

What is Stopping You
The Unchanging God Changing Me
By Pastor Michael Edwards

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Heritage Baptist Church
14510 Spriggs Road
Woodbridge, VA 22193

Website: visitheritage.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/visitheritage

Take your Bibles, if you would, and turn with me to James chapter four. And we will preach this last message in this series of the unchanging God changing me. James chapter four and verse six.

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.¹

Why don't we change? What is stopping us from changing?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we ask you now to guide us in these minutes we have. Speak to our hearts and teach us your Word, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Have you ever said something like this or heard someone say something like this?

“Well, it is the same old story. It is the same old sin. I just can't beat it.” Emphasis, “I can't just beat it.”

There are many believers who I think could write a holiness manual. They could write anything and everything about being holy. They could tell you supposedly how you are supposed to do it. They could tell you what holiness is, but they still keep falling to that same old sin over and over and over again.

¹ James 4:6-10.

We have to honestly ask ourselves if it is not a lack of information, what is it that stops me from changing? And I am going to give you two answers, neither one of them complimentary.

Number one, a, love of self. Why do we never change? Because we love ourselves too much and we will talk about that. Number two, here is one that won't be a shock. We love the sin. As much as we say we hate it, as much as we say we want to change, the truth is it is a problem in our lives because we love it. It is what attracted us to it. It is what tempted us. It is what got hold of our hearts. Here is the truth. When we choose to sin over and over and over again until something becomes a habit in our lives, it is not because we hate that thing. Oh, we may develop a dislike of what it does to us, but it became a problem and stays a problem because we love the sin.

And we don't like to think that of ourselves. We don't like to say that about ourselves, but it is the truth.

Now I don't think I need to instruct you tonight on the fact that you love sin and that I love sin. I am not excluding myself. We know that we love sin. We know that we have a temptation to do that. And I think in weeks past we have proven or tried to show that the only way that you will stop loving the sin is to start loving Jesus more. You are not just going to stop loving a sin. You have got to turn from something and turn to something. So you have got to turn from the sin. And the idea is that the Word of God is going to allow you to know the heart of God. And if you know the heart of God your desire to... you will delight in the things that God delights in and you will be able to turn from that sin because you are turning to Christ.

The hymn writer said, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus." And I don't have time to recite that song, but the very thought of that song is that if you will turn your eyes from the sin to the Lord, the sin will dim and the Lord will grow in your heart.

Now what I want to concentrate on tonight is why don't we change and in this sense it is because we love ourselves. It is because we trust ourselves. So think along those lines with me.

Number one, let's think about pride and self reliance.

Have you ever been mad at your self for committing the same sin again? Now I just want you to answer that question. You said you weren't going to do it and then you did it again and you got mad at yourself for doing that thing again. Have you... You don't have to raise your hand. You don't have to shake your head. But in your heart say, "Yup. That's me."

And I know everybody's heart is shaking right now. Can I suggest to you that even in that there is a hint of pride? When I get mad at me for failing in what I knew I was going to fail in, the hint of pride is this, that I thought somehow I could overcome it by myself,

that I thought somehow I could discipline myself and correct myself and in my own strength not do that thing again.

You see, you have assumed that you could have victory in your own strength and by your own power. And too many times our attitude towards sin is self centered rather than God centered.

Now I really want you to key in with me tonight. Our attitude toward sin is self centered. Often people are more concerned about having victory over the sin for their own sake than they are concerned that the heart of God is grieved by their sin. They don't want to drink anymore because they don't want the consequences that drinking brings. They don't want to look at the pornography anymore because they don't want to experience the shame that rushes in afterwards. They don't want to lose their temper again because they know it hurts their family and their whole focus on not wanting to yield to that sin again is themselves and nowhere in there do they recognize, I have incredibly broken the heart of God. And I have grieved God. I have grieved the Spirit of God that dwells in my heart.

I am just saying that our pride in that matter is sin. As a matter of fact, it is the very definition of sin, because it puts us in the place of God. When we are more concerned because of the consequences that our sin brings even more so than the fact that it grieves God, we have got a pride problem. And trying to get the victory over sin by the strength of our own discipline makes us the chief end of what we are doing instead of God.

Another feature that comes through pride is that when we sin we want to blame someone else. Just as Eve tried to blame the serpent and Adam tried to blame Eve, we find it just as hard to own up to the responsibility of our own sin.

