

Draw Near to God: The Attitude (Part 3)

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

You can turn in your Bibles to James 4. This is the third message in a series on drawing near to God. I'm going to read the first 10 verses of James 4. "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"

Again, I want to emphasize, you don't want to try to figure out: Okay, is he speaking to Christians? Is he speaking to non-Christians? And suddenly try to put yourself in a category where these things don't pertain. The reality is these things do pertain. The reality is that if you're not a Christian or you're not genuine, then obviously this characterizes your life. If you're a Christian, these are things you need to be putting to death, but still envy and jealousy and quarrels and that kind of thing, fights break out in the hearts of Christians. And even if it doesn't come to the outside, sometimes it's in the heart because this all has to do with things that are at war within us. "Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" We feel that warfare of our passions within us. "You desire, you do not have." That describes us. We all have desires that we don't have. And now there can be wrong ways to pursue this, but even in murder, we know that wrong hatred and wrong anger is described by the Lord as murder. This pertains to us all. We don't want to try to dodge this.

"You covet." Now, I know we need to put covetousness to death, but that doesn't mean that we don't know the reality of having to strive with it. We cannot obtain, we fight, we quarrel. "You do not have because you do not ask." That can very much at times describe us too. We don't ask for everything that we ought to ask for. Or we do ask and God doesn't give us. We know as Christians we ask for things at times and we don't receive. Now, it may not be because we have asked wrongly. It just may be that God doesn't want to give it to us. But the reality is that even as Christians we do ask wrongly at times. We don't know how to ask as we ought. Because "you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people..." Certainly that is not a characteristic statement of Christians. But anytime a Christian begins to dabble in the world, "do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" Certainly the lost are very much characterized here. "Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes themselves an enemy of God." That's a good statement for us to take home no matter what our spiritual condition is.

"Do you suppose it is for no purpose the Scripture says that God yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us?" He's jealous for us. "But He gives more grace. Therefore it says..." And here's who He gives grace to. He is especially in the business of giving grace to the humble.

Now that doesn't mean that as much as God opposes the proud, that He doesn't cause His rain and His sunshine to fall upon the proud. Yet, He is in opposition to them and His opposition especially becomes obvious on the day of judgment. But "He opposes the proud, gives graces to the humble."

Now you want to notice that because today I am dealing with "Draw Near to God: The Attitude." I've dealt with the supreme need. I've dealt with the danger. Today, the attitude. "He gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." There's our passage. "Cleanse your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched, mourn, weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves..." There's the humility again. You see it back up in v. 6. He repeats it again in v. 10. In fact, our text in v. 8 is sandwiched between humility. "Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you."

Now, just to reflect a little bit in the past weeks. We dealt with this being our supreme need. And listen, God says this, two evils, my people - He says they've forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and they've hewn out for themselves broken cisterns. I feel like I want to reaffirm something here. I know this. I know this pastorally. I know this if I keep my ear to the ground. I know this directly from some of you. I know this through the other elders or through my wife or however - however information passes back to me. And I get these questions that pour in. I see what people struggle with, what they wrestle with. Some of you, let's just be honest, aside from any portrayal on the outside, some here - I know this doesn't describe everybody - we're in different places, but some, if you're absolutely honest, you would have to admit that right now you are miserable. Maybe you're trying to be a Christian and the thing is miserable because no matter how you try, it's just not working. You're not finding the power of God in your life. You feel empty. Or maybe you've known in the past the riches of being a Christian, but right now you're in a season where you can't find Him. You're in a season where you don't know what's going on.

Or some of you you're in places where it just seems like there are mountains that are obstacles in your life and how to get them out of the way, you don't know how. Or some of you are captive to sin right now and it's got the better of you. You might be in denial or you might be trying to fight it or you might be trying to grit your teeth, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. You know that something's got a hold of you. You can't shake it. It's making you miserable.

Some of you, we know what it is to have spiritual decline. We're not just static in this Christian life. We go through ups and downs. There's valleys, there's mountain peaks. We know that. Some of you are barely hanging on.

What's the great need? See, when I talk about the supreme need here this has to do with real life. And even if you're healthy, this still comes back to this because if you take your eyes off the supreme need, you take your eyes off the fountain of living water, what you're going to find is what happens then, you go to the broken cisterns and then they're broken. They don't hold water. So they don't hold what you're looking for. It just doesn't work.

