

Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
Ruin to Renovation	James 3:16 & 4:1-3	Underlying Feelings	05.13.18
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
We continue this week with our look at 'feelings' & the need for them to come under Christ's Lordship.			

### Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

We began last week looking at how powerful are feelings, desires & passions. If there's any question as to that power, we only need to listen to James, the younger brother of Jesus, as he wrote in the New Testament book which bears his name - chapter 3, V16 says... ***16 For where you have envy & selfish ambition, there you find disorder & every evil practice.***

And 4:1 & 2 say...*What causes fights & quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? **2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel & fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.***

That's just good wisdom! Feelings can be destructive to self & others. Like waves on the sea, they shift & change. Notice how easily your feelings change for people. One week you love being around them. The next, you could dance on their grave.

Especially with figureheads, people of authority, given their great influence. Pastors, bosses, police, politicians, teachers, etc. Authority figures can say one small thing, make one small decision, deny us one small desire, make one small mistake, or simply be perceived so & suddenly a person we praised, could go jump in a lake for all we care. Feelings are fickle & not necessarily truth-based. True love powers through the ups & downs of feelings, staying committed, because godly love isn't a feeling, it's a decision.

If you're married you know this all too well - you have an intimate connection with James 4. Like authority figures, how we feel about our spouse is extremely important, they have great influence over us. When we give a person power over us, as we do in the wedding vow, they elicit strong feeling in us. In marital conflict, we'll often hear someone say, "I can't even remember what we were fighting about." Since the conflict itself isn't really the issue, it's the underlying feelings which drive the conflict.

Often times in marriage a spouse will do something as simple as leaving their clothes on the floor in the bedroom. Which I never do, because I love my wife! But let's say a husband does do this & it upsets his wife enormously, to the point of consistent major fights. The fights always begin & end the same, spiraling out of control until they walk away from each other in a huff, not speaking for a time. All over a few socks on the floor.

But it's not just the socks, is it? It's the underlying feeling. How does the wife feel at that moment? If she's honest, she may confess it makes her feel unloved & disrespected; that he doesn't value her work. Once or twice isn't the issue. It's the consistency of it - the

ongoing message, “He doesn’t love me enough to value me in this way. He cares more about himself, than me.” That message, producing that feeling, coupled with a myriad of similar small things, produces a growing fear in the wife in the form of the question, “Does he really love me? What if he doesn’t, what’s going to happen with this life we’ve built together?”

Husband, seeing her anger & ongoing criticism, feels disrespected. The same sense of fear grows in him, since he believes, over time, she doesn’t respect, love, or value how much he does & how busy he is! The same question arises in his mind, “She must not love me, it’s all about what she wants.”

Focusing simply on the conflict, the two of them grow apart emotionally. The good feeling they had towards each other on their wedding day, when they promised ‘for better or worse’, seems far away & unattainable. Bad feelings of bitterness grow in the fertile soil of fear, watered by socks on a carpet. A familiar cycle. One which can lead to the death of a marriage. Think I exaggerate? Everyone ends up sitting across from the Lawyer saying, “I can’t remember what the fight was about - but they obviously don’t love me any longer!” Loving feelings, interrupted by simplistic actions, extrapolated by fear, buried under disdain & the two are set at odds.

*Ephesians 6:12, <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh & blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world & against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Our battle, in very practical ways, is for the mind, for truth, for love & godly directives to reign. Not bitterness, fear & anger. There are spiritual forces which seek to manipulate our feelings towards others, breaking down relationships - derailing & diverting our focus from the Kingdom. We’re well equipped when we’ve been immersed in the Word of God, enabling it to come to mind in these difficult moments. When we’re in tune with the Holy Spirit who whispers in our ear...”They’re not the enemy, look closer...”*

So, what if Husband & Wife practiced these principles, taking their thoughts captive to Christ in order to break the cycle by getting to the feelings underneath? Instead of bending the ear of close friends, slandering our spouse, without really knowing their heart, what if we could get to the root of the issue. Proverbs 10:18 says, “*He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.*” Bottling up anger isn’t the answer. Being passive-aggressive, doesn’t work! Letting it fester, fails. Talking badly about someone never helps.

What if they could, in the middle of the fight, stop & say, “Wait, this is just adding more hurt...I love you. I don’t want to be at odds with you. I’m just scared. My fear leads me to anger. I know you love me, it’s just when you do this, it communicates to me that you don’t.” That’s cooking with gas! No one can argue those words, they melt us! It’s honest - not concealing anger, it’s letting anger out in healthy ways!

What if that good statement’s followed up with, “I’m sorry. I need to be patient & thoughtful. I promise to from here on out. I’m sorry if I’ve not acted lovingly lately.” Then a hug & kiss. That marriage is going someplace. **Notice, the cycle’s been stopped,**

but nothings been negotiated - it doesn't need to be. It's focused on the underlying emotion, not the behavior - the initial conflict doesn't need to be addressed head on, since the underlying feelings have been.

