

James Lesson 8 Articles

Is there anything more vexing than a child who refuses to submit to his or her parents? When told to do something, the child obstinately refuses. When told not to do something, he or she immediately does it! We all detest rebellion in children, especially when we see it coming from children who have exceptionally good parents.

Do we detest that same rebellion in ourselves? Even the best parents are flawed in many ways, but the Lord is perfect in every way. And from the coffer of his goodness, he has poured out upon us blessing after blessing. How are we responding to these things? Are we doing what the Lord tells us to do? Are we refraining from those things he tells us not to do? Are we submitting to the Lord, or are we acting as ungrateful, rebellious children?

Rebellion against God is a serious matter. The devil is the greatest rebel of all time, and he is in the business of persuading God's people to join him in rebellion. If, then, we are rebelling against God, we are submitting to the devil.

What are we to do? The answer is as clear as the noonday sun: *stop submitting to the devil and start submitting to God!* If we will resist the devil, he will flee. If we draw near to God, he will draw near to us! You see, the devil really is something of a coward. When he sees the people of God getting close to God, he takes off!

There is no more urgent and important business for each of us than to draw near to God. If we would be brutally honest with ourselves, we would have to say that we have had our faces towards the devil and our backs towards God. It is time to reverse all of that. It is time to turn our faces towards God and our backs towards the devil.

It is not hard to secure agreement from Christians on this. We quickly and readily agree that we need to draw nearer to the Lord, but are we doing it? Our tendency is to draw near with our lips, but not with our hearts (Matt. 15:8)!

James's next emphasis shows us very plainly and powerfully that drawing near to God is far more than merely mouthing a few words. This emphasis is the second part of his cure for worldliness.

Cleansing our hands and our hearts (v. 8b)

James is calling us to draw near to God by cleaning up both our behavior ('hands') and our inner lives ('hearts').

Dirty hands and defiled hearts! That's the position that many, many Christians are occupying these days. Their hands are dirty in that they are doing worldly things, things that are out of keeping with God's ownership of their lives. They go to places to which they ought not to go. They say things they ought not to say. They do things they ought not to do. All of these things and more constitute outer behavior, and all are comprehended and embodied by James's use of the word 'hands'.

But James was not content to call for a change only in the behavior of his readers. The hands reflect what is in the heart. A. W. Pink observed that the hands and tongues are the shops, and the heart is the warehouse.² To call people to cleanse their hands without also calling for them to purify their hearts is pointless.

Why did James think it necessary for his readers to purify their hearts? He said they were 'double-minded', which means they were 'double-souled'. They were not loving God with the whole of their hearts. Their hearts were torn between God and the world.

What does the Bible signify when it uses the word 'heart'? It refers to the totality of the person, that is, to the mind, the will and the affections.¹

² A. W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975), p. 155.

¹ Ellsworth, R. (2009). *Opening up James*. Opening Up Commentary (131–136). Leominster: Day One Publications.