And the thing is these problems in our life, sometimes you get people that come in the church and it's almost like they think - I hear people say pastoral visitation, pastoral visitation. It's almost like there's this mindset that you know what I really need? I need counseling to fix everything. People come into the church. Well, you know, I'm here to be mentored. And you get this idea. Look, I'm not saying that there isn't a place to mentor, there's not a place to invest in one another's lives, there's not a place for the church to interact and stir up, there's not a place for pastors to visit and counsel. I'm not saying there's not a place for that. But you know you can

get in a place where that's where you think the answer is to be found. If only I could just - pastoral visitation, that's what I need. I need a visit.

That's not the primary thing that you need. How do you overcome? Because listen, even if one of the pastors comes to your house, they don't bring you power. What they may bring you is truth that will lead you to the right place. That's really what counselors do. That's how they're effective. They present you with truth. If you take that truth, somehow, you're going to be able to believe it, live according to it, live in light of that reality, in light of that truth, act in light of that.

How do you overcome? You know how you overcome. You overcome when you're flooded by joy. The joy of the Lord is your strength. You overcome when you experience resurrection power. You overcome when you feel the love of God and it's real to you. Brethren, the reality is living the Christian life, you know what it is that gives you victory. It's when you have a hope. It's when you believe this truth. It's when God comes close. It's when you draw near to Him, He draws near to you. And things happen and you experience reality. And there's manifestation. And there's love, there's reality, there's joy, there's power. That's how we overcome.

When you really look at your life and it's like you recognize that there is indeed something at work within you that no longer is enslaved to sin. You see God working. He takes that appetite away. He gives you the ability to say no to things. He gives you the ability to turn and walk away, not to be like the Gentiles and how they are and how you were in your former manner of life. It's when you look up and you realize: Wow, there are things at work in me that used to not be there. There is faith there. I can lay hold on promises and I can walk in these things. Look, we're needy. Do you hear him? Draw near to God and "I will draw near to you." And that will answer your problems.

You know, people are always looking for the next gimmick. Give me the book. Give me this. Give me that. Give me the visitation. They're always looking. And you know what happens? "Well, the preaching here, you know, it's not cutting it. Oh, a new church! That's what I need! I need a new church." You know what I have found? That when people have had a coming close to God, suddenly, they're the healthiest people in the church. Suddenly, they're not the people looking for some gimmick or some door out. Why? Because that's what we really need. That is the supreme need. This isn't just whistling Dixie here. We're talking about what really fires the true need.

What we really need is we all have to wake up and realize - don't depend on men. Men are just weak. Men can know Scripture. Men can have gifts and they can use those gifts to help you, but what you really need is you need God. And that's what this text is all about. It is about drawing near to Him that He might draw near to you. And I'll tell you what, the best preachers in the world, the best pastors in the world, and all the home visitation in the world will not compensate or make up if you're far away from Him. That's a reality. So we all need to take this serious.

Look, the remedy is here. You want to be the happiest people in the world? You want to be the most victorious people in the world? Be people who dwell in the presence of God. That'll do it. People who really know the reality of what James 4 - James had some idea here being inspired by the Spirit. The Spirit was telling him: James, you tell them. Draw near to God and He'll draw near to you. Tell them, James. And now, I'm here to tell you. Nothing is going to

compensate for you not drawing near to God so as to have Him draw near to you. See, it's not enough for you to think you're drawing close to Him or even to draw close to Him. What you really have to have is Him draw close to you. But there's a way - see, this is a conditional promise. Something's got to happen on your part. That's why I'm wanting to look at this. What is it that we do? How do we really get there?

Then the second message I did after the supreme need was the danger. Now just to remind us about the danger. See, this is going to take me into the message today. The attitude. We talked about the danger, and what I wanted us to look at last week, you may remember we looked at places like Psalm 50 - God's threatening to tear us apart. We looked at Psalm 21. God has His bow at the face of His enemies. See, I wanted to look last week at what a dangerous God we have.

This week, I'm wanting us to deal with the attitude. What does attitude mean? Anybody have an idea? Sometimes we say: The guy's got a bad attitude. But you know, it's broader than that. It's a frame of mind. It's the manner. What do we think about attitude? Attitude is the manner or the disposition. You know, attitude can be even the posture. When we talk about the attitude, think about the posture in which we approach God. Now what James told us is this, the attitude that you want to come to Him with is humility. The way is barred. He resists the proud. The proper attitude.

