

GREATER THAN PART 2 – WEEK 4

HEDONISM

Warm-up: How have you related to this series on Greater Than? What have you learned from it? Were there things that were confusing?

The Christian Tension

Sometimes we can feel a tension between enjoying the things around us and following Jesus?

Q1: Why do Christians feel this tension?

Compare these readings – perhaps read them across the row to see the contrast.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)	James 4:7-10
James 1:17 (NIV)	1 John 2:15-16
Phil 4:19 (MSG)	Phil 3:7-9a
3 John 2 (NKJV)	Col 3:2-5
1 Tim 4:4 and 6:17	
2 Cor 9:8	

Q2: Have you any personal examples of this tension from your own life or from books that you have read?

Q3: Have you come across different views in the church on this issue?

Hedonism

Hedonism tries to answer the dilemma of the purpose of life by seeking pleasure as the greatest good.

Hedonism – the ethical theory that pleasure (in the sense of the satisfaction of desires) is the greatest good and proper aim of human life. Therefore, a hedonist is someone who seeks to maximise pleasure and minimise pain.

Q45: What is the attraction of hedonism and what are its drawbacks?

There are 2 intrinsic questions from this worldview – what is the greatest good and how do we pursue it. Socrates said that the greatest good was to pursue virtue (high moral standards), while Buddhists focus on a form of ascetism (separating yourself from the world and its pleasures).

The Christian answer.

The writer In Ecclesiastes 2: 11 gives his view that all the chasing after pleasure is meaningless.

It is interesting to note that these issues were dealt with in the Westminster Catechism¹ that was produced in 1647. The first question and answer is below.

1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

Q5: Why is the glory of God the greatest good? Romans 11:36, Ps 19:7-11, John 15:11, 20:30-31. 1 John 1:4.

Q6: So how do we pursue God's glory as the greatest good? John 15:5, 10-11, 2 Tim 3:16. 1 Cor 10:13.

Q7: How then should this change our approach to enjoyment and pleasure? Think of eating and drinking, enjoying your home or taking care of others.

Conclusion:

The Greater Than series has tackled 4 main subjects and compared the different worldviews.

Origin (where do we come from?)	Christianity > Naturalism
Identity (who are we?)	Christianity > Humanism
Morality (what is right or true?)	Christianity > Other religions
Meaning (why are we here?)	Christianity > Hedonism

Discuss: Do you feel more confident in speaking about these issues? Can you think of any questions you might use for approaching people who hold these views?

¹ This catechism (or set of beliefs) was intended to bring uniformity between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. This was widely taught in many UK Sunday schools until the late 1960s.