the Lord and see what he has to say about it." That's going to produce true humility. If you and I just look at it ourselves and we can say, "Well, it's pretty bad. I shouldn't have done that." But there's something powerful about that becoming now in the presence of Christ because he sees us as we truly are.

When John describes the vision at the beginning of Revelation on the island of Patmos, he hears behind him a voice like the sound of a trumpet, verse 10, chapter 1, verse 10, and the voice says, "'Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.'" Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His

chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man." John has a vision of the risen Christ and this vision is overwhelming. He heard the voice, he turns around and he sees Jesus, one like a Son of Man moving among the lampstands. The lampstands represent the seven churches. Jesus is walking among the lampstands, among the churches, and John sees him and he describes what he sees. He sees this picture of absolute holiness and purity. His head and hair white like wool, like snow, he adds that. Like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet burnished bronze like made to glow in a furnace. His voice like the sound of many waters. Then when he sees that and sees him holding the seven stars, the two-edged sword coming out of his mouth, he faints dead away. Jesus has to say, "Don't be afraid," and get him up.

Now his eyes were like a flame of fire. The eyes of the eternal Son of God are like a flame of fire. They are penetrating and piercing like fire. You cannot hide anything from the gaze of Jesus Christ. He sees every secret motive. He sees every intent of our hearts. He sees every idle word. He knows every idle thought. He knows everything about why we do everything that we do. There is nothing that we can hide from him. So when we are confessing our sins, we need to have a mindset that says rather than just quickly confessing, we do need to go to him and we confess our sins the best we know but we need to always have a sense of, "Lord, show me my heart. Let me see what you see. What really are the issues that you're concerned about as you look at me?" Because he knows what we need to deal with and he will show us the ugliness of our sin.

In fact, it's interesting after he has this vision of the Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus gets him back up, then he tells him what to tell those seven churches and each time he says to the church at Ephesus and he says some kind of introduction like, "To the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands, he says this," that's Jesus, "this is what the living Christ says to the church at Ephesus and this is what the living Christ says to the church in Smyrna and to Pergamum." Each one starts with that formula and the first two words in English are always this, what Jesus says to each of the churches, these churches spread across the Mediterranean world, he says this, these are the two words, "I know." Every time the first words out of the mouth of the risen Christ, "I know. I know your deeds." Five times, "I know your deeds. I know where you dwell. I know your tribulation."

He knows everything and when we go into the presence of the Lord with our sin, James is saying, "Don't try to pretty it up. Don't try to airbrush it. Go to him with best you can tell, tell him what you know about it but go to him with a desire to understand more. Lord, you look at my heart and you tell me what's here." And he will expose our sin in greater depths to us.

Now what does that look like? How do you really do that? You don't just pray. You do pray and you try to consciously in the presence of God, I talked about how we meditate

on our sin, we think about what sin is, what sin does. We talked about last Sunday, you think about those things, you meditate on it, you reflect on it, but remember I talked about you don't just do meditation in your own mind. Meditation and prayer should go hand-in-hand so that you're thinking about the Scriptures, "How does this apply to me? What does this mean in my life? Lord, help me see this. Lord, I need you to show me." This is what he's talking about here. "Humble yourselves in the sight, in the eyes of the Lord. Realize you're doing this before the eyes of God and as he looks at you and as you reflect on these things, you will be broken."

Now how do you even add feet to that a little more? There's a really helpful principle in Hebrews 4:12-13. I want you to look at it with me. Hebrews is the book right before James. How do I invite the eyes of Jesus to really look at me and expose my sin so that I can be truly broken and lowly and humble? Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." This verse is often quoted as we talk about the power of the word, right? The word of God is living and active but think about the purpose of the word there in verse 12. The purpose of the word is to pierce, to divide soul and spirit, joint and marrow, to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The purpose of the word of God is to lay open the heart of man. God to lay open our hearts and to show us exactly what's in there and you see that it's not just an impersonal thing where we're reading our Bibles and this is happening, it's actually, I think he's saying it's actually Jesus Christ doing it.