Now I will tell you this from my own life. We blame others for causing us to sin. All you have got to do is be a principle or a vice principle for a year and you will recognize that no kid ever did it. They were made to do it. Either the kids did it or somebody did it, but they didn't. They just... they were just there. They are innocent, but it sure looks like they are guilty, because we don't want to accept responsibility.

But I am going to go a step further from my own life. I often blame others for not doing enough to stop me from sinning.

You say, "Preacher, what are you talking about?"

My wife buys cookies. Doesn't she know it is her responsibility not to buy cookies because I will eat them? And so I will say, "If you didn't bring that trash into the house, I wouldn't eat it."

And I am waiting of the day—she never has yet—if your heart was right, no matter how many cookies were there, you wouldn't eat them.

Lord help her the day she says that back to me.

It is not her fault if I eat the cookie. Do you see what I am saying? It is not somebody else's fault. You were just in the room and they turned the rock music on. You were just in the room and somebody turned that picture on on the computer and you looked at it, but it wasn't your fault. We just don't want it to be our fault. We are masters at blaming our circumstances. We are masters at blaming our upbringing, our environment, our heredity. And though I know certain external factors can make a difference, greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world and here is the important statement. We ultimately cannot allow our anger, our lust, our hunger or our words be the fault of anything but our own heart.

I want to read that again with you looking at it. We cannot allow our anger, our lust, our hunger or our word be the fault of anything but our own heart. If I put it in my mouth, I put it in there because my heart allowed me to do it. If you look at pornography on that computer, you do it because your heart allows you to do it. You chose to do it. If you lose your temper, you lost your temper because you chose to do it.

Jerry Bridges, many of you have read some of his books, and he says this and I think it is a tremendous statement.

“Too often we speak the language of defeat when we ought to use the language of disobedience. I didn't fail. I sinned.”

Do you see what I am saying? I didn't just get beat. I chose to sin. Until we come to the place in our lives where we accept responsibility for our sin, when we accept responsibility for that thing in our lives that is controlling our lives that we can't seem to change and until we stop saying, “Oops, I just blew it again,” and we say, “I disobeyed God and I grieved God and in so doing I am quenching the Spirit of God in my life,” until we are willing to accept that kind of responsibility, my friend, I am not sure that we are ultimately going to change. That is why we remember that God allows us to be who we are, allows circumstances in our lives.

I have said before. I am never going to be thin. If I don't eat the rest of my life I will still be a fat thin. God made me the way he did. And, by the way, I don't wrestle with why God made me this way. I understand why God made me this way. I won't share that with you, but I have got it.

Here is my point. Keep arguing your environment and keep arguing your heredity and keep arguing your circumstances and the truth is what you are ultimately doing is blaming God for your failure. God knew how he made you. God knew where he put you. God knew what environment he put you in in this place and if you keep blaming your failure for your circumstances, heredity, environment and so on, you are ultimately saying, “Evil comes from God, because God knew and God made me to do this.”

Be very careful of that.

We often avoid responsibility for sin by minimizing it. In everyone else it is great sin. In us, ah, not so bad. We say things like, “It is not that bad,” or our famous one is, “I am not as bad as he is or she is,” or “If you take me overall, I am a pretty good guy.”

But true repentance grieves over sin and never tries to minimize sin. You and I need to tremble at the Word of God.

Let me read to you verses out of Isaiah 66 verses one and two.

Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.²

We stand at an unusual place in our generation and our time. We stand... we are not Puritans. We are not harsh. And certainly the Puritans did have a harsh nature about them. They were harsh in their punishments and harsh in their application even of grace. It was sovereign grace for salvation, but it wasn't grace for forgiveness. But we have come full circle to our generation where we make trivial the Word of God and we make light of what God says and we make light of sin. And I am telling you that neither one of those extremes are the right extreme. I don't want to become a harsh pastor where we judge every time somebody fails and make it a public sentencing every time someone fails and I don't want to become harsh in our application of the Word of God. But listen. There is truth in the Bible when it says that we ought to tremble at the Word of God. We ought to tremble at standing in his presence and knowing that our lives are not where they need to be.

The man who knows in his life that he is not living what God wants him to be, either in his mind or with his eyes or in the way he treats his family, that man ought not to be at peace when he sits under the preaching of the Word of God. He ought to be bothered. The woman who knows in her heart that she is not where God wants her to be ought not to be sitting in a service and saying, “Well, I know the preacher is preaching this, but compared to or I am a lot better than and I would never do what that one did.”

