

Expressive Individualism

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Thesis

My concern here is not the world's adherence to Expressive Individualism, except to point out that it is an old and ongoing satanic strategy to get people to disobey the Word of God. Rather, my concern here is that believers in Jesus Christ understand why this is so dangerous for the Christian.

Definitions

Definition from Google search posted March 19, 2024:

Expressive individualism is a self-focused emphasis on personal happiness and “self-actualization” as well as a claim that the internal self is the true self.

The Gospel Coalition adds these results of Expressive Individualism:

- Marriage is about your “soul mate” completing you and making you happy...
- Friendship is an avenue for mutual self-fulfillment
- Churches are dispensers of religious goods and services... [November 13, 2018 (thegospelcoalition.org)]

Their point is that marriage, friendship, and religion are only valuable if they serve you.

Although it has become a worldview, Expressive Individualism is not something new. The idea was illustrated in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (written sometime between 1599 and 1601), who said, “To thine own self be true.” “Individualism” is a term coined by French aristocrat and political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). “Expressive Individualism” is a phrase introduced by American sociologist Robert Bellah (1927-2013) in his book, “Habits of the Heart.” Today, it has become a movement which says to find our purpose for life, we must search our inner feelings. That is how one will be truly happy, which is the ultimate goal.

Expressive Individualism is abundantly poured out on social media. A friend of my daughter recently posted on Facebook that she has finally decided that she needs to “put herself first before everything else.” She received many encouraging comments like, “Way to go!” “So proud of you!” “You be You!”

When we discover who we are (say, LGBTQ, etc.), we should express what we find to the world. Expressive individualists believe people should not only accept but praise you for finding your individualism. It demands tolerance of everything.

Oh wait! Everything except biblical Christianity!

The Bible and the Individual

There is some truth in individualism. The Bible primarily focuses on the individual. In a sense, the Bible is a record of the people who had an individual encounter with God. In the Bible, we read about Adam, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, Samson's mother, Samuel's mother, David, Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Even among the apostles, the focus is on Peter and John and later, on Paul.

Many names could be added to this list, but there are two that reveal the addition of a collective commitment. When we come to Abraham, we learn that God, for the first time in history, added a collective commitment to His individual commitment. It is usually called the Abrahamic Covenant. God added a genealogical commitment to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The people we now call the Jews (Genesis 12; 15; 17).

When we come to Moses, we learn that God made that genealogical commitment into a national commitment (Exodus 20). That national commitment to Israel was in place from the Law, given to Moses on Mount Sinai, until the death of Christ (Romans 10:4).

When we come to the apostles, we learn that the death of Christ was followed almost immediately (Acts 2) by the beginning of the church age, also known as the age of grace (Ephesians 3:2-9). During this church/grace age, God's collective commitment to Israel was set aside until after He removes the church from the earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). At that point, the church age will be over, and God will once again reinstate His collective commitment to Israel (Romans 11:1, 17-25; 1 John 3:16; Hebrews 10:16-17).

Where we live now, in this church/grace age, everyone must relate to God individually, including the Jews. But there is a corollary that must be recognized. Although God has no collective commitment to the church as an institution, our individual commitment to God requires a fellowship commitment to one another. We are responsible for one another (Matthew 18:15-17), we are to love one another (1 John 3:16) and *stimulate one another to love and good deeds*, individually and in our assemblies (Hebrews 10:24-25). So, during this age, God's commitment is to us, the individual believer. But two things are true. How we treat one another depends on our relationship with God, and our relationship with God depends on how we treat one another.

- **Matthew 22:37-40**, *And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," on these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."*
- **1 John 4:20**, *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.*
- **Philippians 2:4**, *... do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

The Bible and Expressive Individualism

Probably the best way to think of Expressive Individualism is by going back to the phrase in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "To thine own self be true." It is a satanic strategy, but it is not a new one. Satan's method, for getting Adam and Eve to disobey God, was not to tell them to focus on him but to focus on their own well-being by thinking about their own self-interest apart from God.

Genesis 3:4-6, *The serpent said to the woman... "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.*

Here are some things the Bible has to say about the idea of Expressive Individualism.

1. Our goal is to know God, not to express our individualism

- **John 17:3**, *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*
- **Hosea 6:6**, *For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings (see also Matthew 9:13).*
- **Romans 10:2**, *For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.*

- **Jeremiah 9:23-24**, *Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.*
 - **Philippians 3:8**, *I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*
2. **Expressing our individualism is a formula for disappointment and disaster.**
Solomon, possibly the wisest and richest man in the ancient near east, tried Expressive Individualism. And he had all the wealth he needed to succeed. His conclusion was,
- **Ecclesiastes 1:2 & 14**, *"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity... I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.*
- Asaph was envious of those who were successful at pursuing abundance. But then he wrote,
- **Psalms 73:17**, *It was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end.*
- Jesus told a parable about a man with so much wealth he decided to build a bigger barn to hold it all.
- **Luke 12:20**, *But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?"*
3. **The problem with expressing the individualism of our heart, is our heart is deceitful, sick, and corrupt.**
- **Jeremiah 17:9**, *The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?*
 - **Psalms 14:1-3**, *...They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God, they have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one (quoted in Romans 3:10-12).*
 - **Matthew 15:19**, *"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.*
4. **We cannot focus on expressing our individualism and follow Jesus.**
- **Luke 9:23-24**, *And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."*
 - **Philippians 2:5-7**, *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men.*
5. **We cannot focus on expressing our individualism and follow the leading of the Spirit.**
- **Romans 8:13**, *for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*
 - **Galatians 5:17**, *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.*
 - **Romans 7:21-23**, *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.*

6. It is God, not expressing our individualism, Who gives us the desires of our heart.

- **Psalm 37:4**, *Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.*
- **Proverbs 3:5-7**, *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.*
- **James 1:17**, *Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.*

Conclusion

Expressive Individualism dates back to the Garden of Eden when the devil convinced Eve that God was keeping her from expressing her individualism. The devil told her, “*For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*” (Genesis 3:5). The devil’s message to Eve included the idea that God is keeping you from expressing your individualism.

We are, of course, individuals. We cannot escape our autonomy. We are born, live, die, and are judged by God as individuals. It is not only appropriate but essential that we ask, “How can I be the best that I can be?” The real question, then, is not, “Should I pursue my individual best?” But “How should I do that?” In this, the Bible disagrees with the rest of the world.

- The world says to look inside yourself and follow your desires.

The Bible says to look outside yourself and deny your desires.

- The world says you should do what the devil told Eve to do, express yourself apart from God.

The Bible says you should express yourself by knowing God and keeping His commandments.

- The world says, as the girl quoted above, to “put herself first before everything else.”

The Bible says you should conform yourself to the image of Jesus Christ.

- The world says our bodily desires are good because they express who we are (LGBTQ etc.).

The Bible says we are *wretched* [the word *wretched* can be translated *miserable*] people who need to be *set free from the body of this death* (Romans 7:24).

The ambition of the expressive individualist is to be their own god in opposition to the God of the Bible. Expressive Individualism is a world view which promotes self-worship, which is a form of idolatry.

Once again, as we see in all satanic activity in this world, it is all about denying the Bible.

The fact that expressive individualists can push all the evil in the world off on something outside of people is amazing. The one thing obvious to any realistic person is that evil transcends everything that involves people. It is in liberal and conservative organizations and traditions. Schools, corporations, churches, governments, sports—nobody escapes. Wherever there are people, there are evil deeds. The problem is *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). Expressing that individually only expresses the sin.