Look at verse 13, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." This is an observation Heath Lambert made yesterday at a conference that many in our church attended down in Faith Bible Church. He pointed out how this is, you're talking about the word of God and the next thing, he seems to be personifying the word of God. The word of God has this power and then there's no creature hidden from his sight. He doesn't mention the Lord or God. It's like the word of God stands in the place of God or is almost the same as God. You look at the Bible and the Bible looks at you. You look at the Bible and you look into the Bible and you start seeing how the Bible fits together and the Bible starts discerning how you fit together. You find that you're the one being examined. What's happening is the word is examining you. Who is the word? The word is the Lord Jesus Christ.

So to be humbled in his presence is to let the word of God, we stay in the word and, "Lord, show me from your word. Search me out." We go to a passage of Scripture that might relate to the issue that we're confessing and we let the word lay us bare. "Open and lay bare the eyes of him with whom we have to do." The word makes us helpless, completely vulnerable. This is what James is calling us to, to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord. To be lowly before God requires this kind of seeking of the Lord.

Now, that's the practice of lowliness and the presence that produces lowliness and finally, the third point is the paradox of lowliness. Back to James 4:10, he says, the paradox is seen in that last clause, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt

you." Make yourselves lowly in the presence of God and he will exalt you. The paradox is that to be lowly is to be high. In fact, the word "exalt" means "to lift it up; to have your position exalted and lifted." So he says, "You make your business, you make it your practice to seek to go low before the Lord and in doing that God will lift you up. The more that you make it your business to think less of yourself truly as the Bible shows you, for what we truly are, the more God will lift you up and exalt you." This is the way of God.

I think his exaltation means he's going to honor you but he's going to honor you by using you. The more lowly you become, the more useful you become. The more you're aware of your sinfulness and your weakness, the more powerfully God can use you. You may accomplish things without being humble and lowly but it won't be accomplished with the same power that will happen when you are truly lowly and humble because when you're broken and weak, then the power of Christ can rest upon you.

So the paradox is that to be low is to be high. To go low in seeking the Lord and letting God show me the ugliness of my sin just means that when I realize I have a problem, what I do is I spend time with the Lord over it. I don't just quickly confess it, "Okay, honey, I lost my temper. Please forgive me. Lord, I lost my temper with Patty. Please forgive me," and moving on and I just keep doing that over and over and over. I need to confess it every time. Yes, I do need to confess it, but what this is talking about is I take some time to get alone with the Lord and read the word of God and let him examine me. That's the only way change is going to happen. It's going to happen through him examining me with his word and bringing me low so that I now realize, because what happens when we go through this is I see how ugly my sin is, I see how amazing his grace is that he would save me, and I see how unworthy I am of anything good. Everything that I have is a gift. Undeserved. Unmerited. The more that we see ourselves as we are, the more we know that we don't want what we deserve because what we deserve is hell. We deserve nothing good.

So as we're broken down like that, we become truly useful and the Lord begins to use us mightily. It's actually analogous to, it's an interesting point about this, you think about Jesus and his work of salvation. Theologians like to speak of his first coming as the humiliation of Jesus; that this was the lowering of Christ and the Scripture makes this clear, he left the glory of heaven and he entered time and space and this was, as Philippians 2 says, he was taking the form of a servant, becoming obedient to the point of death. Look at how the humiliation of Christ, he leaves glory, he doesn't regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, he leaves glory and he becomes lowly, and his whole life was a life of lowliness and brokenness and humility. Not because of his own sin. He never sinned, but it was the path that God put him on. His path was one of humiliation. Though the world was made through him, the world did not know him. He came to his own and his own did not receive him. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

God made it so that people rejected him. I mean, they rejected him naturally but the Lord allowed that to happen to him over and over and over again. He knew the brokenness and

the pain of rejection and we see this intensifying throughout his life so that his rejection becomes more pronounced day by day, and so that the humiliation of Christ, the suffering and the humbling of Christ reaches its zenith, zenith is not the right word, whatever the lowest point is, reaches the ultimate low at the cross. He's betrayed by a friend, denied by another. He's cursed by God. The Son of God who deserves all glory and praise is now hanging on a cross as the lowest and most despicable, bearing the sin of those who believe. He cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" God abandons him. The Father turns his back on the Son and in this incredibly low point, the lowest of lows, the most unimaginable horror, that is actually the greatest point of victory that the world has ever seen. This great low is actually the exaltation of Christ. It's the exaltation of God's glory.

