

The Insatiable and Its Satisfaction

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Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians. 5:19–21)

Solomon wrote, “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing” (Ecclesiastes. 1:8). This is a fundamental truth that Satan twists and uses to trap people. Surely it is true of sexual desire, as its many perversions reveal. But the object of desire may be comfort, possessions, talent, money, or reputation in a profession. If you watch people in the sports or entertainment industries, you will see a magnificent display of vanity. It is likewise in literature and in many of the arts. There is incredible vanity that can never be satisfied: an itch that simply cannot be sufficiently scratched. No matter what you do, there will always be a cry for more. If we are going to live a life of abundant sufficiency, we must be focused and intentional in standing against these dreadful roots of the self-life. Until we have done that, we will be incapable of entering by faith into the life God longs to give us.

Desire is infinite partly because we were made by God, made for God, made to need God, and made to run on God. We can be satisfied only by the one who is infinite, eternal, and able to supply all our needs; we are only at home in God. When we fall away from God, the desire for the infinite remains, but it is displaced upon things that will certainly lead to destruction. As we pursue this desire for self-gratification and self-satisfaction, life becomes just as Paul describes in the passage above.

James also speaks of two kinds of wisdom in comparing the flesh and the spirit, using language that is also characteristic of many other portions of Scripture:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. (James 3:13–16)

Where there is envying and self-seeking, the old self with its practices and habits (Colossians. 3:9) is still alive, insisting on having its own way. Otherwise there would be no envying, no self-seeking, but simply satisfaction in God’s appointments for our lives. We will not be striving with others about anything. We may speak the truth. We may calmly present what we believe to be good and right, but there will be no envying, there will be no self-seeking, there will be no bitterness, there will be no confusion.

REFLECT

James 3:17-18 says, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”



Contrast the “earthly” wisdom rooted in the elevation of our desires as ultimate with another wisdom that is to be possessed. What ideas stir your heart and draw your attention to the wisdom that is, as James says, “from above”?

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