Now, brethren, I want us to look at a contrast. I want us to think about a contrast right in the beginning. Here's the thing, if I open my Bible, say, here. It says if you think about the eye of God - anthropomorphic language - the eye of God. He sites His bow at the face of the wicked - at the face of His enemies. Okay, if I turn here, I find that the eye of God is on the horizon and He's watching for a sinner, but you see, this sinner is coming towards Him and He runs. He sees and He runs and He throws His arms and He calls for the robe and the ring and feet to be sandaled and fatted calf to be killed. Okay, you see this in Scripture. You see this God who says I am going to tear you apart. My sword is whetted and it is sharp and I am going to execute judgment. Those who would not have Me to reign over them, you bring them here and slaughter them before Me. But then I find that the same God as described by Christ...

And here's the thing - Christ - Do you know what Christ said when He came here? He said this concerning His Father. He said I know Him. If you go to John's Gospel, "I know Him, for I come from Him. He sent Me." That's John 7:29. In John 8, He says, "You have not known Him. I know Him. If I were to say that I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you, but I know Him." "I do know Him and I keep His Word." And you see, here's Christ. He says I know Him. I came from the halls of glory. Don't we read this? That it's He who declares God. He came here to declare God to us. He came here to show us the Father. "Show us the Father and it suffices." Phillip? You've seen Him. He came and you know what He said? You know how He describes this terrible sin-hating consuming fire of a God who is His Father? He does say things like: Don't fear those who kill the body. I'm going to tell you who to fear. You fear My Father. You fear Him who destroys both body and soul in hell. You fear Him.

But then Christ could come around and say - Remember what was happening? The tax collectors and the sinners were coming to Him. That's what it says in Luke 15. They were coming to Him. And He begins to tell parables. And He tells three of them. And He describes His Father in these terms. He says while you know the sinner I'm talking about, there was a

certain sinner that we know as the prodigal who had been with prostitutes and riotous living. While that man was still a long way off, his father saw - same eye that sits that bow at the face of sinners - that same eye saw. He saw this former prostitute-visiting riotous living, squandered everything - he sees this young man and he felt compassion. Now Jesus is giving us a picture of the Father. He says the father ran and he embraced him and he kissed him. "The father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, put it on him. Put a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let us eat and celebrate, for this my son was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.' They began to celebrate."

I would say you know what, we almost can't make heads or tails out of this. It's like are we even talking about the same God here? See, a lot of people don't. They look at the Old Testament, which the fingerprints of the Old Testament God are all over the New Testament. But somehow people just imagine they can't put these together. How can this be the same God? How can it be? How can it be? One who waits to run to the sinner, embraces him, kisses him? How is this even possible?

Now look, your life - your life depends on this. You better be able to figure out why God is portrayed both ways. Your life depends on this. It all has to do - all of it - has to do with the attitude of your approach. All of it. The way you come to God.

And I might try to just simply go on explaining. But as they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. So let me begin to give you some pictures. You know this if you've read your Bible all the way through, but I want to remind you. You have a man. This man was probably considered the most debauched, evil, wicked, defiled king that the Northern Kingdom ever had. He was a man that went by the name of Ahab. And you know him. His wife was Jezebel. Scripture says this about him. "The son of Omri did evil..." "Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord..." Listen to this, "...More than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel and went and served Baal. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah..." Listen to this, "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. Ahab arose..." to go down to the vineyard of Naboth. You know what happened at Naboth's vineyard. Jezebel had Naboth killed. And here's this wicked king. He wanted this vineyard. The owner wouldn't give it to him, so just off the guy. He's going down to claim the vineyard, to take possession of it. "The word of the Lord came to Elijah." Ahab was a contemporary of King Asa in the Southern Kingdom and of the prophet Elijah. So God tells Elijah you go tell Ahab something. "The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite saying, 'Arise, go down to meet Ahab, King of Israel. You shall say to him, "Thus says the Lord, in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood. Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up. I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free in Israel. I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah. For the anger to which you have provoked Me and because you have made Israel to sin, there was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab whom Jezebel, his wife, incited."

But there's the most interesting fact about this exceedingly wicked king. When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes. He put sackcloth on his flesh. He fasted. He lay in sackcloth and he went about dejectedly. "And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite,

saying..." Now think with me. God says to Elijah: Have you noticed? Did you see this? I mean, He's dialoguing back and forth with Elijah. Elijah, can you believe this? Do you see what I see? Have you seen how Ahab has - and here's our word from James 4 - humbled himself before Me? "Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the disaster in his days." Look, I'm not saying Ahab was saved. But you want to notice that. Here's a man who did more to provoke the Lord and let him humble himself and the Lord notices and says I'm not going to do what I said I was going to do. Not in his day anyway.