I mean, we see something, this vicious murder, the most unjust act in history. How could people crucify the Lord of glory? A man who only did good, who only spoke truth? But God willed it and allowed it to get this terrible act at its most heinous moment and yet in that moment the greatest victory happened. In fact, you see this hinted at in John's Gospel. When we were preaching through John a number of years ago, it was interesting to note that Jesus says about the cross, which the cross, remember, is him becoming cursed, it's like the lowest of the low, "Cursed is anyone who hangs upon a tree." For Jesus the Son of God to die on a tree, he was being cursed. That is, he was being rejected by God to the fullest extent, but when Jesus is talking about the cross in John 3, he says to Nicodemus, "The Son of Man must be lifted up." Then he says the same thing in chapter 8, verse 28, "When I am lifted up, you will know that I am. You will know that I am the Lord. When I am lifted up." Then he says in chapter 12 right before the cross, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to Me," and theologians have come to see that the cross is actually the beginning of the exaltation of Christ. It's the lowest point of the lows and yet it's the highest point of the highs. It's the point of victory. It's the point of triumph. It's the point where he defeats Satan, purchases men from every tribe and tongue and kindred for himself. It's the great victory and it is the point, though, it's the greatest outpouring of evil the world has ever seen. It is the greatest injustice the world has ever seen, it is at the same time the greatest outpouring of the glory of God the world has ever seen because in the cross you see all the attributes of God on full display at their greatest height and glory. You see the wrath of God, the justice of God, the holiness of God, the kindness of God, the mercy of God, the love of God. Where do you see them any more than on the cross? You don't see any attribute of God anywhere more than on the cross.

So the lowest point where he's abandoned by God is actually the point where he's manifesting the glory of God and he's basically saying to us, "This is the way that you follow me. As you learn to become less, you become more." The avenue of brokenness and lowliness is actually the pathway to exaltedness and favor and if you will not go that way, you will not be used by God, but if you will, he will use you mightily.

I'll read "The Valley of Vision," a familiar Puritan poem. Listen to these words. Listen to the very first thing. "Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly." Jesus is both high and holy and meek and lowly.

"Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly,
Thou has brought me to the valley of vision,
where I live in the depths but see thee in the heights;
hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold
Thy glory.

Let me learn by paradox
that the way down is the way up,
that to be low is to be high,
that the broken heart is the healed heart,
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
that to have nothing is to possess all,
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
that to give is to receive,
that the valley is the place of vision.

Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells,
deepest wells,
and the deeper the wells the brighter
Thy stars shine;

Let me find Thy light in my darkness,
Thy life in my death,
Thy joy in my sorrow,
Thy grace in my sin,
Thy riches in my poverty
Thy glory in my valley."

When we see our sin and we see how ugly our sin is, we see how beautiful Jesus Christ is, we run to him with a whole new intensity. We see that we cannot, and this is what we have to learn to do, we have to learn to agree with the Spirit when he condemns us and we can even agree when Satan attacks us, rather than argue with him. When he says, "You are just wretched and you're vile and how can you say that you're a Christian? How can you talk to this person about Christ with how you treated this person today?" We just need to learn to agree with him. "You know, you're right. I am vile and I'm wretched but Jesus is so wonderful. Jesus is perfect and his righteousness is mine." So rather than get into an argument about us and defending ourselves, it doesn't matter about us because probably even if people accuse us of things we haven't done, if they knew other things, they'd have more stuff to say about us. They just don't know. They're just accusing us for the wrong things.

God knows and God has found a way to love us because of Jesus Christ so let's stop fighting against him exposing our sin. Let him do his work and then run to Christ. That's what God wants us to do and when that happens, then we become lowly people who are

very hard to pick a fight with. We'll be people who promote peace. This lowliness is meekness and it makes us like Jesus.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for the glory of our Savior. We thank you that though our sins are as scarlet, he makes us white as snow; that his death is all that is necessary to cleanse the most foul stain in our lives. Lord, we thank you that you do know everything about us. We can't hide anything from you. You see us as we are. Help us to stop deceiving ourselves and to just surrender to you, continually joyfully surrendering to Christ. Help us to keep on repenting all the way to glory and to keep on believing and trusting in such a glorious Savior. We pray this in his name. Amen.