And, that's the best scenario for Husband to want to act more thoughtfully by picking up socks. And when he forgets, Wife is more patient, since it's not such a life & death feeling any longer. Love's been reaffirmed, through divine obedience, allowing God to work further! The real need is to remove the cause (underlying feelings), and not just the effect (the conflict). If not, it'll only resurface.

What if they didn't take that route. Wife gets just more naggingly proficient. Husband succumbs, picking up his socks for the rest of his days. What's she feel? Superiority & pride - she *thinks* she's won, but she's *sacrificed* relationship. Each time Husband bends over to pick up a sock, it reinforces his bitterness. He too has sacrificed relationship by keeping his anger in. But it could be different. Love could be replanted to grow & flourish into changed behaviors. Instead of nagging, there could be words of affirmation. Instead of thoughtless acts, there could be acts of loving service.

*“You quarrel & fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.”* Notice he doesn't say you don't have because you don't argue hard enough. Negotiate well enough. Nag strongly enough. Or, assert your power enough. The conflict isn't addressed. It's because you don't ask God - you're asking the wrong person - going to the wrong source for satisfaction! What we feel we want, or desire, is sometimes out of line, or it's only the surface thing producing & reinforcing negative feelings within us.

What James is saying is, to ask God is to let him realign our feelings, desires & passions with His in these situations. My desire is to be free to do what I want (leave my socks on the floor), but God wants to change my desires to be loving (pick up my socks). What we really want is connection, love & relationship. When we have that, socks on the floor don't matter as much to the wife! And picking them up is suddenly important to the husband!

James continues to say...*“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”* (4:3)

There's never growth without tension. God allows us to live in relational tension to spur growth. Christianity is communal. We have to learn to love beyond our own feelings, desires & passions. We have to learn to appreciate others & to drive towards God's perfect will on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10). Our attention to life has to get beyond 'spending what we get on our own pleasures.'

God sets his standards high, Jesus says in Matthew 5:48, <sup>48</sup>*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* That said at the end of the passage concerning having love for our enemies. Which, for the Christian, extends beyond family & friends to everyone we encounter! The Christian doesn't have the luxury of racism or hatred towards anyone! Can we get angry, yes, but it matters what we do with it. Can we have difficult feelings, yes, but they must be subordinate to Christ & measured against truth.

The teaching continues in 1 John 4:16-21, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. <sup>17</sup>This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: **In this world we are like Jesus.** <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

<sup>19</sup> **We love because he first loved us.** <sup>20</sup>Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother & sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup>And he has given us this command: *Anyone who loves God must also love their brother & sister.*”

That should make us stop & think hard when we have conflict with others. Perfection isn't about being morally perfect in our own strength in all situations. It has to do with reacting in love; or maybe better said, reacting like Jesus (v17b). Realizing & owning Christ's righteousness. Reacting in love, reflecting the character of God, is to react perfectly. Paul says it this way in Romans 13:14, *...clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

In Ephesians 4:22-24, <sup>22</sup>*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;* <sup>23</sup>*to be made new in the attitude of your minds;* <sup>24</sup>*and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness & holiness.*

In Colossians 3:8–10, <sup>8</sup>*But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.* <sup>9</sup>*Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices* <sup>10</sup>*and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

See how all this is about Christ's righteousness transforming how we think & feel, and where those things lead us? Scripture is wholly practical & a lot cheaper than counseling! We're able to love others perfectly, spouse or otherwise, only because such great love has been lavished on us perfectly! And there's the Christian advantage & what takes this beyond good psychology & into the realm of the Spirit. We have no excuse not to love sacrificially given we have a loving sacrificial God who's revealed himself in the Word, leaving us with the Holy Spirit to guide & empower! **Remember 2 Peter 1:3,** <sup>3</sup>*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory & goodness.*

Feelings are important...they're great servants, but terrible masters. They're central to life. We must be responsible with them. There's no need to live as victims to them. Feelings in & of themselves aren't necessarily bad or wrong, but when not directed well, or subordinate to Jesus, they'll be destructive. Some of our lives look like the floor of the husbands bedroom, feelings scattered everywhere in disarray. Like Proverbs 10:18 says, *“He who conceals his hatred has lying lips,”* repression or denial of harsh feelings isn't the answer. Being honest about them, allowing the spiritual formation process to replace, or reorder them, is though.

We can't seek to chase feelings only for sake of having them - for instance, the person focusing themselves on 'being loved' or 'being in love' will always be chasing the feeling & not be able to have loving relationships. The person who wants peace so badly they're unwilling to confront evil, or to do what is right when it'll bring tension, will never be able to attain peacefulness. Peace isn't the absence of tension, it's the presence of Christ within it. MLK described it this way, "The peace which Paul spoke of is a calmness of soul amid terrors of trouble."