Now we go to the Southern Kingdom. And if you're following where I'm going, you probably know already who I'm going to bring up next. Now we have a king in the Southern Kingdom in Jerusalem who is by far the most evil of all kings in the lineage of David. This man's name was Manasseh. Hezekiah was his father. Seems like he may have had a good upbringing. He reigned 55 years, and I'll tell you, that was a long reign for a king anywhere. And most of it was unbelievable.

Listen to this, "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel." He rebuilt the high places. He erected altars to the Baals. He made Asheroth. He worshiped all the host of heaven. He built altars in the house of the Lord, in the temple. He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. He burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. He used fortune telling. He used omens, sorcery, dealt with mediums, necromancers. He was into the demonic and into the occult. "He did much evil in the sight of the Lord provoking Him to anger. The carved image of the idol that he had made, he set in the house of God." "Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel. The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention."

Here's the thing, God spoke to Ahab and he responded and God relented. He humbled himself. Now hear what's happening here. God spoke to Manasseh. He says I don't hear it. I don't believe it's from God. I don't believe you're a true prophet. He paid no attention. "Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another. The Lord said to His servants the prophets, 'Because Manasseh King of Judah has committed these abominations, has done things more evil than all that the Amorites ever did, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols, therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing about upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.' Therefore (now listen to what happened), the Lord brought upon Jerusalem, Judah, commanders of the army of the King of Assyria and they captured Manasseh with hooks..." I wonder what that means. They captured him with hooks. That doesn't sound good. They bound him with chains of bronze and they brought him to Babylon. "And when he was in distress..."

Now listen to this. So he's gone further than Ahab. He says I'm not going to hear the prophets. But now these commanders come in of Assyria. They bind him. They haul him off to Babylon. They throw him into prison. And there in his distress, "he entreated the favor of the Lord his God and (here's our James 4 word) humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." He prayed to Him. And God was moved.

See, that prodigal, it was the same. He came to himself. "I have sinned before heaven and before you." No longer is it: give me! Give me my inheritance! He came to himself. He recognized he didn't deserve anything.

Manasseh is in distress. He entreats the favor of the Lord. He prays to Him. "God was moved and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God. And Manasseh took away the foreign gods, and the idol from the house of the Lord, and the altars that he built on the mountain of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem and he threw them outside the city. He restored the altar of the Lord and offered on it sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving, and he commanded Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel." This is the most wicked, defiant, vile king of the Southern Kingdom.

You know what God has done? He's taken the worst of the North, the worst of the South, and He's put them up on display as both being men who humbled themselves and God said I see it. Now, I don't think there's any indication that Ahab is converted, but I think there's a lot of indication that Manasseh... Manasseh repented. And all is well with him. There's no indication he ever went back to his sin. God restored him, he went back to his people, removed all of it, and he told the people: Now you bow down to the Lord.

Sometimes we don't recognize what Jonah was dealing with. See, we hear Nineveh. Let's just think beyond Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire. When you go through your Bibles, you come across different names like Shalmaneser, or Tiglath-pileser. Do you know those names? Or Sargon, or Sennacherib. Do you ever come across those names? They probably ring a bell with you if you've read all the way through your Bible. Those were kings who would have reigned in Nineveh. In fact, we know historically, Shalmaneser the Third was on the throne in the year that Jonah went to Nineveh.

You just begin to do a little bit of research. You know what you find about the Assyrians? The Assyrians loved to skin alive the enemies that they captured and defeated. They were famous for flaying men. In fact, I understand, I think it was them, they had developed the art of seeing how much they could tear your skin off you and keep you alive. They cut people's hands and feet off and impaled them on stakes. They cut pregnant women open, dashed children to pieces. This is all historical. This isn't just historical, we've got reliefs and they're preserved. They were buried in the sand in different places. They've uncovered them. They are preserved with detail. And they show you what they did to people. There's no question. We know what they did.

Now I would just say this, imagine [someone] invaded our country. And they took our soldiers and we knew they cut off their hands and their feet and they impaled them on stakes. We knew that they captured our citizens and tore their skin off them and mounted the skin on walls. You had heard they took every pregnant woman they found and they ripped the babies out, dashed children to pieces. You see, if suddenly God told you: Christian, I want you to go preach the Gospel [to them,] that's basically the kind of situation that Jonah was in. That's what these people had done to his people. That's what the Assyrian Empire was like.

