

Faithfulness: A Strength that Finishes James – God’s Work in Us and through Us

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Conflict. Inner conflict and outer conflict. In James 4, God inspires James to write about both. James begins by talking about desires (the “want tos”) and ends by talking about complacency (the “ought tos”). They are called the sins of commission and the sins of omission. The sins of commission are when we know the will of God and choose to do something else. The sins of omission are when we know the know God’s will and choose to do nothing. BOTH mess us up. Actually, James has a third category in addition to the “want tos” and the “ought tos” that I call the “do dos”. These are our actions that mess us up. So our intentions mess us up, our inaction messes us up, and our wrong actions mess us up. Thankfully, like a loving parent, God deals with our messes. We consider first how we mess up...then how God cleans us up and helps us watch where we step.

THE “WANT TOS” - James 4:1 “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?”

When my wants conflict with your wants then we have conflict. If the needs of a baby are not instantly gratified, he/she lets you know...that means we can argue before we know how to talk. In any relationship, one of the most important tools to learn is conflict resolution. There are going to be conflicting desires. We all have God-given legitimate desires. But when we make them number one to us, they will cause conflict.

THE DESIRE TO HAVE * James 4:2 “**You want something but don’t get it. You...covet, but you cannot have what you want.**” God created things to be used and people to be loved. We can get the equation backwards. We love things and use people - use people to get more things. We become possessed by our possessions. Howard Hughes was asked, “How much does it take to make a man happy?” He said, “Just a little bit more.” That is addiction. But the thrill wears off. If you base your life on comparing it to other people, you will never be happy no matter how much you get. There is always something more. The desire to have does not satisfy...it leaves you empty.

THE DESIRE TO FEEL * James 4:3 “**that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**” The desire to feel good creates conflict. It is not wrong to enjoy life. 1 Timothy 6:17 “*God provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*” But when pleasure becomes your number one goal...“if it feels good, do it”...then you are inviting trouble. The fact is...I am more interested in my comfort than I am in yours. I want to have my senses satisfied...and when thwarted, resentment can build up.

THE DESIRE TO BE * James 4:6 “**God opposes the proud...**” Power, prominence, popularity. Our desire to be “number one” means God is NOT “number one”. James calls it spiritual “adultery” (v.4)...when we listen to the world say “we are it” when the reality is that only God can be the center. Proverbs 13:10 “*Pride only breeds quarrels.*” Why? Because if I say I am right and you say you are right...then we will fight it out because of pride...our need to be right. We all need God to be the ultimate authority...the absolute truth...for there to be peace.

THE “DO DOS” – James 4:12 “...who are you to judge your neighbor?”

When we play God, in words or in action, we mess up. Only God is God. And God is not only the Lawgiver...God is the Judge...“*the ONE who is able to save and destroy*” (v.12). So when we live life by our rules, then we are in big trouble. Actions we choose to do, apart from having God’s guidance actually separates us from God’s will and God’s good and God’s grace in our life. We “*are a mist that appears for a little while and vanishes*” (v.14), so our little games only end up being “little games” since we are temporal and God is eternal...and our smarts do not lead to life, apart from God.

THE “OUGHT TOS” - James 4:17 “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”

This may be the most difficult to grasp. Inactivity is not an option. Pew sitting is dangerous. When you, as a Christian, know what you ought to do and choose to do nothing...God calls that “sin”. But I didn’t break any of the commandments! Maybe. But did you obey God’s prompting when God told you to help that person or to share with that person. Did you give back to God as a steward of all God has given you? Did you spend time with the Lord this week? Did you do – in word and action – what you know God wanted you to do in order to bless others...and in order for you to be blessed?

So our “want tos”, our “ought tos”, and our “do dos” – make a mess of our lives. How does God deal with our messes? By the “get tos”. Because God entered humanity in the person of Jesus and because of the power of the cross and because of the presence of God’s Holy Spirit – we live with the option of getting right with God, of getting close to God, of getting cleansed from our sin, and of getting God’s help.

THE “GET TOS” – James 4:6 “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Grace is the solution to the problem of conflict and to the very source of our problems. Think of grace as an acronym for God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense – G.R.A.C.E. Because of the cross, we get to choose a different way...a better way...God’s way.

GET TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD * James 4:7 “**Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**” Because of the cross, we can come before God and not know God’s judgment. No human pride in the presence of God. No LeBron James’ ego. Only an admission that God is God and that we are not. Only the request for God’s kingdom to come and God’s will to be done...and not that of God’s adversary. Part of saying “yes” to God is saying “no” to all opposed to God...and God promises that our spiritual battles will be won.

GET TO GET CLOSE TO GOD * James 4:8 “**Come near to God and God will come near to you.**” Because of the cross, we not only get to acknowledge God as God, we get to have a relationship with God. This is an amazing promise for Christians who want to be close to God.

GET TO GET CLEANSED FROM SIN * James 4:8 “**Wash your hands...and purify your hearts...Grieve, mourn, wail. Change...**” Cleansing comes through repentance. Repentance entails genuine sorrow for our sin and a changing of how we view things as we see our choices from God’s perspective. If you ate cotton candy all the time, you might enjoy the taste and the sugar high, but eventually your teeth would rot and your health would fail...and eventually you would regret eating food that was bad for you and feel crummy and get yourself to a dental hygienist. In the same way, sin rots your soul. When we see the error of our ways, God is there to deal with our truth decay.

GET TO GET GOD’S HELP * James 4:10 “**Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**” Humility means to admit to our dependence upon God...to our faith in the God who loves us to life, who gives us what we need, who sees us through to the end. Through Christ, God gives grace to the humble...a grace that lifts us up in this life and in the life to come.