

There are several things that everyone desires. Some of these “universal” desires are fundamental to our being. These are the things that make for a good life. Examples of these fundamental desires are the desire to be loved, to have good health, to live in safety, that our basic needs are met. I think these fundamental desires, that every human has, are inherently good. **They keep us alive.** There are other very common desires, some may even be universal, that may not always be good for us. To be clear, I’m not saying they are bad, but unlike the fundamental ones, they could lead to trouble. These are things like the desire to be comfortable, to have more than I need, to be right in my thinking, to be respected by others, etc. These desires are not inherently bad, but **if we put too much effort into pursuing them, we will end up going down a wrong path.** For example, comfort is good – it allows us to sleep well which contributes to our health. But, pursuing comfort to an extreme will make us lazy.

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. (James 1:14)

And, certainly there are simply some desires that we have that are just plain bad. I am sure we are all familiar enough with these and are engaged daily with those battles. I see that desire is either good or bad. But, as I illustrated above with comfort as an example, **there is a gradient in our level of desire** that, at some point, crosses some obscure line that separates “good” from “bad.” It is our nature to always brush up against that invisible line.

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. (Romans 7:14-15)

Have you ever felt this – what Paul is expressing here? I have – At times incredulously, I’ve asked myself, “What am I doing? – I desire to keep God’s law, yet I am fulfilling the desire of my flesh.” Why is it that we have **desires that we know are bad for us, yet we fulfill them regardless?** In my humanness, I have normalized the notion that becoming athletic is a long-term process that will take me months of diligent exercise. So, I can easily justify eating a bag of chips while I sit and relax. I’ll exercise tomorrow! But then I know that if I eat a whole bag of chips, my gut will not like that, and I will feel ill in an hour or two. This is not at all in line with my justification that physical fitness is such a long-term process that waiting one more day will not matter. The regretful results are mere minutes away, yet I “love” those chips and eat the whole bag anyway... Paul tells me that my struggling with such a desire is actually proof to me that I believe that God’s law is good and that I desire to keep it.

*But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, **no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.** (Romans 7:16-17)*

Here Paul says that “sin” is what is doing the thing that is wrong, not him. I have heard people use this to justify bad behavior. Let us not fall into that trap! My “old man” is at play here – alive and shouting out commands that I often struggle to silence or ignore. Blaming my old man for poor decisions and bad behavior is accurate and truthful, but **in no way creates a valid excuse for it.** We are commanded to bury, drown, crucify that old man. Yet, few of us have had any success in doing so.

*“...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for **he who has died is freed from sin.** (Romans 6:6-7)*

So, how can we accomplish this seemingly impossible task of killing the old man? Here's an instruction:

*"...that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Ephesians 4:22-24)*

Renewed in the spirit of your mind. I've read that in another place, also:

*And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)*

In Romans 7 Paul struggles deeply with this topic that we are discussing here, this topic that I struggle with too often. And I have found myself reading Paul's struggle and feeling good about myself... Hey, if Paul couldn't overcome it, **if Paul couldn't figure it out, then how can I be expected to?** I don't come close to Paul, so I shouldn't even try. Chapter 7 ends with what sounds a little like Paul giving up – surrendering to the fact that his old man has some mastery over him. But the story doesn't end with chapter 7. Thankfully, Paul wrote chapter 8! It is worthy of quoting here in its entirety, and you should read it all for its encouragement. But here is a nugget that sums it up:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18)

I believe the reverse is also true – that is, those short term desires, like eating a whole bag of chips, will pale in comparison to the satisfaction we will get from accomplishing the long term goals, like having a strong, fit body. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, knowing that **God loves you infinitely**.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

Be strong and courageous, be diligent in seeking Him in all things, endure to the end, desire the right things and you will be blessed. The Main Commandments are this: love God and love your neighbor – **desire God above all else and all things will fall into place**.

***Delight yourself in the LORD**; And He will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalms 37:4)*

When you're faced with the temptation to desire something that will take you away from God, remember that it cannot and does not compare to the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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