And Jonah - Jonah called out. He goes to this city. Nineveh's wicked. They are one of the powerhouse empires upon the face of the earth at this time, maybe the strongest. And they were wicked, wicked. Notoriously wicked. "Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown," and

the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast, put on sackcloth. See, this is like Ahab. They sat in ashes. "He issued a proclamation published through Nineveh, 'By the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast...'" This is the king of Nineveh. He says, "Let neither man nor beast nor flock taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water. Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that's in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from His fierce anger." You see, this is the God with the bow. The fierce anger. It's the same God. And yet, let these people... you know who He aims at? He aims it at the people who are aiming back at Him. But let the people lay down the weapons and fall on their knees and say, "Mercy," and He runs and puts the robe around you. It's all got to do with the attitude.

And you know what? That's why Jonah didn't want to go. Because he knew it! He says as much. (incomplete thought) Jonah 4, "It displeased Jonah exceedingly." He was angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That's why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. I knew You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster. And isn't it amazing? You know how it says it there at the end when he's all upset and the gourd withered and everything? God says to him, "Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, there's more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left?" And for Him to even tack on to the end: "And also much cattle..." It's like why did the Lord even add that? There's cattle. There's much cattle.

Children, I really fear children of Christian households embracing a hyper-Calvinism where you're saying, well, God's got to give me a new heart. You know, God's got to do this. God's got to zap me. God's got to cause me to be born again. God's got to do this. Let me tell you what the message of Scripture is. You just lay down your weapons and you cry to Him. And we have such a God who will run to celebrate with you. Have you not heard what the Lord said? "There is more joy in heaven..." - that's the celebration - over one sinner who does something that the 99 others don't do. What is it?

Listen, it's the same Father. This is a Father whose wrath is terrible beyond description. Do you know what it says of the prodigal? Here's the thing: Father, give me my inheritance! Classic example of a lost person. God, give me, give me, give me. You think you deserve everything. You think you're good. You think God owes you. You're upset, bent out of shape when you don't get what you think you want. But you know what happened to this guy? It says he came to himself. He began to think. Repent. That's what this chapter's about in Luke 15. It's about repentance. He rethought things. Repentance - a change of mind. He came to himself. He starts rethinking things. He said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread? I perish here with hunger." He said I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to arise and go to my father. I'm going to say, "Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm not worthy. I'm no longer worthy." He never was worthy, but he sees it now. He comprehends it. "Treat me as one of your hired servants." He's just asking for mercy. How much ever he might get.

But you see what you have to recognize is this: God doesn't shower His mercy partially in redemption. It's all or nothing. And he gets it all. It's like the Father doesn't even hear him. He arose and came to his father. "While he was still a long way off..." It doesn't matter how far off you are. You could be way out there. You say you don't know what I've done. Yeah, you don't

know what I've done. But you can be way out there. You can be like Ahab and Manasseh and Nineveh. It doesn't matter how wicked. You see, what God has done is He's written a book to take some of the most wretched people imaginable and show you that if they will lay down their weapons and surrender and ask for mercy... you see. You see what He's shown you.

And here it is again. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son, but... the father...' The father doesn't even answer him. The father just spins around and begins talking to the servants. It's like he didn't even have anything to say to the son. Why? Nothing needs to be said because he sees everything is right. He spins around. He says to his servants: Quickly, the best robe! Put a ring on his hand. Shoes on his feet. That's it.

But you see, the Bible says that there's 99 out of 100 who don't need repentance. They don't think they need to think any different about themselves. Why? Because they think they're okay. Let's get out of the religious setting, the church setting. If I sent somebody to your door - not me - somebody you didn't know, a stranger, they just show up at your door. (knocking) And they begin to get in a conversation with you. And they want to know do you deserve hell? If there are any people in here who say: No, I've been a pretty good person... you are one of the 99 and God is angry - fiercely angry. And that arrow is thirsty for your blood and it is pointed at your face. If that is your answer, that is not the answer these guys gave. See, that's not humility. That's self-exaltation and self-righteousness.

You know what these people recognized? Lord, we need mercy because we're in trouble. And you know what Jesus said. He said if you're well, you don't need a doctor. Who's well? Who? And who are the 99 who need no repentance? Well, they're all around us. And I'll tell you they will find God to be a holy terror to them. They will find Him and the fierceness of His anger will tear them to pieces. And I'll tell you one of the main reasons why. Because you're basically saying: I don't need Christ. I'm okay myself. I don't need what Christ did on that cross. I am not a sinner. I am not like that. I don't need that. I am not going to say I've sinned because I've been a pretty good person. What you are doing is you're basically spitting on what God sent His Son to do on the cross because you're saying God's messed up. He doesn't really know what He's doing. He doesn't really know what He's talking about sending His Son to die on that cross. What is that? You see, that shows us how bad we really are. And when you say, no, I don't think I need that. I think I'm pretty good. I don't deserve hell. I've not killed anybody. People talk like that all the time. Just be honest. If somebody came to your door and asked you that: Do you deserve hell? If you said no, why? Because I'm basically a pretty good person. I've never murdered anybody. That is a pat answer from the vast majority of people around here and I suspect some in this room would answer that way. If you answer that way, you're in serious trouble. You are in serious trouble.

