

# THE BEREAN

"...EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY..." (Acts 17:11)

## HEDONISM

BY B. G. ECHOLS

"Whence come wars and whence come fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your pleasures that war in your members?" (James 4:1). The word here translated "pleasures" is used twice by James and occurs also in Luke 8:14; Titus 3:3; and II Peter 2:13. In every case it denotes pleasures of an evil sort. It is the Greek word from which we get "hedonism" and "hedonist." Hedonism is the doctrine that pleasure is the only good and proper goal of endeavor, or the self-indulgent pursuit of pleasure. A hedonist is one who regards the pursuit of pleasure as the chief activity of life. While hedonism may take several forms, all forms either possess some or degenerate into a "playboy" philosophy.

While the thought may shatter many present adherents of hedonism, the idea is not new. It has been in the world since sin. One of the earliest proclaimers of hedonism was Aristippus of Cyrene (430-350 B.C.). His philosophy sounds modern. He maintained that pleasure is to be our goal in life and we should have as much and as intense pleasure as we can get. As pleasures of the senses are the most intense, they should be sought in preference to all others. Pleasures of the moment are more desirable than those that might come in the future. According to Aristippus, the road to happiness lies in an uninhibited enjoyment of pleasure. Pleasures are to be seized while there is time, and those of the senses must be preferred for in them we find immediate and undeniable appeal.

Hedonism has always been an extremely popular philosophy of life. Yet James tells us that it is just such quests for pleasures that cause us our troubles. The pursuit of

pleasure by mankind is inconsistent, thoughtless, and self-defeating. To the hedonist, this world is the only one we can count on. No thought can be given to heaven or hell. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." A hedonist cannot consider tomorrow but must be concerned only with the here and now. To such a mind there can be no such thing as moral responsibility. The hedonist insists that if God created man with desires, surely He can't blame man for enjoying pleasures. Blaspheming his Creator, the hedonist consumes himself in his lusts.

Still some doubts about such an outlook arise in our minds. Even without the Bible, we are forced to admit that the pursuit of pleasure does not satisfy the deeper desires of our spirit. Despite our desire to escape tomorrow, it comes. The morning after is never worth the night before that was spent purely seeking pleasure. The heartache of the tomorrow outweighs the intensity of the pleasure. There always seems to be a day of reckoning. Instead of finding happiness, the hedonist ends in frustration, disillusion, or boredom. He becomes a slave to his pleasures. When all the juice has been squeezed from the orange of pleasure, what do we do with the empty peel? The hedonist has no answer. Living for this life only, he finds it quickly gone. Seeking momentary pleasures, he cries because they last for only a moment. Things don't turn out as he anticipated.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

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