

Desire

Some words we hear in church seem to automatically carry a negative connotation. For example, the word desire. When we hear this word, it is normally speaking of carnal lust or greed. We may read scriptures like this one found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians where Paul uses the word desire.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Ephesians 2:1-3 NASB)

We were living to seek and satisfy our desires. The pity is that today many are still living in this manner. That could be the basis for a sermon. However, this morning we will approach the word "Desire" from another angle. Desire, in and of itself, is neither good or evil. The Greek word that is, at times, translated as desire is ἐπιζητέω epizeteo (pronounced ep-eed-zay-teh'-o). I consulted two sources for the definition, the first was my favorite *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* then, I checked *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. The definition of this Greek word, according to Strong, is desire, enquire, seek after. It is a compound word from epi and zeteo; to search (inquire) for; intensively, to demand, to crave -- desire, enquire, seek (after, for). According to Thayer, it is: to enquire for, seek for, search for, seek diligently; to wish for, crave; to demand, clamor for.

As you can see, when we read the word desire in the Bible, it is speaking of an intense emotional drive that pushes to find, demand, or search. It is easy to see where we may be driven by evil to desire certain things to satisfy our human lust. Yet, today, we will look at a few examples where we may desire positive things.

The first example is found in Paul's letter to the Philippians. In the 4th chapter, Paul remembers that the church in Philippi had donated money to assist in his missionary work on more than one occasion. In this letter, he is not appealing for more money but he desires (seeks) for something more. I will read this first from the New American Standard Bible and then from the King James Version.

Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. (Philippians 4:17 NASB)

Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. (Philippians 4:17 KJV).

Paul has an intense emotional drive to seek (desire) to see the church grow and produce much fruit. This is an unselfish desire to see this church succeed and prosper. This is a clue for us. Are we jealous of others when they succeed? Is our love for God's church so strong that we desire to see other churches grow and produce much fruit?

Earlier, in the same letter, Paul declares a desire to die so he could be with Christ. This is not a suicidal wish.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. (Philippians 1:21-24 NASB)

Paul is intensely looking forward to his time to be with Jesus. This is his desire. For us, have we reached that level of Christian maturity that we may intensely desire leaving this world behind to be with Jesus?

There is another measure of our maturity. Do we find ourselves earnestly desiring to see others saved? Remember that in looking at the word desire, we see that it is an intense emotional drive. So, do we have that desire—the intense emotional drive to seek salvation for others?

Once more we turn to Paul for an example. In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul has eloquently presented the case for Gentile and Jews failing to meet God's standards and thus all have fallen short. In the 9th chapter, Paul mentions that some Gentiles had, through faith, arrived at a relationship with God that the Jews, through their seeking to rigidly observe the law, had failed. Through it all, Paul desires them to come to salvation.

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. Why? Because *they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. (Romans 9:30-10:1 NASB)

Whom do we desire to be saved so much that we earnestly pray to God for their salvation? Perhaps some of our family members are in our prayers. But, do we pray for those not like us? Our mission, as given by Jesus, is to seek and save the lost. Is this reflected in our desires? Is it reflected in our prayers?

With respect to our salvation, do we seek to grow in maturity? On several occasions this morning, I posed the question about our maturity as a Christian. Maturity implies a growth process. Peter mentions this growth process and compares it to a baby's growth. For many of us here this morning, it has been some time since we held our children. Some of us have more recently held grand children or even great-grandchildren. We know that a hungry child desires to be fed their formula. They need that formula in order to grow. Peter's admonition is to get rid of the things that prevent us from growing and to long for, seek, desire the food that will help us to grow.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure (or *unadulterated*) milk (or *spiritual milk*) of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1 Peter 2:1-3 NASB)

Peter lists things for us to put aside. Included in this list is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is from the Greek word used to describe an actor. Peter is asking us to quit play acting as Christians. He then tells us to desire the spiritual food we find in the Bible. We would certainly be taking our baby to the doctor if the baby only wanted to eat once a week or maybe once a month. Babies require frequent feeding in order to grow. We need to eat on a regular basis to maintain our bodies. We need to desire to feed on God's word regularly.

An integral part of our growing into the mature body spiritually is our fellowship. Paul had worked with the church in Thessalonica and wanted (desired) to see them again as he expressed in this scripture.

But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. (1 Thessalonians 2:17 NASB)

In the early days of the church, we see that they enjoyed the company of fellow Christians. They were together not only in corporate worship but socially as well.

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46-47 NASB)

We live in a fractured society. Christ's church should never become like the world-divided by polarizing worldly objects. We, of all people should desire to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ. This desire should drive us to develop Christian friends that associate outside of Sunday worship services.

When our desire is to be with those outside of Christ more than those within Christ, then we may need to look at where God and His church fit into our life.

The final desire we will consider this morning is the desire to be in the city God has prepared for His people. This city is mentioned several times in the Bible. One time is in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. The various people mentioned because of their faith. They live and died looking toward a home that is not of this world.

But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:16 NASB)

Later, in the same New Testament book, we are told that Jesus paid with His blood apart from the existing patterns of worship (outside the camp). We do not have a permanent home or city but, through the blood of Jesus, we have a city that will come.

For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come. (Hebrews 13:14 NASB)

In the last book of the Bible, this new city is mentioned by name and we find that it will descend from heaven after this world is destroyed.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:1-2 NASB)

I fear that too many of us have lost our desire to be a part of this new city. We no longer have that intensely emotional drive to be in that city. We no longer see the need to sustain our Christian life at the level where we have the overpowering desire to live for Jesus. We have forgotten the words of Jesus that John recorded to the church in Philadelphia.

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. (Revelation 3:12 NASB)

Desire can be a good thing when our desire drives us to more like Christ. Do we desire to see: Christ's church grow, Jesus, salvation for others, our own spiritual growth, other Christians, and the promised new city of God?