

Lessons From Parrots and Snakes

James 4:9-10

John received a parrot as a gift. In time he found that the parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, obnoxious, and laced with profanity.

John tried everything he could think of to change the bird's attitude and language by consistently saying only polite words, playing soft music, and anything else he could think of to clean up the bird's vocabulary. Finally, John was so fed up he yelled at the parrot who yelled back. John shook the parrot and the parrot got angrier and ever ruder.

In desperation, John threw up his hands, grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer. For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed. Then suddenly there was total silence. Nothing was heard for a minute. Fearing he had hurt the parrot, John quickly opened the freezer door. The parrot calmly stepped out onto John's outstretched arm and said "I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I'm sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgiveable behavior."

John was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude. As he was about to ask the parrot what had made the dramatic change in his behavior, the bird continued, "May I ask what the turkey did?"

We are in **James 4:9-10** this morning where I invite you to turn in your Bibles as we continue to address issues for daily practical Christian living.

From our study last week, the challenge for us is to draw near to God with the promise that when we do, God will draw near to us. James provides two practical steps in our endeavor to draw near. We are to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. From our discussion last week, we learned that hands are a reference to our conduct, the things we do. The heart refers to our character or who we are and includes thoughts and motives. If we are to draw near to God so that He in turn draws near to us we

need to act by removing sin that is in our lives. We saw from the Old Testament that before the priest could come into the presence of God, he had to go through a prescribed ritual of washing that symbolized the cleansing away of sin. Only after he did this could he enter into God's presence.

Our passage today is a continuation of what is required if we are to enter God's presence.

Psalm 24:3-4 "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false." (See also **Psalm 15**)

The Psalmist echoes the thoughts of James.

Who can draw near to God?

Who can stand in His presence?

The person who has clean hands and a pure heart.

The person who has put away spiritual idolatry.

The person who does not lift his soul to an idol.

The person who is not guilty in his actions.

The person whose attitudes and motives are right.

Jesus said in **Matthew 5:8** that the **"pure in heart will see God."** **How do we become pure?** Only by being clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Romans 5:1-2 "Therefore, since we have been justified (made right with God) through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

II Corinthians 5:21 "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him (Christ) we might become the righteousness of God."

Philippians 3:8-9 "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

We can only stand in the presence of God by being holy ourselves, but we are sinners so unless and until we confess, repent, and believe in the finished work of Christ on the cross that His death and resurrection satisfied God's justice for sin, we can't come into God's presence. When we are saved, we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, making it now possible for us to stand before God. But when we sin, that fellowship is broken, not lost, but broken. To have it restored I need to confess and repent. That doesn't mean getting saved all over again, it means fellowship is then restored because we have the promise through **I John 1:9** that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This, coming after **verse 3** where we are told that we can have fellowship with God. Our passage tells us the actions or conduct and the attitudes or character we should have when dealing with sin.

Sin is something we all have. **Romans 3:23** says that sin is falling short of God's glory, something we are all guilty of doing. Sin, then, is anything against the character of God.

Sin for Charles Ryrie is "missing the mark, badness, rebellion, iniquity, going astray wickedness, wandering, ungodliness, crime, lawlessness, transgression, ignorance, and a falling away."

I John 3:4 simply defines sin as lawlessness, not by how the world defines right or wrong, but as God defines it since He is the standard. Sin is a defection or deviation from any of God's standards.

Strong's Concordance defines sin as a "lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state."

Wayne Grudem says, "sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature."

Buswell defines sin in this way: "Sin may be defined ultimately as anything in the creature which does not express, or which is contrary to, the holy character of the Creator."

Holiness simply means separated from what is common or unclean. When we think of the holiness

of God it not only means being separated from what is unclean or evil, it also means that He is positively pure in every way. Holiness is more than being good and morally upright. Holiness is the defining character of God. He is holy in every thought and action, an attribute that will never change.

Because God is holy and we are sinners, we must be separated from God unless a way is found to make us holy. Christ's sacrificial death made it possible.

The prophet Habakkuk reminds us that God's eyes are too pure to approve evil and He cannot look on wickedness with favor (**Habakkuk 1:13**).

Jesus had some things to say about specific sins that included blasphemy or irreverence for the things of God, hypocrisy, covetousness, transgression against the law, pride, being a stumbling block, disloyalty, immorality, anger, fruitlessness, sins of speech, showing off by supposed piety, lack of faith, and prayerlessness (this is not an exhaustive list).

