

INTRODUCTION

We are currently in a series called “Worldliness,” which is taken from a book edited by C.J. Mahaney called “Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World.”

Our passage for this study has been 1 John 2:15-17 which says, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

As we have considered this subject, we have looked at media and music, and now we’re considering pleasure.

Does the Bible make any reference to godly or ungodly pleasures?

Most definitely!

In fact, if you listen to John Piper's teaching, you'll learn quickly that he teaches about a godly pleasure or what he refers to as a Christian hedonism.

We'll say more about that term later.

But let me suffice it to say that the pleasures that we are to enjoy, without hesitation, must be godly.

Our pursuit of pleasure must be our pursuit of God and not the flesh.

John says what characterizes worldliness is "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

So we must take captive every the flesh in pursuing Him.

In short, we must “walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

Or in the words of Psalm 37:4, we must “delight ourselves in the Lord.”

With those thoughts in mind, it is imperative that we are discerning regarding media and music but not just those things alone---all things!

We must be discerning with what we’re taught from those who say they are teachers of the Word of God.

1 John 4:1 says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are

from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

It is our duty to test those who teach and preach as well as test what they are teaching.

In the words of Paul to the Thessalonians, we are to “examine everything carefully” (1 Thess. 5:21).

As we consider this subject once again this morning, I would like us to begins to consider James 4:1-3.

Please take God’s Word and turn with me to James chapter 4.

James, writing to his scattered congregation (cf. Jas.1:1), says, “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.

You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

It is clear from this passage that James is not referring to a Christian hedonist.

No, he calls them “adulteresses” in verse 4.

Why?

Because this kind of behavior reveals truly where the heart is at.

It’s not focused on the happiness of God but more on the happiness of man.

James calls it “friendship with the world” (v.4).

This, as he continues is “hostility toward God.”

And “whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (v.4).

So, James is making it clear that the one who lives solely for his “own pleasures” is a “friend” of the world and not a “friend” of God.

In fact, he says, he is “an enemy of God.”

This brings our foundational passage of 1 John 2:15-17 even further into view.

The danger of loving the world presents the danger of not being a Christian.

John MacArthur rightly says, “Genuine spiritual life and faithful Christian living involve separation from the world and all its countless contaminations.”

That has always been the line drawn in the Scriptures.

2 Corinthians 7:1 says, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

1 Peter 1:15 says, “But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.”

Holiness is the issue and so is the heart.

Are we putting into our hearts the right things?

Are we putting into our hearts that which promotes holiness in our lives?

As we look at James 4:1-3, we will see that a person who continues in habitual friendship with the world is grounded in human wisdom and gives evidence of unbelief.

Because “if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart,” James says, this is wisdom that “is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there is disorder and every evil thing” (Jas.3:14-16).

Keep your eye on the phrase “selfish ambition” and you will understand what James is saying in chapter 4.

He says in verses 1-3 that such ungodly friendship with the world unavoidably results in personal conflict with others, with oneself, and, most importantly, with God.

James begins verse 1 with...

CONFLICT WITH OTHERS (v.1a)

He says, “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?”

Simon Kistemaker says, “The connection between the last part of the preceding chapter and the first three verses of this chapter is clear. If bitter envy and selfish ambition have filled man's heart (3:14, 16), if his guiding principle is earthly wisdom that is unspiritual and devilish (3:15), if he has alienated himself from God, then he promotes 'disorder and every evil practice' (3:16). When that happens, fights and quarrels are the order of the day” (Baker New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of James and the Epistle of John).

The first question identifies the problem

“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?”

“Quarrels” (polemos) refers to “a strong verbal or written attack” (Oxford Dictionary).

It is a “general, prolonged, and serious disputing or combat and is often rendered ‘war.’

It is “conflict in general.”¹

The second word “conflicts” (mache) refers to a “specific fight or battle” (MacArthur).

“Both words could describe violent verbal disputes.”²

James tells us that...