That is not the exercise that you and I need to put ourselves through in the Word of God and when we are hearing the Word of God. There needs to be a sense of trembling at the Word of God.

And may I be honest tonight? It is not my job to make you tremble at the Word. It is my job to preach the Word. I will tell you. For a long time in my ministry I took the responsibility of invitations and conviction and I realized that so often the results were the results of what I could produce.

² Isaiah 66:1-2.

God convicts and God puts fear in our hearts. And I want to tell you. When you can sin against God and sit in a church service and feel no conviction, that is not a healthy place to be. And, by the way, we don't choose what God is serious about. We don't decide that a little dalliance in pornography is acceptable because we are a man. And we don't accept that to be a little flirtatious as a woman is ok.

And, by the way, I know our world doesn't like it, but God is still against immodesty. And we don't get to decide which ones God is serious about and which ones he is not. His whole Word he is serious about and there needs to be a sense of trembling before the Word of God.

Oh, preacher, I think that is... I just don't think that is for our day.

God is for our day. And God's Word doesn't change.

Now, again, I don't want to be harsh and I don't want to be light. We have got a generation of churches and believers who are not convicted of sin not because God doesn't still convict of sin, but because they have been so light about the Word of God that there is no room for conviction in their heart. I am simply saying there ought to be a trembling in our lives at the Word of God when we acknowledge and take responsibility for our sin we are we are not victimizing ourselves or legalizing ourselves. We are actually setting ourselves on the road to victory. When I am willing before God to say, "God, I am accountable. It was from my heart. I did that because I love that sin and I failed in that because I thought I could do it by myself in quitting," when I am willing to take responsibility for that and then turn and make myself accountable to God, that isn't Legalism. That isn't undue restraint. That is the path to victory over sin.

You and I must resist our natural desire to hide our sin.

The Bible says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."³

People sitting in this room tonight, it might even be me, sitting here convinced in our hearts that we have covered our tracks, that even though we know we have done what we have done or we know that we are not where we need to be with the Lord, we have sufficiently covered our tracks. And we don't understand the impact of that verse, that that person will not prosper.

You say, "Well, preacher, I make pretty good money."

You don't measure prosperity in money, my friends. You will some day measure it in the peace of your heart. You will some day measure it in the lives of your children. God says if a man will be honest and confess and forsake that sin, then he shall have mercy. We

³ Proverbs 28:13.

love our standing before men and we love our reputation so we hide our sin and we pretend, but we don't honestly seek help. We try to handle it ourselves.

I can't tell you how many times, I can't tell you how many times I have been called out at three and four in the morning, gone to some bar and picked up a drunk, gone to a woods or a shelter and picked up a drunk, gone to a home where he is drunk again and gone in and said, "Now, listen. Are you ready to get right? Are you ready to do this?"

"Yes. I am ready."

And by the time the morning light comes here is their deal.

"Preacher, I appreciate you coming over and I am serious this time, but I don't need to... I don't need to go to rehab."

Now, listen. I am not standing here preaching that rehab is the answer. What I am standing here saying is, that is the reaction of a truly unrepentant sinner. When it is just another decision to handle it myself. When it is just another decision to push it under and I am going to deal with it myself. Not so.

The only way sin and these habits get out of our lives is for radical changes in our lives, radical changes where we look to the Lord and trust the Lord. We want to avoid exposure so we decide to manage our sin rather than forsake it. And true repentance lets nothing get in the way of change, not even our reputation. There has to be confession to those that are harmed and there has to be accountability.

Someone said this.

"Sin is like mold. It grows best in the dark. Expose it to light and it starts to dry up."

You say, "Oh, preacher. I have got a problem, but I couldn't tell anybody about it."

Well, I want to tell you. If you are going to try to fix it yourself, you are going down the path of pride and self reliance.

Now I am not suggesting to you that you run up on this platform and say, "Ok, I want to tell everybody what I have done."

Don't do that.

But I want to tell you—and I am not holding myself up as the perfect one—but I am telling you. I have known some men that have beat it because they have been honest enough to come to a 60 year old preacher who is going to love them in spite of it and show them where to go to get help and help them and make them accountable to him. I am not looking for more business. I am just telling you. You can find someone in your

life who loves you and who you can trust. And if you don't, I dare say you have very little chance of beating this.

And I don't care what it is. And I would say the same to ladies. It seems that we talk about the sins of men way more than ladies, but please understand thou art as sinful as we.

And you are not going to break that old stubborn spirit just saying you are going to. You are not going to break that immodest style of life. You need help. You start by pouring out your heart to the Lord.