Listen, do you know what Scripture says? It says this, "Come..." See that's what we're talking about. We're talking about drawing near to God. We're talking about the attitude in which you come. If you come saying I'm basically a pretty good person, you better fear. It's the person who says: "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." "Lord, I don't have anything to offer." See, this is what Scripture says: Come. Come. You're bidden in the Old and in the New [Testament]. Come without price. Without price means I don't have anything to offer but my sin, Lord. I'm destitute. I'm bankrupt - even my righteousneses, even the good things I've done, I recognize they're so

polluted by sin. I have not loved You with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I haven't done it. "Come, everyone who thirsts." See, this is the message. "Come to the waters. And he who has no money, come buy..." Wait. No money? Come buy. Lord, I don't understand that. How can I do that? How can I buy? "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Or right at the end of the Bible, this is the last message God wants to leave us all with as He wraps this book up. He says tell them one more time. You tell them this. John, those who heed this will do well. "Let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who desires take the water of life without price. See, that's what the prodigal did. He came to himself and he said this: All my money's gone. I don't have any food. I don't have anything. I've squandered it all on prostitutes and riotous living. I don't have anything. Even the servants in my father's house, they have everything. Look where I'm at. He recognized: I don't have anything to offer but sin. I'm going to go throw myself on the mercy of my father. "I've sinned before heaven. I've sinned against you. I'm not worthy." No worth. See, that's no money. No worth. I've got nothing to offer. I'm empty. No price. Wait, wait! It says "buy." I don't have anything to buy with. But you see, isn't that the song? "Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling." That's precisely how you buy. There's no other way.

You see, if you bring anything in your hands, the arrow's in your face and God will slaughter you. You say, wow, that's strong. No, that's biblical language. I'm just wanting to be honest with you. Biblical language. The only way you can buy is to come with nothing. This is the only way. What bargaining power do I have with God? Just bankruptcy. Emptiness, worthlessness, uselessness. That's how you buy with God. You see, it's about the approach. If you come proud - which is exactly what anyone is who says I am not that bad, God will resist you all the way to hell. When you come and you say: God, I'm bad. I don't have any hope. Will You have mercy on me? You see, this is the way you buy. That's what you buy with. The only thing that you can bring to God is your poverty. Don't try to bring anything else. You will meet with wrath. You know what? No money is the currency of Heaven. That's it. No money. Come buy and eat. No money. The money of the Kingdom is just that: No money.

But you see, it's humility, because pride says: I've got something to offer God. That's what pride says. Humility says I'm nobody with nothing. I'm sick. I need a doctor. Pride says: But wait, I've gone to church. I've gone to church ever since I was a kid. Pride says: I never murdered anybody. That's what pride says.

You want to know the whole theme of the Gospel in one sentence? There's a lot of sentences in the New Testament especially - probably Isaiah too - where it just captures the Gospel, the whole theme of the Gospel in one sentence. You want to come face to face with one of the most glorious moving summaries of the whole Christian faith and what it is we believe? It was in our songs for sure. Here's one verse. We dealt with it some time ago in Ephesians 2. "Now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." See? Come near. Come near. Without money, without price. Come near. How do we draw near? It says those who are far off come near by the blood of Christ. That's the whole Gospel. That describes what we once were: far off. We weren't near. I mean, who are we to enter into the presence of God? How can I draw near to God unless I know the way?

Well, there is a way. What's the way? There's a right attitude. What's the right attitude? Here it is. Be done with your own ideas and submit to this. It's kind of like on the day of

[Passover.] You'd have something around the door. The death angel's coming and he takes out. If he doesn't find the blood... it's the blood. We sang a lot about it. The one question to ask is this: Are you near to God? Do you know God? Have you entered into the holiest of all? Have you come to that place? Are we just to go before the throne of grace and cry out in our need? You know what the Scripture is telling us? We dare not. There's something very fearful about the holiest of all places - the holy of holies. We dare not, except this - except there be blood. You dare not stay in Egypt when that death angel is coming except there's blood around that door. That's it. Only then do we have a right of entry.