The conflicts and fights were in the Church

James says, “What is the source...among you?”

¹ John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible: James 4:1

² Douglas Moo, James, 138.

Unfortunately, “these are between people in the church, not internal conflict in individual people.”³

Some believe the phrase “Among you” (en humin) “may be rendered ‘in you’ and taken to refer to the old nature in the believer causing inner feelings of tension and frustration.”⁴

Some, like Easton, hold that this picture is “grotesquely unsuited to members of the early Christian churches” (Burton Scott Easton and Gordon Poterat, *The Epistle of James in the Interpreter’s Bible*, 12:53).

Other’s restrict the phrase “to be taken to the communities as a whole.”⁵

³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*: James 4:1.

⁴ A.T. Robertson, *Practical and Social Aspects of Christianity. The Wisdom of James*, 192-93.

⁵ Alfred Plummer, *The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude*, in *An Exposition of the Bible*, 6:607.

The use of “you” is best taken as restricting the reference to the readers of the epistles of James.

Spiros Zodhiates suggests that by saying ‘among you’ James “speaks as if he were outside that circle of fighters and disturbers.”⁶

Conflict within the church is not in God’s will or design.

Jesus said to His disciples in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Later in His high priestly prayer in John 17:21 He entreated His Father that believers “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, The Labor of Love. An Exposition of James 2:14-4:12, 215.

and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

After Pentecost, Acts 4:32 says of the church that “the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.”

But sadly there arose quarrels and conflicts.

Paul, writing in his first letter to the Corinthians exhorted them “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor.1:10).

Conflict was a frequent problem in the early church just as it is today

After Paul told them to “agree and that there be no divisions among you (1 Cor.1:10), he scolds them in chapter 3:1-3 for continuing to do this.

He says, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?”

Later in his second letter to them, he said, “For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances” (2 Cor.12:20).

John MacArthur, commenting on the phrase “among you” says that “some of those members obviously were not saved. And because they were thereby enemies of God, they were also enemies of each other and of true believers in the churches.”⁷

The conflict was not only with others there was...

CONFLICT WITH SELF (vv.1b-3)

The second question identifies the true source of these conflicts

James asks, “Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?”

Now we are introduced to the word hedonism or hedonist.

⁷ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: James*, 184.

The word “pleasures” is the Greek word hedonon from which “hedonist” and “hedonism” are derived.

The word itself “connotes the gratification of sensual, natural, fleshly desires” (MacArthur).

Vernon Doersken says it refers to a “self-seeking philosophy, a philosophy wherein pleasure is the summum bonum of life. The ‘If it feels good, do it’ way of life is an example.”⁸

A hedonist is “one who lives for pleasure” or “the enjoyment derived from the fulfillment of one’s desires, or, as here, the craving for the pleasure itself.”

“The term is rare in the New Testament, always with a bad connotation, being ‘one of the many forces which belong to the world of unsanctified

⁸ Vernon Doersken, James, 94.

carnality, which strive against the work of God and His Spirit.”⁹

“Hedonism is the uncontrolled personal desire to fulfill every passion and whim that promises sensual satisfaction and enjoyment.”¹⁰

Unbelieving, ungodly hedonists are, according to 2 Timothy 3:2-4, “lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”

They are slaves to their own desires, tyrannized by their passions.

⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, James, 243

¹⁰ John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: James, 187.

Consequently, when the seed of the gospel falls on the thorny ground of their hearts, “they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Lk. 8:14).

Peter describes them in 2 Peter 2:10-14, 17-21 as unsaved and ungodly members in the church or more specifically false teachers and false brethren.

“War in your members” (melos) is where this uncontrolled desire occurs

D. Edmond Hiebert says the present participle, ‘that war,’ in verse 1, “depicts these pleasures as soldiers carrying on a military campaign aimed at securing the satisfaction of their cravings.”¹¹

Tasker says James recognizes that “the human personality has, as it were, been invaded by an

¹¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, James, 244.

alien army which is always campaigning within it.”¹²

“Your members” is not referring to church members, but to “the physical and mental elements of the body, which contain man’s fallen flesh or humanness” (MacArthur).