"Lord, I can't break this in my life. I need your perspective." And you pour your heart out to God and then you find yourself someone that you can be accountable to that you know walks with God and that you know is sincere in their love for you and in their desire to help you and you get with that person and you say, "I want these chains broken. I don't want to live with this shame anymore and I don't want to live with the consequences and the ravages of these things in my life."

Jesus said, "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light."⁴

You say, "Preacher, how can I tell if I am on the right road?"

You can tell if you are on the right road if you are willing for the light of day to make it on to your problem. And I am not saying everybody, but I am saying when you are ready to come out of the closet and say, "I do this. I have got a problem with this. I need help with this. I can't trust my flesh. I can't trust my own strength. I need help," and you stop relying on yourselves and you give over your pride, there is a chance when the light hits that thing to have victory.

In some cases we say we want to change when, in truth, what we really want is just no consequences. We want the consequences to be removed. We may not want the guilt or the damage that the sin brings, but we still love the sin. In our hearts we desire the sin and in the moments of temptation we think it offers more than God.

Now I am going to be brutally ugly. I have got about three minutes left. That man who stands in front of his wife and goes into a rage, he knows he shouldn't do it and he knows that it disappoints God. But do you know what the truth is? He thinks he will feel more satisfied after he goes into the rage than if he would just resort to ask God to help him in his heart.

That man who sits at that screen and he doesn't want to click that mouse and he doesn't want to go there, but the truth is he loves that sin and he does go there. Do you know why he goes there? Because in that moment he thinks that is more satisfying than what God says in his Word in how to build a relationship with his wife and his family.

⁴ John 3:20.

I don't care whether it is drinking. I don't care whether it is food. I don't care whose sin it is. I am not trying to stand on yours and not mine. I am just telling you we are all cut out of the same stuff and when it comes down to it, when we yield it is because we love that thing and we believe that it will bring us more satisfaction than resorting to Christ and asking him for help.

There are times when people seek counseling to bring order to the chaos. They want free of the debt. Or they want the marriage to be smoothed out. They want forgiveness for their words and their outbursts, but they have not dealt with the issue of grieving the heart of God.

I have gone through an evolution in marriage counseling. I don't mean that I have gone to marriage counseling and it has evolved me. I mean I am starting... I used to sit down like all the doctors and all the counselors and I am not saying they are wrong. I am just saying I am a pastor and I just don't do it like they do it. I used to try to have all these cute little things where everybody did this and did that and you do this and you do that and you do these three things and you do those three things. Well, I got over that because that didn't work for 30 years. And I came up with this one.

I said, "Who is going to go first? We are both adults. We are all adults in this room. All of us know what needs to be done, now who is going to go first?"

Well, do you know what I found out? Evidently nobody.

Do you know what I say now?

"Do you have any clue how you are grieving the heart of God and how you are disappointing God with how you are acting towards this other person and how your stubbornness and your anger are grieving God's heart?"

That is really the issue, folks. It isn't do I want out of debt. It isn't only do I want peace. It is this. Do I want to please God? And to be honest with you, do you know what I have figured out? If we are sitting three of us in a room and it could be anything. I am just talking about marriage at the moment. If there is three of us in the room and on this issue there is a couple that don't want to please God, there is really no use in scheduling another appointment, because all the tricks and all the fancy things, until you decide it isn't about me, it is about God. And apply that to any sin in our life. Don't justify it. Don't excuse it in your life. Don't compare yourselves to others. Are you grieving the heart of God? And if the answer is yes, tremble at his Word. Then go to the cross and with this I am done.

The key to change is to constantly return to the cross of Jesus Christ. Just think of it. I will just mention these and be done.

Number one, it is at the cross that we reject ourselves and we receive Christ. Remember how you got saved? You had tried to save yourself and maybe you didn't care about it,

but whatever it was, when you came to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ you got saved without this being some element of it, you didn't get saved. Without this I cannot save myself. I am asking for what you did for me on the cross to save me. Without the sense of that substitutionary death, you could not have been saved.

Now I am just saying to you, you got saved, but your flesh didn't get anymore strength in it than the day you got saved. And if something is going to change in your life just from going from lost to saved, you did it at the cross and if you are going to get victory over something in your life, you have got to get right back to that cross, not to get saved again, but to acknowledge that tremendous truth. I cannot of myself.

Here is number two. It is at the cross that we are humbled and we realize that had we been able to correct ourselves, Christ would have never had to die.