Paul wrote about sins like anger, hatred, bitterness, envy, covetousness, lying, slander, unforgiveness, sexual immorality, brawling, unkindness, lust, idolatry, filthy language, impatience (again, this is not an exhaustive list).

James addressed a variety of sins like doubt, lack of joy in trials, pride, being judgmental or showing favoritism based on a person's economic status, giving in to temptation through lust and evil desire, anger, moral filth, disobedience to God's Word, an untamed tongue, following the wisdom of the world that is unspiritual and of the devil, envy, selfish ambition that leads to chaos and every evil work, quarrels, fights, spiritual adultery, not to mention the things he has yet to address.

James 4:9-10 show us how to address the sins that are an affront to God, the things that keep us from drawing near to Him. **"Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up."**

James is saying that if we want to draw near to God, we must consider the seriousness of sin and

effectually deal with it. Having a right view of God and His holiness should make us sensitive to our sin. James presents two ways we do so. To sum it up in one word, it would be the word repentance. It's the call to have a contrite heart. It's the call to have the character of humility.

I. THE CALL TO HAVE A CONTRITE HEART – v. 9

In **verses 7-10** there are 10 commands. Five of them are in **verses 7-8**.

We are to submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God, cleanse our hands, and purify our heart.

Our text today gives the other 5 commands. We are to grieve, mourn, wail, change our laughter to mourning and joy to gloom, and humble ourselves before the Lord.

As we saw in the previous verse where one dealt with conduct and the other dealt with character, we see the same idea in our text today. When it comes to how we are to deal with sin, **verse 9** deals with our conduct or how we should respond to sin and **verse 10** deals with our character or the kind of attitude we should have toward sin.

This morning I want us to see the seriousness of sin and how James says we should react to it. We have already taken a brief look at the holiness of God and defined sin. We understand that we are all sinners and even after our salvation, we still sin, so what are we to do about it. **How should we respond?**

The Bible uses two terms that are important to understand. The word in the Old Testament is contrite.

David uses it in his prayer of confession found in **Psalm 51:17** **“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”**

In essence, come with a fully penitent heart. The Lord says in **Isaiah 66:2** **“These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at My word.”**

Contrition is being broken by sin, something God

likes and looks on with favor. We see it linked with humility, brokenness and a fear of the Word of God.

The International Bible Encyclopedia defines it this way: **“A contrite heart is one in which the natural pride and self-sufficiency have been completely humbled by the consciousness of guilt.”**

The Hebrew word means to be crushed, crippled, or broken. As a modifier, when the word is joined with heart, we have the idea of a conscience that is crushed by the weight and guilt of sin.

GotQuestions.org adds this: **“When a human spirit stops justifying its wrong choices, awakens to the depth of its depravity, and humbly accepts God’s righteous condemnation of sin, contrition is present. A contrite heart offers no excuses and shifts no blame. It fully agrees with God about how evil it is. A contrite heart throws itself upon the mercy of God, knowing that it deserves nothing but righteous wrath.”**

Isaiah 6:5 **“‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined (to be without hope)! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’”**

Psalm 41:4 **“O Lord, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against You.”**

Along with David’s prayer of confession from a contrite heart torn by his sin, there is another great example by another king of Judah.

II Chronicles 34:3-4, 8, 14-21, 27

From an early age King Josiah had a desire to seek the Lord, to lead the nation in obeying God’s law and doing away with idolatry. But that wasn’t enough. We can do all the right things on the outside and still not have a broken spirit over sin. It wasn’t until they found the Law of God, hidden in the temple, which tells you the spiritual state of Judah, then read to the king that his heart was broken over the sins of the nation. Tearing one’s clothes was a public sign of grief. One tradition says that the mourner must tear the clothing over the heart – a sign of a broken heart.

One time while reading Psalm 51 I was overcome by an overwhelming sense of guilt for sin. I lay on the floor sobbing in repentance from a contrite heart, broken by sin and in need of forgiveness. A great sense of peace then flooded me, knowing that confession and repentance brings forgiveness and cleansing for sin.