Jesus said in Matthew 5:29, “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” -- here referring to a physical member of your body.

Paul used it to refer to both physical and mental members of the body as the seat of the desires and passions.

He said in Romans 6:13, “And do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as

¹² R.V.G. Tasker, The General Epistles of James, 85.

instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

In Romans 6:19 he said, “I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.”

In Romans 7:5 he said, “For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.”

In Romans 7:23 he said, “But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a

prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”

In Colossians 3:5, he told the Colossians “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”

W. E. Vine says, “Since our bodies and their "members" belong to the earth, and are the instruments of sin, they are referred to as such (cf. Matt. 5:29-30; Rom. 7:5, 23, mentioned above); the putting to death is not physical, but ethical; as the physical "members" have distinct individualities, so those evils, of which the physical "members" are agents, are by analogy regarded as examples of the way in which the "members" work if not put to death.”¹³

¹³ W.E. Vine, Vine's Expository Dictionary.

James used it in James 3:6 when referring to the tongue.

He said, “And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.”

The trouble is not an evil environment beyond their control, but their own self-seeking attitude.

“When sinful pleasures gain the dominance in a person, that individual will become the center of strife” (Doersken).

Remember I said not to forget the words “selfish ambition”?

This is what is produced by “your pleasures.”

This is why there are “quarrels and conflicts” in the church.

Everyone is living for his or her own desires and that is a major problem!!!

Where is the slave concept in this kind of living?

It's absent.

We can't go around and say that we're slaves of Jesus Christ and live solely for our own pleasures.

It's like what Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Though that verse may be talking about materialism, it can apply to all of life.

This is where we can take up John Piper's statement of a Christian hedonist.

He is not one who lives for his own pleasures but for God's.

John Piper says in his book "Desiring God" that "The ultimate ground of Christian Hedonism is the fact that God is uppermost in his own affections: The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy Himself forever.

The reason this may sound strange is that we are more accustomed to think about our duty than God's design. And when we ask about God's design we are too prone to describe it with ourselves at the center of God's affections. We may say, for example, His design is to redeem

the world. Or to save sinners. Or to restore creation. Or the like.

But God's saving designs are penultimate, not ultimate. Redemption, salvation, and restoration are not God's ultimate goal. These He performs for the sake of something greater: namely, the enjoyment He has in glorifying Himself. The bedrock foundation of Christian Hedonism is not God's allegiance to us, but to Himself.

If God were not infinitely devoted to the preservation, display, and enjoyment of His own glory, we could have no hope of finding happiness in Him. But if He does in fact employ all His sovereign power and infinite wisdom to maximize the enjoyment of His own glory, then we have a foundation on which to stand and rejoice.”¹⁴

¹⁴ John Piper, *Desiring God*. 33.

Therefore, as 1 Corinthians 10:31 says,
“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever
you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Glorifying God should be first and foremost in
our lives---even when it comes to our needs.

Jesus said not to worry about “what you will eat
or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to
what you will put on” (Mat.6:25) “But seek first
His kingdom and His righteousness, and all
these things will be added to you” (v.33).

When this is your focus, you will “do nothing
from selfishness and empty conceit, but with
humility of mind regard one another as more
important than yourselves” (Phil.2:3).

CONCLUSION

To become a Christian Hedonist, as John Piper
puts it, you must be converted.

You must be born again or born from above.

The Bible says you and I are sinners and the wages for our sins is “death” (Rom.6:23).

Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, went to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

When we repent of our sin and turn to Him, He saves us and grants us Eternal life.

This is where it all begins.

Let's pray.

God, My Heart and Pleasure (Pt.1)

James 4:1

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