You see, the mark of the blood better be on you. But He puts the mark, He puts the blood on you if you're coming with nothing to offer. It's for those that the blood avails. You know, you may have some idea about the blood or you may not. The prodigal doesn't specifically say it. I don't know that Manasseh and Ahab and the Ninevites necessarily even knew. I know I didn't know very much when I cried out to the Lord. I knew very little about the blood. I probably knew next to nothing about the Passover. But I knew I was in trouble and I cried out for help. I knew I was bad. You see, the blood is for the bad. You see, it's the sick who need the doctor and you know what the Doctor has? The Doctor has blood. His own blood. Not to transfuse to you, but to pour out on your behalf. And it's only there. This is what humbles us because we begin to realize it's not me. My salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is entirely of Christ in shedding His blood. Be done with yourself. If the mark of the blood of Christ is upon you, you know what, the doors are open. God doesn't only say come, He says boldly come. He says come with confidence. The way He ran to the prodigal, you can run to Him. He says run to Me. The doors are open. You're ushered in. Without the blood, there's no access.

You say how can I know if I've got the blood or not? Just this way: Have you come with the proper attitude? That's it. Have you come recognizing I don't have any hope in myself? I need God to accept me based on mercy. If He does that, it's all based on the blood. You look to Calvary. What happened there? That's the place of dying. It's the place of bleeding. Our Gospel is a Gospel of blood. If you didn't notice in the songs and in the little cup that sat up here, and it's not because we made that up. Those who are far off and brought near by the blood of Christ. There's no other way to be brought near.

When you feel, wherever you're at, you feel these mountains are in your way, you feel lonely, you feel defeated, is there any greater truth than this? We don't go to a God who simply wants to keep us down, who wants to oppress us. You listen in Scripture. He bids us to come. If you look at this Greek word "come," or "draw near," it's an imperative. You're being commanded. God commands you to draw near to Him so that He might draw near to you. He bids us come no matter what you've done, if you've the things that Manasseh's done, if you've done the things that Ahab's done. How? With what attitude? You come as a sinner. You come broken. Listen, this is why I did that message on repentance. I am so convinced that people have this idea that repentance is: clean your life up. That is damning. That keeps the arrow in your face.

Remember, genuine repentance in Scripture is coming to recognize that I'm not rich and well and in need of nothing. Coming to your senses, coming to yourself is like the Laodicean church that was told to repent when they thought everything was great. And Christ says what you don't realize is you're absolutely miserable and destitute and poor and blind and naked.

See, that's repentance. There's always humility with true repentance. Any idea that it's got to do with cleaning up my life, that's not it. Repentance is going from the pride which is innate in us of having something to offer God and it's you coming to recognize you've been wrong and that you don't have anything to offer. That's genuine repentance. That's it.

And you know what the reality is? It's amazing. It is absolutely amazing how staunchly proud the heart of man is. When you go tell man he's this bad, he recoils. You tell him it's this easy - it's very easy. The proud heart loves to have a list of things to do. Give me man-made religion. Give me your list of rules. I can do that. The simplicity of this, it's like what? Am I to do nothing? And offer nothing? And simply come and the way is open? And the blood will usher me in? Yep, that's it. That's it. You just come with nothing, without price, and the way is open to you. Well, I can't understand that! See, the proud heart doesn't want to understand that. Give me a list of things to do. Look at all the false religions in the world. No! No, no, no! You've got to give me some kind of penance. Give me some Hail Mary's! Let me count some beads! Let me walk somewhere on my knees! That's what they do in Islam. That's what they do in Hinduism, and Buddhism, and Catholicism. You've got to give me the thing to do! You see, the natural man loves that. He can't figure this one out. So people say I can't figure your Gospel out. I can't figure this thing out.

No, men who love their sin and their self-righteousness, they can't figure this out. But if you're in a place where you know: Lord, I'm a mess. He says, yeah, that's the currency that will get you in here. That's how you draw near.

And brethren, even as Christians, even if by the grace of God you have been living a life where you're bearing good fruit, still, you know that any ability to do that came from Him. "Without Me you can do nothing." And in and of yourself, you're still a mess. And so even as Christians, if we walk for decades, we still come. Because the reality is we've failed enough that we know there's enough blemishes. And we have to come back to Him again and say Lord, it's me again.