Isaiah 57:15 (God speaking) **“I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”**

David put it this way in his confession: **“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice...Restore to me the joy of my salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”** (Psalm 51:7-8, 12)

The New Testament uses another word to depict the kind of attitude we should have regarding sin. It's the term repentance. Repentance requires that we have a contrite heart, a broken spirit over sin. We need to see sin for what it really is and not treat it so glibly as if we only took a piece of penny candy from the store counter. Any sin, all sin is an affront to God and we need to see it as a serious matter and repent of it.

Charles Spurgeon says **“repentance is a discovery of the evil of sin, a mourning that we have committed it, a resolution to forsake it. It is, in fact, a change of mind of a very deep and practical character, which makes the man love what once he hated, and hate what once he loved.”**

He's saying that when we see sin for what it really is, especially in light of who God is, then we will be broken by it and have a desire to forsake it. We can't help but cry out like Isaiah in confession and repentance. As we draw closer to God the darker our sin will appear, and like Peter, we will tell the Lord to get away from us because we are sinful. But God wants us to confess and repent of our sin. He wants us to realize what it cost Him to forgive our sin. He wants us to draw near to Him and we can't

when there is sin. Without contrition and repentance, we will be like the Pharisees going through the motions of religious activity but bringing us no closer to God.

James calls us to a heart of contrition and repentance in the three commands in **verse 9** – grieve, mourn, and wail, let laughter become mourning and joy gloom. They are outward expressions or response of our grief over sin.

So let me ask at this juncture: are we broken over sin? Do we grieve for what grieves God? Or do we have a somewhat flippant or calloused view of sin as if it's not a big deal?

Let's remember that even the sins we think are seemingly insignificant are sins that sent Jesus to the cross. Learn to see sin as God does and respond with a broken heart as we confess and repent so that we can draw near to God.

A couple moved into a new neighborhood. One morning as they sat at the kitchen table, they saw the neighbor hanging her laundry. The wife commented that she was surprised the neighbor would hang out laundry that looked a bit dirty. The husband said nothing. The next week, it was the same thing, the wife remarking again about how dirty the clothes looked how and embarrassed she was for the neighbor. She had the same comments for a couple more weeks. Then one morning as she observed the neighbor hanging out her clothes, she was surprised that the clothes look clean and wondered if she had changed detergent. The husband then said he had gotten up early and washed the window.

From whose perspective are you looking at sin?

One day two men entered the Temple to pray. The first to pray was a Pharisee. He praised himself for how righteous he was citing all the acts he thought God was pleased with. He offered no heart of confession or contrition and even cast himself as better than the other who had entered at the same time. From his perspective, he wasn't even sure God would give the other guy the time of day given

the kind of sinner he was being a tax collector. The second man then offered his prayer asking God for mercy for his sin. The Bible says he was so distraught he couldn't even look up but beat his chest in remorse. Jesus then asked which man went away justified. The answer is the man whose heart was broken and repentant over sin.

Do we grieve, mourn and wail over sin? Do we show visible signs of repentance? Do we see sin as God does?

To grieve is to be afflicted with the idea of being miserable or causing pain. It suggests that our sin should make us feel dejected and unhappy. The word mourn means to lament. It's used in Revelation when the merchants lament the collapse of Babylon in the end times. Gloom literally is to be downcast or lower one's eyes.

Is our heart heavy over our sin?

Let's be clear that there is a difference between confession and repentance. Confession is admitting to something. When a person confesses in court to breaking the law, they are admitting that they violated the standard of society. In the Bible, confession means that we agree with God that our actions or words are wrong. When we confess our sin, we admit we violated God's law. Confession is not repentance, it's a part of repentance. Confession doesn't mean we have repented of it. Judas confessed, Peter repented.

Repentance, on the other hand, involves the desire to change our actions. People will confess to a crime, serve their time and then after release go out and do the same thing again. Repentance means more than just turning from sin. In the Bible it means to change one's mind, which leads to changed actions and yes, turning from sin.

Matthew 3:8 "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."

Luke 19:1-10

Charles Stanley says that "repentance is heartfelt sorrow for sin followed by a sincere commitment to

forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ. When we truly repent, the result is a changed life. We forsake our former ways and return to the Lord."

Isaiah 55:7 "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon."

Confession isn't enough. It's only words. Many will confess to sin only because they got caught, but don't intend to change. **As one author noted "Their show of remorse is due to the consequences of their actions, not the sin of their actions."** When John the Baptist preached repentance to the crowds, he also said that their repentance should be evident in a changed heart seen by their actions.