We'll always have to address conditions whether good or bad & let feelings take care of themselves knowing Christ walks with us. I believe Jesus says this in Mt 6:33 when he says, "...seek first his kingdom & his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." And we remember also what Paul said in Philippians 1:6, "...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

We must never seek to cherish, protect, or manipulate feelings in ourselves & others except when these feelings become so overwhelming they threaten to take over. That's when we utilize prayer, medication & counseling to get a handle on them. They've gone too far, intervention's needed.

I had a friend in Indonesia who was rock solid. She'd gotten spiritually attacked to such a degree & for so long, it brought on a deep depression she couldn't dig out from underneath. A doctor finally medicated her, which she believed was spiritual intervention, and it was. It cleared her mind enough to be able to think straight & she eventually didn't need medication any longer.

Feelings are slippery things. They can be overpowering & dangerous. They can spread into all areas of our lives. It's hard to reason with someone who's allowed certain feelings to take over - they'll defend them at all cost, beyond rationality. About that person we say, "There's no reasoning with them! I can't get through." We've said thoughts generate feelings, and if we allow certain thoughts to obsess us, then we'll be enslaved & blind to truth - our ability to think & perceive rightly inhibited. We may see this in people who've experienced some sort of emotional trauma at the hands of another, either truly, or perceived. Focusing on it, they brood until it permeates every aspect of their being. In the end you can even see it in their countenance & how they carry themselves physically. Hebrews 12:15 calls this *a root of bitterness* & is why forgiveness is so important. This can even happen in whole groups of people, where they view another group with disdain - such as the Nazi Party, North Korea, the White Supremacy Movement, other current social, or political groups, included.

We need to be practiced in the art of thinking how we think. Like David, to step back from our own emotion, understanding we may be wrong. Often our feeling of self-righteousness in some situation is a clear sign we may be off. Remembering, you can be all right in your summarization of the details of a situation, but all wrong in reaction to it. Thoreau noted 'the mass of men live lives of quiet desperation'. Allowing ourselves to be carried away by feeling, without limiting & bringing them under the Lordship of

Christ, is to bring a deadness to our soul. We see this in addictions where the person's given themselves over to the feeling & put it in the place above Jesus, others, and personal safety. The terrible tragedy is, they may even admit it, see the prison they're in, but not be able to see a way out, having developed physical triggers which make it even more difficult. Grace & compassion is greatly needed in these cases.

One of the great tragedies of modern life is, we've lost the practices of spiritual formation. People are overwhelmed, overstimulated & relationally disconnected. Left only to make decisions based on feelings. We've lost our sense of community, although we spout the word left & right. We no longer have the traditions, or practices of faith it takes to govern life wisely & well. Feelings aren't the Will, and shouldn't be confused with it - but we act as if that is so. Feelings again, need to come under the Lordship & direction of Christ - **to have healthy self-control. Which is the God-empowered ability to do the best thing in a situation even if you don't 'feel it'.**

In a society of individuals where character's seriously lacking, self-control isn't extolled, nor practiced & is the enemy of feeling - feeling will almost always subvert good choices. Solid disciplined spiritual formation in Christ is the mongoose which defeats the cobra of feeling.

Looking deeply into this subject it's overwhelming. But God's able & will continue the good work in you until completion (Philippians 1:6). We're in a spiritual battle, make no mistake. Be prayerful privately & corporately. Ask for protection. Bind the power of evil spiritual forces in the name of Christ. Ask for God's divine intervention. Communicate your commitment to partnering with him. Ask him to wake you up spiritually, to give you eyes to see & ears to hear. Foster the *Vision* of a transformed life in Christ. Fan into flame your *Intention* to follow Him. And utilize the *Means* of spiritual formation to walk with Him.

Let me lead you in an imaginative prayer exercise this morning in which we'll begin by renouncing the power of evil spirits which bring about confusion or unbelief (pray).

Staying in a prayerful posture, let's meditate now with the Holy Spirit...privately ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in taking off that Old Self, and putting on the New. Allow him to define one feeling he'd like to bring under control in your life? Maybe it's bitterness, rage, anger, superiority, fear, confusion, sadness, or an addiction, whatever it is... Imagine yourself carrying that feeling to the foot of the cross. Laying it there. Christ's powerful blood begins to wash over it. Imagine the Holy Spirit picking it up & nailing it to the cross, crucifying the power & control it has over you. Sit with that image for a moment.

Take a moment now & thank Jesus for his sacrifice, and for taking this thing from you. For extracting the power of it over your heart. For bringing order to your mind. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak loudly to you all week through whatever means possible.