And you know the devil loves to prey on that. You failed yesterday. And you failed the day before that. You think He wants anything to do with you? Oh, just listen to Him: Draw near to Me. That's what He says. Come. He wants you to come. Why? Because that's where all your healing is. That's where all your help is.

You know what it says in Hebrews? It says that the blood speaks - the blood of Jesus Christ speaks better things than the blood of Abel. It speaks. What does it say? It says: You who are broken, you who don't have any hope, you who deserve hell... it speaks. A better word than Abel's - I don't know, I have some ideas about what Abel's blood says, but that's not our study right now.

What does the blood of Christ say? It says better things. What does it say? It's speaking. Blood speaks. It's crying out to you. What does it say? I mean, it says, I shed My blood. My blood - the God-Man. The perfect Man. I shed My blood. I died. Why? Because your head was demanded and I stepped in the way for you. That's what the blood says. The blood says I died and I paid. I suffered the wrath of God. That's what the blood says. The blood says the punishment's been borne. The sins have been paid. The way into the presence of God has been opened. That's what the blood says.

Look, I'll tell you this, we have no good news for sinners except this: that you draw near to God based on what Christ has done. There's no other Gospel than that. There's no other way to Him. There's no other way into the holy of holies. None other. That's it. There's just one way. The foundation of your hope has to rest just in this: I can offer nothing. Humility. You must relinquish every false hope. Put it away. Cast it away. Because anything you hope in, those are your weapons. Those are your weapons with which you fight against God. You may not see them like that, but anything you have hope in aside from God welcoming broken, sick people - people who have leprosy of the soul.

If you say, well, I never! I'm no common sinner like that! Okay, okay. I would just say to you there are 98 others out there that you can leave and fellowship with. But for that one who says, oh, what you've been describing, that's me, there is a King here who offers pardon to the subjects in His Kingdom who are rebels - out-and-out rebels, and they have defied Him and He offers pardon. He offers mercy. But it's based on one condition. It's based on you laying down those weapons.

Don't be a hyper-Calvinist. Children, you young people, don't do that. Don't say: Well, I'm waiting for God to save me. That is not what God tells you. That is not what He says. You'll go to hell like that. Because when you say that, what you're really saying is: I want to hold on to the weapons of my warfare because God hasn't saved me. I'm blaming Him for me keeping up my rebellion.

Look, even if you feel like you're in the grip and bondage of your sin, even if you feel like you love it and you don't want to give it up, you can go to Him and be honest. Lord, the truth is I'm afraid to become a Christian because I've got a sin that I love over here, and the truth is I don't want to give it up for Christ. Can You save me from that? See, He will. Be honest with Him. Tell Him. Tell Him. Just be open. Be transparent. If you've got a sin you love, take it to Him and say Lord, I love this sin. I don't want to get rid of it, but I would love for You to put me in a right frame of mind where I hated that thing and I love the right thing, the good thing. Lord, I want what's best for me and I know I don't love what's best for me. I see that and I recognize I'm running headlong into hell and I recognize I can't fix this. I can't change what I love.

You see, repentance isn't you having to fix yourself. It's not you having to change what you love. It's simply you coming to recognize: Me - humility has everything to do with how you perceive yourself. Pride has everything to do with how you see yourself. Nothing but wickedness makes repentance difficult. Believe that.

Do you love your sins so much that you can't ask God to save you from it? To take it away from you? That's the issue. Jesus wants nothing from you, nothing from us when He bids us come. He did it all. He finished it all. It is finished. What did that mean there on the cross? All is ready. Even right feelings, again the hyper-Calvinism. It's like I have to feel like maybe He's doing something. No, you don't! He doesn't ask for right feelings. He doesn't ask you to sit there and try to feel the spiritual wind. He simply says, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy-laden. Come." There's rest here to be had. You come. And I will draw near to you. And when I draw near, such things will happen to you as the greatest thing to ever happen to you. Come. Come. Come loving sin, but asking to be freed from it. Come. He gives everything that's needed. You can come with no money. Come penniless. Come just as you are lost and forsaken, no good feelings and no good hopes. None of that.

I'll tell you this, you know what He says? He says: Him (or her) who comes unto Me, I will never cast out. The way is open if you come by the blood. The way is open. Not only is the way open, you will find God come flying out of that door to throw a robe around you if you even appear on the horizon with your face towards home, coming to plead His mercy. I'm a sinner and I'm not worthy. That's what he did. It's all got to do with our attitude. Draw near to God. The proper attitude.

Father, I pray, may You instill the realities of this upon the lost here, upon all of us. I pray in the name of Christ, Amen.