

Desire!

The word “desire” appears often in Scripture, yet we rarely if ever discuss it. The word means to long for, or to seek pleasure in something. A “desire,” according to my dictionary, is a strong impulse toward something that promises us enjoyment. **“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God”** (Psalm 42:1,2) illustrates a desire to know and to be with God. But we can desire lots of other things besides God. There are, in other words, good desires and . . . well, not good desires. And then there are also totally wicked desires. A mature believer is (or should be) aware of desire and exercise discernment. We should have in the Church a theology of desire, it’s that important. But we don’t, so this lesson is necessary.

Desire appears on the opening pages of Scripture. It’s in Genesis Chapter 3 and again in Chapter 4. It’s there as a concept as well as the word itself, and the concept suffuses all subsequent Scripture. It seems that we were created with the capacity to desire. It’s also, however, a controlling force within the sin nature. The best understanding might be this: Desire is creational, but corrupted by sin. Who or what we desire is the great issue, not desire itself.

Our great desire should be that of the Psalmist, that is, God Himself. And His will for us as well, if we truly desire God. But God is invisible. We can only know Him thru the words of Scripture. That’s one of the reasons the Son came to earth, to reveal God in a tangible way that no words possibly can do. So our desire should be to know and to be with the Son, with Jesus. And He, Jesus, in turn takes us who desire Him to God, and He transforms us so that God can fully satisfy our desire for Him. All else is idolatry, vanity, wickedness, waste.

Desire reflects the state of our heart (Romans 1:24). In Deuteronomy 30, God observed that the Israelites didn’t have a heart for Him. He promised thru the writing prophets that in the future, during the Messianic era, His people would have a heart for Him then. Our desires expose not only our attitude toward God but our otherwise hidden motives as well. Those motives are just as sinful as the thing desired. When Jesus returns, He will reveal all motives (1 Corinthians 4:5); nothing is hidden from Him.

We can indulge in sexual or other sensual desires, we can desire riches, comforts, excitement and thrilling experiences, ideas, gadgets, information, the praise of others, power over others, and a whole host of other things. Our world offers scads of things to desire, all of which block us from desiring God. Psalm 37:4 is highly instructive, **“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”** What we *should* desire, in other words, is informed by the indwelling Holy Spirit, but it’s conditioned on our more primary desire for God.

One of the saddest verses in Scripture is Psalm 81:12, which states that God gave His own people, Israel, over to their own desires, for they would not listen to Him or submit to Him. (Paul picks up on this and applies it to all Gentile peoples in Romans 1:24.) There are many other verses regarding desires, though, such as Isaiah 53:2, the Servant had no beauty that His people would desire Him to be their king. A lovely desire, in contrast, is expressed in Philippians 1:23, where Paul writes, **“I desire to depart and be with Christ.”** By this, Paul was saying that his supreme desire was to be with Jesus, and he would be pleased to die in order to make that a reality. Paul also reveals that a special blessing awaits all who desire to see the exalted Lord return (2 Timothy 4:8).

Related to desire is delight. But delight has the idea of already taking pleasure in something, whereas desire connotes a longing for something not yet (fully) experienced. The Lord, for example, delights in showing mercy. He delighted in David. Godly people delight in the commands of God (Psalm 112:1), indeed, in all the Scripture (Psalm 1:2). God delights in His Servant, promised by Isaiah (42:1). He also will delight in His people when they return from exile in the future Messianic era.

Let's reflect on this matter of desire! We in the Western world have turned Christianity into a "mind" religion. We've intellectualized it. To us, "belief" is intellectual; it's not relational as it is in the Bible. We're satisfied with knowing about Jesus, with knowing about the Bible, and knowing some theology. Yet in Scripture, desire is a matter of the affect. Yes, there's a component in it of the mind as well as the will. But desire is mainly affective. The mind and the will follow the desires of the heart. Desire for a Person expresses a loving relationship.

One more aspect of desire springs from Scripture: We cannot have lots of desires, of which one is a desire for God. We either love God exclusively, or we don't love Him as we should. **"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways"** (James 1:8). God will not allow us to have Him peripheral in our life, only central. All other desires crowd out our love for God, and it's only our desire for God that matters. We therefore need to be circumspect about what we fill our life with.

Think carefully, dear Reader, about what it is that delights you, and what you desire. Our desire, our obsession, our heart's continual longing should be to know God and to be with Him. Our magnificent and consuming desire should be to be with Jesus. Our desire should be to want to please Him, to exalt Him, to serve Him, to obey Him, to be like Him and to be with Him. This is love. I don't think I'm overstating the matter by claiming that there's no more important concept in life than what, or better, Who we desire.

May we be one with the Psalmist who confessed to God, **"Earth has nothing I desire besides You"** (73:25b).