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Trouble with a Capital "P"

JAMES 4:1-3

Introduction

1. The Pslamist once wrote, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! (Psalm 133:1).
2. While this is the ideal, we know that it is not always the reality.
3. Unity doesn't always exist in our homes and neither does it always exist in the church.
4. But why is this true? Why can't we get along?
5. James presents us the reason for the troubles we sometimes find in the church.
6. Let's look more closely at what he has to say and what we can do about it.

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I. The Origin of Trouble

A. STRIFE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

1. Attitudes of personal favoritism (James 2:1-11)
   a. Rich man who comes into worship "with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes" vs. "a poor man in dirty clothes."
   b. To the rich man they said "You sit here in a good place," while to the poor man someone said, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool."
2. Anger (1:19-20) and abusive speech (1:26;3:9-10)
   a. There were apparently those who were "quick to anger."

b. James told them to be "slow to anger" because "the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19b-20, NASB95).

b. There were also those who did not control their tongue.

c. They apparently were praising God in worship but cursing their brethren around town (James 3:9-10).

> "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." (James 3:9–10, NASB95)

3. They were filled with "bitter jealousy" and "selfish ambition" which brought into the church "disorder and every evil thing" (3:14,16).

4. Likewise the church at Corinth had it share of problems

a. Quarrels (1 Corinthians 1:11)

> "For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you." (1 Corinthians 1:11, NASB95)

b. "Strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances" (2 Corinthians 12:20)

6. So also the church at Philippi (Philippians 4:2).

> "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." (Philippians 4:2, NASB95)

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B. A PROBLEM WITH PLEASURE

1. James asks a rhetorical question and then answers it with another rhetorical question (James 4:1).

a. "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?"

b. "Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in you members?"

2. He traces the problem back to one thing

a. "Lusts" (KJV)

b. "Pleasures" (NASV)

c. "Desires" (NIV)

d. "Desires for pleasure" (NKJV)

3. James uses the Greek word *hēdonē* from which we get our English *"hedonism"* — the belief that pleasure is the chief goal in life.

4. Much strife in the church for the past 2,000 years can be traced back to the desire for personal pleasure.

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5. Pleasure is not evil in and of itself, but the driving desire for pleasure is.

   a. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus explained the seed among the thorns as those who "are choked with worries, and riches and pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14).

   b. Paul reminded Titus that prior to Christ the Christians on the island of Crete were once "enslaved to various lusts and pleasures" (Tituse 3:3).

   c. Peter called the false teachers in the church "stains and blemishes" who "count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime" (2 Peter 2:13).

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C. THE WAR WITHIN

1. James described the source of our trouble as "pleasures that wage war in your members" (James 4:1b).

2. Because of conflicting desires our inner life becomes a battleground.

   a. The old nature with its self-seeking focus on personal pleasure, fights against our new nature (cf. Romans 7:21-23; Galatians 5:17).

> "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 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." (Romans 7:21–23, NASB95)

"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." (Galatians 5:17, NASB95)

b. Our selfish pleasure-seeking dominates more often than not.

2. This then fosters a self-focus which naturally diminishes the importance of others, making pleasure the goal of life.
3. The ultimate result is a relational war with those around us, especially in the church.

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D. WE LIVE IN A PLEASURE SEEKING WORLD

1. In 1931 Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World* in which he portrayed a society addicted to pleasure-giving technologies.
2. Today, Americans spend billions of dollars each year in the pursuit of pleasure.
   a. $57.3 billion on live entertainment (2025)
   b. $43.5 billion on spectator sports (2025)
3. If we are not careful, this mindset will become the desire of the church as Christians promote a pleasure-centered theology.
4. The end result is a church fighting with itself.

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II. The Pathology of Trouble

A. A JARRING INDICTMENT

1. "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder." (James 4:2a)
   a. Just this year an 11-year-old boy (Clayton Dietz) in Pennsylvania was charged as an adult for shooting his adoptive father. His father had confiscated his Nintendo Switch and locked it inside a family gun safe.
2. Some Christians, frustrated in their pursuit of pleasure, resorted to murder.
3. It is sad that such a "pleasure first mentality" can bring such degradation to

the Body of Christ.

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B. UNREQUITED PLEASURE-SEEKING

1. Notice the progression
   a. "You lust (desire) and do not have (frustration) — so you commit murder" (James 4:2a)
   b. "You are envious (desire) and cannot obtain (frustration) — so you fight and quarrel" (James 4:2b)
      ❑ Desire plus frustration yields murder or in-fighting.
2. The frantic, pleasure-first life goes after that which cannot satisfy.

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III. The Prayerlessness of Trouble (vv. 2b,3)

A. "YOU DO NOT ASK"

1. Some of these Christians would not ask God.
2. Though driven by pleasure, they must have realized that their prayers were inappropriate.
3. Thus they don't ask at all.
4. Is it possible in our own lives that we have stopped praying because the things we want are not high on God's priority list.

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5. David once wrote, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4)
6. When we "delight [ourselves] in the Lord," the "desires of [our] hearts" become the things which honor God and bring glory to Him.

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B. "YOU DO NOT RECEIVE"

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you

may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:3, NASB95)

1. The reason we do not receive is that we ask with wrong motives.
2. Our desire is to spend it on our pleasures.
3. God will not provide us with the financial wherewithal to squander on a life focused solely on personal pleasure.
4. Genuine prayer leads us away from preoccupation with ourselves.
5. Instead, it aligns us with God's purposes for our lives.
6. John provides us with a proper motive for prayer.

"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." (1 John 5:14, NASB95)

Conclusion

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1. Is James saying that as Christians, we should never be passionate about pleasure?
2. No! It is okay to enjoy . . .
   a. A day in the sun or on the lake
   b. The pleasure of sightseeing
   c. A run in the country
   d. A fine meal or an outdoor barbecue
   e. The enjoyment a sporting event, a concert or time at a theme park.
3. The Christian life is not a life of sad faces and gloomy days.

"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones." (Proverbs 17:22, NASB95)

4. As Christians we should be people who enjoy fun times together!
5. But there are some things we must remember.

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   a. All true pleasure comes from God

"Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4)

"O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!" (Psalm 34:8)

"You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever. " (Psalm 16:11)

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b. Man is naturally made to seek pleasure.

1) The problem is that we so often seek pleasure from the wrong source and in the wrong way.

2) Consider Jeremiah 2:13

"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." (Jeremiah 2:13)

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c. God wants us to immerse ourselves in His pleasure by immersing ourselves in Him.

"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1,2)

"O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water." (Psalm 63:1)

6. Are any of us so controlled by the pleasure we seek that it creates strife between ourselves and our family? The church?
7. Find your pleasure in God. Remember if you delight yourself in Him, He will give you the desires of your heart.