

The Pleasure Seekers
James 4:1-4

April 21, 2013

A. Introduction

1. The Philosophy of Pleasure

- a. Jefferson
- b. 'hedonism'

2. Read James 4:1-4

B. These Are Strong Words

1. Do They Apply to Christians?

- a. not me!
- b. to whom was James writing?!?!

2. Wake-up Language^A

- a. relationship to Jesus' teaching
- b. murder and adultery in Sermon on the Mount, &c
- c. spiritual adultery means:

C. Pursuing Pleasure Brings Violence James 4:1-2a

1. The God of Peace^B

- a. the gospel of peace
- b. the Prince of Peace

2. Quarrels and Conflicts

3. Things That Wage War^C

D. Pursuing Pleasure Is Vanity James 4:2-3

1. Pleasure Is Never Satisfied^D

- a. man created for peace with God; if not present then:
- b. can I distinguish between pleasure and joy?
- c. check out also Proverbs 27:20, 23:5, Ecclesiastes 5:10-11, 1 John 2:16

2. The Pursuit of Pleasure Precludes Prayer

- a. prayer's purpose is:
- b. we abuse prayer when we ...

E. Conclusion

1. What Has Precedence?

2. The Results Will Tell

^B Luke 2:10-14

^C Colossians 1:9, Romans 7

^D 1 Timothy 6:17, Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

^A Matthew 5:29-30, 15:19-20

A. Introduction

1. The Philosophy of Pleasure

a. Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, referred to himself a Christian, but his was a strange Christianity

(A) there is the Jefferson Bible which he assembled for use in the state of Virginia: its contents are limited to the four gospels and from these everything has been excised that has reference to the deity of Jesus Christ, of miracles, of the supernatural

(B) Jefferson's writings testify against his being a Christian – at best he was a Deist ... one who believes in a Creator, but a God who does not involve Himself in the world that He has created

(C) his Providence is impersonal, the laws of nature God established

(D) Jefferson describes himself as an Epicurean – a follower of the Greek philosopher Epicurus who viewed the pursuit of pleasure as the purpose of life – sumptuous eating, drinking, living

(E) as the principal in drafting the U.S. Declaration of Independence, you can see that philosophy in its second section: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'

(F) you will search in vain for support for these words in Scripture

b. this philosophy of pleasure is called hedonism, and is rife in the world

c. it is the philosophy of Hugh Hefner of Playboy notoriety and the other publishers of such smut

d. it is the philosophy of the entertainment industry

(A) and as each effort to titillate the senses becomes ho-hum and boring, it goes to greater and greater extremes

(B) sex, normal and aberrant, sadism, masochism flash on the screen

(C) I have read that the so-called 'reality shows' rely upon more and more grossness to shock viewers into watching

e. James has something to say against this philosophy in today's text

2. Read James 4:1-4 NKJV– 1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

B. These Are Strong Words

1. Do They Apply to Christians?

a. perhaps as we read these words you were thinking

(A) how does this apply to me?

(B) I don't wage war; I don't engage in battles – those are for nations

(C) I'm not a murderer; I don't commit adultery – I'm a Christian

(D) so the temptation and tendency is for us to tune out as we read these verses; or, to transfer them as applying to others; or to ask,

b. to what kind of Christians was James writing, anyway?

(A) James repeatedly addresses them as 'brother', 'beloved brothers'

(B) but in these passage makes these charges against them

(C) yet Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, experiencing some pretty severe moral problems, doesn't use such language

(D) so let us first try to understand this use of language by James

2. Wake-up Language

a. as we have been teaching through this book of James, I have not been making any special mention of one feature of James' writing

(A) this is the strong relationship between it and the teaching of Jesus

(B) you find this in the method of teaching that both used – the many illustrations and parables in order to clarify the truth

(C) you also find this in the substance of what both are teaching – even though James, as one of Jesus'

- half-brothers, did not believe at first, yet he must have heard Jesus' words in the carpentry shop
- (D) and you find it in their use of hyperbole, that figure of speech sometimes called exaggeration, but used by these teachers to capture the attention of their audience
 - (E) in Matthew 5:29-30, Jesus used it, for example, in advocating the maiming of the body: the plucking out of an eye or cutting off of a foot – lest such a member of the body should inhibit spiritual growth – a command which false sects have literalised rather than imbibing its intent
 - (F) that is one purpose of the strong language in this passage
- b. but it doesn't stop there because there is also a related and important use of the accusations of murder and adultery
- (A) which are also found in the teaching of Jesus Christ, particularly in those chapters called the 'sermon on the mount'
 - (B) which is this truth that sin resides first of all within the human heart – the Biblical term for the innermost part of a person that encompasses his or her will, attitude, ambitions
 - (C) Jesus said, [19 'For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 a These are the things which defile the man; ...'](#) (Matthew 15:19-20)
 - (D) so Jesus taught that in God's eyes, to hate is the same as murder; to look with covetous lust is the same as adultery
- c. and finally there is the spiritual meaning of the term 'adultery'
- (A) which is especially portrayed in the prophecy of Hosea
 - (B) namely that the OT people of God were His wife, even as the NT people of God are the bride of Christ – so that to forsake God; to forsake Christ is spiritual adultery
 - (C) that is what verse 4 of this chapter describes – forsaking Christ because of the allure of this present world
 - (D) we shall not address verse 4 much more this morning, but rather come back to it in a couple of weeks to look at God's provision for restoring of a Christian from falling into worldliness
 - (E) except we shall say this: one outcome of the pursuit of pleasure is being the enemy of God; a place where no Christian wants to be
- d. the first lesson that James has for us sounds strange:

