

Desire Resource Paper

Lightbearers resource papers are designed as a resource to Lightbearers staff as they interact with students and partners and are asked to provide wisdom on a variety of topics. These papers should be considered an internal resource providing clarity on a sound evangelical stance on particular issues.

Foundational to each paper is the perspective that the Gospel is primary recognizing that the Gospel impacts every corner of life (1 Corinthians 6:20); therefore, we aim to provide staff with direction that is Biblically sound and points them to view any issue through the lens of the Gospel.

What drives this particular paper? *In our lifetime, we have witnessed an increasing confusion over how to define and categorize the nature of desire. Are desires morally neutral until acted upon? Is it possible that there are some desires that are sinful to the core and never to be embraced? How do we know? Some of our students are asking these key questions - it is vital that we thoughtfully and graciously walk alongside them. The majority, however, do not even know to be asking questions - they are operating out of the following false assumption: My identity rests fully on what I desire and in my power to fulfill said desire. How misleading and empty! We must also admit that we as staff are not immune to this line of thinking either. Therefore, it is important to disciple students into the fullness of the Gospel by lovingly posing these questions and thoughtfully pointing students to Scripture's stance on desire. In this brief essay, we seek to help clarify what God thinks and the position we as Christians must be holding. We hope and pray this is a help to you!*

Basic Desires

Merriam Webster defines desire as a “conscious impulse toward something that promises enjoyment or satisfaction in its attainment” (2022). While Scripture does not explicitly define desire, it does provide several examples and expressions of the longings of the human heart. For example, in the Psalms, we read the cries of David as he longs for safety, satisfaction, friendship etc.. Song of Solomon gives an account of the sexual longing between the sexes and its fulfillment in marriage. We see instances of the basic need for food, water, and shelter throughout historical accounts in the Old and New Testament. We also know that Adam and Eve experienced deep desires (i.e.—companionship) before sin was even ushered onto the stage,. Christ Himself desired food and drink, sleep, and friendship with others, indicating that desires can be God-given and good.

The Effects of Sin

The Fall in Genesis 3 holds major implications for how the believer views desires. For one, sin pervades all aspects of mankind—body, soul, and mind. We are fallen creatures, morally bankrupt, and dead in our trespasses and sins (*Eph. 2:1*). We are hostile in our minds, haters of God, and at our core do not seek after God, indeed no one does (*Col. 1:21; Rom. 1:30; Rom. 3:11*). While desires for sex, companionship, and work were present before the Fall, man's natural bent is to now pursue these desires for personal gain and self-worship. Some desires are sinful in and of themselves (i.e.- to murder), while others can be twisted for personal gain

and can become sinful (i.e. - sexual desire turning into lust). The believer also recognizes that God places limits on man's desires. He deems what is right or wrong, worshipful or rebellious. Before sin was even on the scene, God forbids Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, warning them that acting on this desire would ultimately end in death. Therefore, God's rules and guardrails are not attempts to stop mankind from experiencing pleasure and fulfillment, but actually lead to true flourishing for all mankind. His ways are perfect and born out of a true care for His creation. The believer also recognizes that desires are not necessarily morally neutral. Jeremiah writes, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and that no man can understand it" (Jer. 17:9). In Hebrew tradition, the heart is the straw that stirs the drink in our actions and thoughts. Indeed our heart is the revealer of what we desire and if our heart is wicked, then our desires and motives will be too. We cannot separate our hearts from our desires. Furthermore, Jesus makes it clear in the Sermon on the Mount that it is not merely the act of adultery that is sinful, but the lust and desire of adultery that is sinful. Indeed, any desire, as the Westminster Confession states, that is contrary to the will, law and nature of God is sinful.

Modern Day Thought

According to modern Western culture, however, desires are always good and worthy of full pursuit in and of themselves. Sayings like "*Follow your heart*" and "*You do you,*" pervade the average person's thinking, providing the false notion that desires should be trusted and promise true fulfillment once satisfied. Society argues that we are born into a state of moral neutrality without any leanings toward good or evil. The individual is not born corrupt but is corrupted by the society around them. The real problem, we say, are not our internal desires and leanings, but rather people who do not affirm and celebrate all longings. Therefore, if a man feels his true self is best expressed as a woman, society's morality would say it is more loving to affirm his feelings and desires rather than call him to submit to God's desire for his expressed sexuality. The latter is seen as cold, rigid and hateful. Or take a married woman who has been married to her husband and begins to sexually desire another woman—is it wrong of her to desire these sexual experiences even if she never acts on them? What if she desired to sexually be with another man? The answer is a resounding 'yes' on both fronts.