Now if we would just understand that in terms of our sin, if I was able to correct my life, Jesus wouldn't have to die. I could have merited salvation.

Now I am not discounting growth and I am not trying to say we don't grow, but I am just saying this. On a life altering habit or sin, when something has its grip on you, I am not just talking about not gossiping anymore, unless it has got its grip on you. I am talking about a life altering sin. You can no more get out of its grip than you could save yourself. You have got to go to the cross and say, "God, this thing has a hold of my heart. I fly into a rage because it is just who I am."

Have you ever said that? Do you ever get tired of failing so much you just say, "It is just who I am."

Hey, you are not going to change that with just who you are. You are going to change that at the cross. When you say, "God, this is who I am and I can't reach down deep enough in the strength of my flesh and make it different," and you lay yourself out before the cross of Christ and say, "I need your grace in this matter. I need your work in my life," and you keep your eyes on him.

Number three, it is at the cross where we see the cost of the pleasure of sin.

I wish I had another hour. That little party where you get drunk, do you want to see the truth behind that? Go to the cross of Calvary and see the suffering of Jesus. That is where that sin was paid for.

Do you want to just throw your temper again? Go to the cross of Jesus and you will see the payment of temper, the payment of lust, the payment of gluttony, the payment of drunkenness. Go to the cross and you will see the actual cost of it. It is not innocent.

And can I tell you something else? As you do it, you know you will do it again. I am just telling you. If you want to see the real cost of it, go to the cross and see what it cost Jesus.

And then fourth and last it is at the cross that we see Christ's love for us and we can learn to love him more than our sin. I will close with this.

Every Easter or around Easter someone will preach on the crucifixion or any time somebody preaches on the crucifixion there will always be this one guy who walks us through the crucifixion and he tells us about the cat of nine tails and how it rips the flesh and all this and I always think to myself when I hear a preacher do that, oh, man, this is... we have heard this.

I listen to it.

You say, "Preacher, what is your reaction at the end?"

I have heard this. I wish he would get done.

No, my reaction is to be broken hearted again over how much the Lord Jesus Christ loves us.

I get a station on my radio now of gospel music, good music. And I will hear a song about Christ on the cross. I will hear a hymn even about it. I am telling you. I don't walk away from the cross and say to myself, "Tired of hearing that one." It is never that effect on us. The effect when we go to the cross is to realize how much we are loved, to realize the cost of our sin.

They say, "Preacher, is that just... you just rub that on somewhere?"

No. I... hey. You have got to beg God to help you have that perspective. And you have got to place yourself in the place to hear that Word and read that Word and hear that Word and you have got to spend time meditating on those things. But I am telling you that where you got saved was at the cross. And where you will save your life from this life altering sin is at the cross.

It is life changing to go to the cross. And I don't just mean reading those chapters. I mean going to the cross in our perspective and in our spirit, going saying, "Lord, I have been in the chains of this thing long enough and I am acknowledging to you today what I acknowledged to you when I bowed my knee and got saved. I cannot save myself. And, God, I have tried every trick. I have tried to stay away. I have tried everything I know. And, God, I am acknowledging to you there is nothing in me that is disciplined enough to break this chain in my life. And, God, I am asking you for your grace. And beyond that I am going to make myself accountable to someone because I am going to shed the light on this sin. This is not going to be the kind of thing where I cover it for my reputation. I am taking the lid off. And the light is going to shine on this mold and it is going to die."

Why can't I change? Because I love the sin and because most of the time I rely on myself to break that chain and I have no power to do so.

May God help us to see it and may God give you somebody in your life that loves you and loves God and can be a partner of accountability and help you.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for these few minutes we have had tonight and I pray. I know that I have not given anyone a formula to change anything in their life, but I pray, God, that we have pointed the way to the cross and the Spirit of God. If they take nothing else from this, may we understand that making a resolution, getting the stuff out of our house is a great step. It is not enough. It won't break it. Our lives have to be radically changed. Our perspective has to be changed. We have to come to the end of ourselves. We have to be willing to be seen for what we are and to come to you understanding that what we are doing is breaking your heart, trembling before your Word and admitting the truth that we need you and only in your grace and mercy can these chains be broken.

So, Lord, plant the seed of these things in the heart of someone who desperately wants to be different. Give them wisdom as they find that accountability partner. Give them great passion as they search your mind on these things and give them great victory as they begin to love you more than that sin. Help us, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.