True repentance on our part will be evident in a changed heart that is seen both in the remorse we express and in the actions we exhibit.

What can prevent us from confession and repentance?

Pride. We don't like to admit that we were wrong or that we are under the authority of someone else. Pride wants to excuse our sin away or justify it in some way or blame others. (Adam and Eve come to mind here.)

Proverbs 16:18 says that pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

We have also seen in **James 4:6** that God opposes the proud.

Ignorance. I don't mean to imply people who may not be smart. What I mean by ignorance is a neglect on the part of the believer to read the Bible and so have no real understanding of God's moral standard. They excuse their sin away by saying they just didn't know so therefore they should not be held liable. Decades ago, even people who were not Christians had a pretty good sense of right and wrong. That has changed. Even within the church there is a growing Biblical illiterateness or ignorance of what God's Word says about sin and the need to forsake it. So when culture says certain things are okay, they have no Biblical point of

reference on which to base their sinful actions they ignore any Scriptural mandate that would tell them such a thing is sin. They follow the philosophy that ignorance is bliss. They ignore the parts of the Bible that would tell them of their sin and need to change.

Indifference or insensitivity. That's simply a lack of concern or interest in changing. It's a feeling of apathy about sin. Sin isn't really a big deal and it doesn't bother them. As long as they stay away from the big ones, sin isn't much of a concern. This person has no desire to draw near God. He is comfortable with his sin. He doesn't think it's hurting anyone and therefore doesn't consider it a big deal.

Willfulness or stubbornness. We refuse to confess.

John Phillips writes "Nothing is amusing about sin...The only reason we do not weep [over sin] is that we are so insensitive to the horror of our sin, so ignorant of its consequences, and so careless about the holiness of God."

If we looked at our sin over against the holiness of God, we wouldn't be so glib about it, we would grieve, mourn, and wail. When it comes to sin and our desire to draw near to God, we are to have a contrite heart. It should be evident in our conduct.

And then something we have already discussed before, but it comes up again in **verse 10** is the call to have a character of humility. The key to a contrite spirit is humility.

II. THE CALL TO HAVE A CHARACTER OF HUMILITY – v. 10

Humility again, is an attitude of the heart that puts us in proper perspective with God. Peter was humble when he was filled with remorse for his denial of Jesus. Judas was filled with remorse, but it was not out of humility.

In order to draw near to God, we must be humble. A humble heart is necessary to repent of sin. Only a heart that is humble will see God for who He is and see sin for what it is and be moved to repent.

In part 2 of John Bunyan's book *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he describes the time when Christiana and her companions had to travel down into the Valley of Humiliation. It was a "steep hill, and the way is very slippery." What he meant by that is it's never easy to humble yourself. When our journey requires humility, we can easily slip. Simply put, humility is the absence of pride. C. S. Lewis defines humility as thinking of ourselves less. It's hard to want to admit sin, but admit it we must and can only do so in humility. Only when we agree with God about our sin, can our heart be humble in repenting of it. The truly humble and penitent person finds forgiveness and grace from God, who exalts the humble. The tax collector was humbled by his sin and God exalted him.

It is a humble heart that prays asking God to search us and know our heart to reveal any wicked way in us so that we can repent and be led in righteousness. In our passage humility is a genuine realization of complete unworthiness because of sin. **How then, do we respond when the Holy Spirit or the Word of God touches our soul?** When we have a contrite heart and a character of humility we are able to forsake sin and draw near to God.

Gary Richmond gained a unique perspective on snakes while working with a snake handler in a zoo. He helped four others with the extremely dangerous task of milking the venom of a King Cobra, which has enough venom to kill 1,000 adults. To milk the venom, they push an entire roll of paper towels into the cobra's open mouth, which promptly clamps down. Once the paper towels are saturated with the deadly venom, they are ready to release the cobra. The curator gave an important warning: "more people are bitten trying to let go of the snakes than when they grab them." If the cobra is not released properly, it could turn and bite its captors.

Many people claim to repent of sin, but they don't forsake it, they don't let it go properly through a contrite heart. It's like first letting go of the cobra's head and then the tail. **Are you properly letting go of your sin through a contrite humble heart?**
Psalm 34:17-18; Psalm 32:1-5