Role of the Spirit

So, the question is, what now? What do we do knowing that the desires of our hearts, no matter how good they may seem, are stained by sin? Should we fully embrace all of our desires? The short answer is no. How then, do we navigate the complexity of desires? For the believer, we recognize the true gift of the Spirit; our heart of stone was removed and replaced with a heart of flesh that desires to do God's law (Ez. 36:26). Though still affected by sin, we are no longer enslaved to sin. His Spirit works within us to convict us of sin, remind us of God's commands and to intercede on our behalf before the throne of God (John 14:25-26, Romans 8:26). As the believer submits to the will of God, the Spirit begins to sanctify us, shaping us into the very image of Christ. Not only do we begin to forsake outward sins, but we also experience inward change. What we meditate on, are motivated by, and long for are transformed into Christ-likeness. Psalm 37:4 says, "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires." As the believer cultivates a deep love for Christ, our desires begin to align with His through the working of the Spirit. Finally, the believer approaches even good desires differently, viewing them in light of the Gospel. Desires point to a better and fuller satisfaction that can be had through being in right relationship with our Creator. For example, the desire for marriage is good and worth pursuing, but speaks to our true longing to be one with Christ. If pursued in light of the Gospel, man can enjoy this good gift of companionship while placing his true hope in Christ.

Q&A:

Is same sex attraction sinful, even if you don't act upon it?

Yes same sex attraction is sinful, even if you don't act upon it. God does not gauge sin based on outward expression alone but rather speaks to the inward experience of sin as well. Matthew 5 talks about the topics of both anger and lust stating that not only is murder or adultery sinful, anger and lust are as well. The inward desires that lead to both anger and lust are sinful without them being acted upon. Likewise, the inward desire for another of the same sex is sinful as it is contrary to the designs and plans of the Lord.

Doesn't God want me to be happy?

John 15 uses the analogy of branches and the vine to describe the relationship that His followers have with Him. He is the vine and His children are branches that find their sustenance in Him. In verse 9 Jesus tells his followers to "abide in my love" and then goes on to state that "these things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11, ESV). God desires for His children to be joyful and yet clearly stated here is the source of that joy. The way to obtain this joy that Jesus speaks about in verse 11 is through keeping His commandments and therefore remaining in the love of the Lord (John 15:10).

Can you desire too much of a good thing?

God created good things for His people to enjoy. From the Garden God created things such as people, animals, and plants for the enjoyment of His people. Yet, the greatest commandments states that people are to love God more than anything else. Anything that competes with God as the ultimate source of Joy in the lives of believers is no longer a good thing. Thus, any desire that trumps God in our lives is no longer good.

How do you cultivate a desire for Christ?

Desire for God comes in much of the same manner as desire for another person does. As we get to know people our desires grow. As we know their heart, their compassion and care for others, so our hearts grow fonder for them. How much more is this true with a perfect God. To cultivate a desire, we should seek to spend more time with him through his word, through prayer, and through time in community.

What do I do now that my desires are bad?

As a fallen people our desires are bad. People desire bad and often the good desires that people believe they have are also bad. Yet hope is not lost. What should we do now that our desires are bad . . . seek the Lord. Jesus is the grace extended to us in the midst of our bad desires. Hebrews 4:14-16 says "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace

to help in time of need.” This verse speaks to the sufficient nature of Christ who was able to live without sin. It then points believers to the hope that they have in Christ who is able to sympathize with them and be their high priest. When overrun with the weight of bad desires, turn to Jesus, our confidence for grace and help in our time of need.

What is the difference between desire and temptation?

Temptation springs from the desires of our hearts. We are tempted towards things that we desire whether good or bad. Yet there is a distinction between temptation and sin. Genesis 3 speaks to this as Eve when tempted by the serpent when she “saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it” (3:6). Eve was tempted by the desire that was in her to act out of her own self-focus for wisdom and power. This sinful self-focus shifted her and can also shift us into sinful action. 1 Corinthians 10:13 states that “no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind” leading to the truth that temptation is common and experienced by all, yet the same verse goes on to state that “when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” This verse as a whole helps paint a picture of temptation, which does come to all, while also reminding us that temptation can be escaped and does not always lead to sin. When temptation comes and the focus is the Lord and delighting in Him then no sin was committed. Example: someone cuts you off in traffic; the temptation is to respond out of anger and bitterness (yelling, flipping people off, having an ugly thought; the way out of sin is to remember that the person also is the Lord’s creation with value and worth, pray for patience and continue on)

How do I navigate through the waters of desire to know good and bad?

Desire can often be something that is blind to the person experiencing it. It is important to allow the word and other believers to speak into our lives, providing discernment between good and bad. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Through diligent searching of the scripture, good and bad can become clear. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through asking faithful others, good and bad can be distinguished.

Bibliography:

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