

Christian, Are You a Practicing Hedonist?

James 4:1-17

November 18

Hedonism is a pagan philosophy of life in which “pleasure” or “self” is the chief goal. Christianity is the acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the source of abundant and eternal life. Jesus taught that death to self is a prerequisite for discipleship. Hedonism and Christianity, therefore, represent opposing spectrums of life.

Some professing Christians, though, manifest adherence to the hedonistic philosophy of self-exaltation rather than crucified Christ-likeness. James accused the Jewish-Christians he addressed of being motivated by *hedon*, selfish-pleasure (4:1,3). When Christians live for self, the hedonistic principle produces church fights, quarrels, covetousness, ineffective prayer, spiritual adultery, a broken relationship with God, and the issuing of slanderous judgments against other Christians.

James described the ugly results of hedonistic Christianity. Godly repentance provides the correction, or remedy, for the ugly depiction.

What happens when Christians live in a hedonistic manner?

First, hedonistic Christians cause church strife (4:1-3). According to the early North African Christian leader Tertullian, lost people exclaimed concerning Christians, “Behold, how they love one another!” Contemporary lost people may exclaim concerning Christians, “Behold, how they fight one another!” Sadly, wars, a term descriptive of “chronic hostilities” and strife, a term depicting “sharp outbursts” are common realities in church life.

Why are fights prevalent in church life? According to James, church members fight when selfish pleasures (hedon) motivate them. Church members manifest selfish pleasure (hedon) in lust for power, position, prestige, or dominance. Selfishness expresses itself with the attitude, “My way or no way!”

Another manifestation of selfishness is sick praying; the term translated into English as “amiss” or “wrongly” literally means “sick.” You have not because you ask sickly! Sick pray-ers ask selfish request. Prayer should orient our lives to God and lead to submission. Sick, selfish-prayers are symptomatic of the same disease that produces church fights.

Second, hedonistic Christians commit spiritual adultery (James 4.4-6). Selfishness is not a minor shortcoming for Christians. God calls Christians who live for self, “adulteresses.” When the “world” rather than God becomes the object of affections, a Christian commits spiritual adultery. As a husband jealously yearns for his unfaithful wife, God yearns jealously for the heart-affection of His people. Jealousy is God’s protective love desiring the best for those who belong to Him.

Third, God commands hedonistic Christians to repent (James 4:7-10). Christians typically limit repentance to the front door of the Christian life. Legendary SWBTS professor W. T. Conner said, “The deepest repentance of the Christian life comes after conversion.” Repentance is the means by which a Christian terminates a spiritual affair. Through ten commands, God calls for immediate, decisive action.

Submit means to place under the authority of another. Submission is the voluntary commitment to the authority of God. Satan has a role in spiritual adultery, therefore, God commands Christians to resist the devil. In an adulterous affair, partners drift apart. When Christians draw near to God through the means of worship, they discover a willingness on God's part to receive the Christian into restored fellowship. The closer we draw to God the more conscious we are of sin. James, therefore, commands Christians to wash their outward life and inward nature. Repentance involves an emotional response to the consciousness of sin: grieving, mourning, and wailing. One who repents cannot hide true repentance. The repentant suspend laughter and joy. This state is not permanent. God will lift up those who humble themselves through repentance.

Fourth, hedonistic Christians are agents of the devil (James 4.11-12). When Christians speak against one another, they act as agent of the Slanderer. Speaking evil of another Christian disparages God's royal law of love and usurps the authority of God.

Fifth, hedonistic Christians makes plans without seeking God's will (James 4.13-17). James provides three reminders of the dangers of a failure to plan without seeking God. First, planning without submission to God is foolish since no one knows the future. Second, planning without submission to God is foolish because life is like a short vapor. Third, sometimes Christians are more concerned about the future than the present. If we are disobeying God and sinning today, it is foolish to seek God's future plans since we are outside the will of God today (James 4.17). Repent today. Then concern yourself with tomorrow.