- C. Pursuing Pleasure Brings Violence 4:1-2a
1. 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. ...
 2. The God of Peace
 - a. if, as we believe, the nature of the gospel of salvation reveals the nature of the God of salvation
 - (A) that, for example, it is a gospel of grace as He is a God of grace
 - (B) and, it is a gospel of love even as God is love
 - (C) so, one purpose that God has for the man or woman who comes to salvation is that they should realize peace
 - (1) peace with the God of peace, peace with others
 - (2) as even was proclaimed in the birth announcement of Jesus
 - (3) ... 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. ... Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men ...' (Luke 2:10-11, 14)
 - b. to put anything ahead of God as the purpose of our living, must then be detrimental to God's purpose of peace
 3. Quarrels and Conflicts
 - a. wars and fighting; battles and brawling
 - b. what astounds James is that the very opposite to God's intentions has taken place among the people of God
 - c. there has to be an explanation for this
 - d. where is the peace God intended? why is it absent? where is it gone?
 - e. it is because of wrong attitudes; wrong priorities; wrong purposes
 4. Things That Wage War
 - a. the word that is in the Greek is hedon – where have we heard that word before today? yes, hedonism

- the philosophy of pleasure
- b. on the internet, Wikipedia incorrectly implies that the original AV had no marginal notes: here is a facsimile of the page containing today's passage from the AV of 1611 – you will note that the translator's gave these alternatives
 - (A) brawlings for the word fightings
 - (B) pleasures for the word lusts
- c. yes, it is the pursuit of pleasures in the place of the pursuit of the knowledge of the will of God (Colossians 1:9) that destroys God's purpose being achieved in the child of God
- d. Paul in Romans 7 describes this conflict that takes place between our old nature – the flesh – and our new nature – the spirit or mind – so in a very real sense, the nature which we feed will be the one that wins
- e. feeding the desire for pleasure feeds that old nature still within us
- f. and if this war is within us, then eventually it will surface

D. Pursuing Pleasure Is Vanity 4:2-3

1. 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.
2. Pleasure Is Never Satisfied
 - a. that is the second message that James has
 - b. 'you lust and do not have ... you desire to have and cannot obtain'
 - c. if it is peace for which man was originally created – the peace that was to exist between him and his Creator; between him and his fellow creatures – and if the pursuit of pleasure destroys that peace – then all this desire, even if it be for things that are good in themselves, that God has given to us richly to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17) will not fulfill the deepest need of the human heart – fellowship with God Himself
 - d. Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 tells Solomon's experience in pursuing pleasure : 1 I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.' And behold, it too was futility. 2 I said of laughter, 'It is madness,' and of pleasure, 'What does it accomplish?' 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my

body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men – many concubines. 9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. 10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

- e. that is hedonism to its fullest; no man knew greater – totally empty
- f. C. S. Lewis in 'Surprised by Joy' makes this statement: 'Happiness is never in our power and pleasure is. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted joy would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasure in the world. —{2}.'
- g. fellowship with God – despite all circumstances – is true joy

3. The Pursuit of Pleasure Precludes Prayer

- a. one of the means God has given to his people for fellowship is that of prayer – it's importance in this is seen in Jesus' own example
 - (A) which do you think is found more frequently in the Bible: the encouragement to prayer, or to the reading of Scripture?
 - (B) that brings a second question for you to think upon: which is emphasised more: reading the Scriptures or doing the Scriptures?
 - (C) note also that the temple in Jerusalem was not called by God a place of worship, but rather a place of prayer: prayer matters be it the public prayer in the church or family, or private prayer
- b. so we see from what James tells us that this avenue of fellowship is destroyed by the pursuit of pleasure

- (A) either that pursuit is taken up without any regard for God – the quest for satisfaction that looks anywhere than above: *'you do not have because you do not ask'*
 - (1) small wonder it is that we do not ask, because in most cases it is readily apparent that this is not really something for which we want to go to our heavenly Father with a request
 - (2) not many of us are as honest with ourselves or with God as to pray, as Augustine admitted, *'give me chastity but not yet.'*
- (B) or if God is taken into consideration at all, it is in some oblique fashion where we seek, if it were in some way possible, to disguise our intentions from the God to whom we pray
 - (1) we pray for some material blessing
 - (2) perhaps with pious words that this will in some fashion bring glory to God or will enable us to support the ministry
 - (3) but God sees through any false motives
 - (4) we pray amiss, our intent being to take any blessing from God and apply it to our own pleasurable existence
- c. so the purpose for which prayer is given and made available to the child of God at the price of Jesus' death, and through the reality of His resurrection and ascension on high – is brought to nought if the Christian puts his own pleasure ahead of experiencing God

E. Conclusion

1. What Has Precedence?

- a. is it God or is it my pleasure that is my dominant concern in life?
- b. advertising is aimed almost entirely at the gratification of our desire for pleasure – that is the message of this world
- c. and the love of this world is enmity – hatred – of God

2. The Results Will Tell

- a. are the results quarrels, conflict, discord? these are symptoms of wrong priorities in life
- b. do they lead to the dissatisfaction which this world cannot appease
- c. is there a lack of that peace whose fruit is righteousness as James has just finished saying in the last

verse of the preceding chapter

- d. then these are strong indicators – a litmus test, as it were – showing that our life is sour and acidic and we need to get right with God
- e. may the words of our closing hymn, *Take Time to Be Holy*, speak to our hearts concerning these matters

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Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in *(braces)*. Version identifiers are:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6
- EGT – The Expositor’s Greek Testament, *James*, by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)
- Lange – Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)
- NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament, *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8
- TYN – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The General Epistle of James*, by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. ‘*Surprised by Joy,*’ by C. S. Lewis, quoted in Kerux illustrations 22145