

CHAPTER THREE

DESIRES

Desires comprise the greatest part of our soul-life. These desires join together with our will and cause us to either rebel against or dislike the will of God. Because we have too many desires, our feelings become confused and we are unable to quietly walk according to the spirit. Our desires arouse our feeling, causing us to have many restless experiences. Before a believer is set free from sins, his desire is united with sin, and he loves sin. Hence, the new man is put in captivity, losing his freedom. Even after he has been delivered from outward, apparent sins, his desire still pursues many things for himself, independent of God. When he is emotional, he is governed by his desire. Unless the cross works deeply and the desire is judged by the enlightening of the cross, the believer will never live completely in the spirit for God.

When a believer is soulish, he is under the strong direction of his desires. The natural and soulish desires of man are all related to the self-life. They are either for self, by self, or according to self. When the believer is soulish, his will has not yet submitted to the Lord, and he still has many ideas of his own. To desire is to cooperate with one's own ideas, to delight in all the ideas of one's will, and to desire one's ideas to be accomplished. All self-pleasure, self-glory, self-exaltation, self-love, self-pity, and self-respect come from the desire of man. Man's desire makes self the center of everything. Let us consider: is there anything which man desires and likes that does not correspond to any of the "selves" noted above? If we would check our desires under the light of the Lord, we would see that no matter what we desire or how we desire, we cannot escape from the word "self." All of our desires are for the self! They either make the self happy or bring glory to the self. When believers are in this situation, there is no possibility for them to live in the spirit.

THE NATURAL DESIRES OF THE BELIEVERS

Pride comes from desires. The desire of man causes him to seek a position for himself so that he can be glorified before men. Any hidden tendency to boast of one's position, family traditions, health, disposition, ability, appearance, and power comes from man's emotion (desire). To consider how one's dwelling, clothing, and eating are different from others and, consequently, feel self-fulfilled is also the effect of the emotion. Even considering that a gift one has received from God is superior to that of others is a thought urged by the emotion.

Oh, how the emotional believer loves to show off! He loves both to see and to be seen. He cannot tolerate restraints from God. He uses every means to push himself from the back to the front. He cannot be hidden according to God's will nor can he deny his self in secret. He loves people's attention. His desire of self-love is hurt whenever men do not honor him, but he is full of joy when he is esteemed by someone. He loves to hear people praising him and considers such praises to be well-spoken. Even in the work, he tries to exalt himself in many ways. There is always a secret motive stirring him whether he is giving a message or writing a book. In short, his heart of vainglory is still alive; he still seeks after what he loves and what inflates his self.

This natural desire causes a believer to become ambitious. Ambition is inspired by the natural desire. The ambition to spread self-fame, to become one who is above all men, or to be honored by people are all from the soul-life. The desire to be successful, fruitful, and spiritually powerful and useful in spiritual work is often derived solely from the

desire to glorify oneself. In our spiritual life, the pursuit of growth, depth, and nobler experiences is often for our happiness and others' appreciation. If we traced the life and work of the believer to their source, we would find a strange fact: a great part is actually for self! The believer's desire for self is the source of everything in his life and work.

A believer must know that if his life and work are motivated by his ambition, even though everything he does may appear to be good, well-spoken of, and outwardly effective, it is just wood, hay, and stubble in God's eyes. This kind of walk and labor does not have any spiritual value. Any thought for the self is enough to corrupt any activity, and God is not pleased with such thoughts. God views the believer's lust for spiritual fame equally as filthy as his lust for sins. If the believer walks according to his natural desire, then he will regard his self highly in all things. However, God loathes this "self"!

Natural desire is equally active in other aspects of a believer's living. The soulish life causes him to hunger after worldly conversations and communications. It impels him to watch what he should not watch and read what he should not read. This is not to say that he does these things all the time. Rather, occasionally he does what he knows he should not do because of a strong urge from within. The soulish life can even be seen in his attitude. Many believers have such an experience to a certain extent. The function of his soul can also be seen in the way the believer walks and is even more evident in the way he talks and does things. Everyone who walks faithfully by the spirit knows these are small things. Yet if the believer is urged by his emotional desire in these things, it is impossible for him to walk by the spirit. The believer must know that in spiritual matters, nothing is too small to hinder his progress.

A believer is inquisitive when he is urged by his natural desire. The more spiritual a believer becomes, the more ordinary he is, because he is united with God in His arrangements. Only emotional believers have a kind of chivalrous nature and take risky actions to satisfy their own hearts and create a great sensation. When urged by such inquisitiveness, many aspects of their behavior are very immature. They would not care for their maturity but pretend to be clever instead. When they look back, they regret; but at the time, they feel glorious. This inquisitive emotion urges man, and if the believers follow it, they lose their normalcy and go beyond what is proper.

Fondness for pleasure is also a great expression of emotional believers. The emotion cannot bear allowing believers to live completely for God; it absolutely opposes the life that is constantly for God. Though believers may accept the demand of the Lord's cross and put to death the emotion so that they may live for the Lord, the emotion still asks that a small area be reserved for its activities. This is why many believers cannot live for the Lord completely. There is no need to speak of much, just a day's living; no need to mention other things, just the warfare of prayers. How many believers can engage in warfare by prayer that is completely for the Lord for one whole day, without saving some time for their own pleasure? To have pleasure is to reserve some ground for our own emotion. How difficult it is for us to live in the spirit through the day! We always keep some time for ourselves to talk with others because this is soothing to our emotions. When we are shut in by God, seeing neither men nor sky, and are required to live in the spirit to work for Him before the throne, we know whether our emotion has been completely put to death or not. We also know how much our emotion demands from us and how much we live by the emotion.

Emotional believers also like to be hasty. Emotion does not know the meaning of waiting for God, waiting for God's revelation, or following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Emotion is always hasty. Emotion always causes the believer to become excited and to be impelled into action. Whenever this excitement comes with its impelling power, it urges the believer to act hastily. The emotion is very upset and unwilling if the believer waits for the Lord, understands the will of God, and takes one step at a time, not walking by his own desire. If a believer has not put his emotion to the cross, he cannot walk according to the spirit. He must realize that of a hundred things done out of impulse, not even one is according to God's will.

We need time to pray, prepare, wait, and be refilled with the strength of the Holy Spirit. How else can there be no mistakes in our hasty acts? God clearly knows that the emotion of our flesh is impatient; therefore, He always uses our co-workers, brothers, family, environment, and material things to hinder us and slow us down. He wants our hastiness to die completely so that He can work. Since God never does things in a hurry, He never grants power to those who act hurriedly. Hence, the hasty doer can only do things by his own strength. This is clearly the work of the flesh. God does not want the believer to walk by the flesh, so the believer must be willing to put his hurried emotion to death. Whenever the emotion operates hastily, let us pray, "O Lord, the emotion is impatient once again. May Your cross operate." A person who walks by the spirit must not be hasty.

God does not want us to do anything by ourselves; He wants us to wait for Him and His command. His command must be in all our doings. Only the things that are commissioned in our spirit are of God. How can this be accomplished by a believer who walks after his own desire? Such a one is hasty even when he wants to follow the will of God. He does not know that God not only has a will but also a time. Although we may be in one accord with His will, He still wants us to wait for His time. The flesh cannot tolerate this. Once a believer presses on in the spirit, he will see that God's time and God's will are equally important. If we are hasty to give birth to Ishmael, later he will be the greatest enemy of Isaac. All those who cannot wait for God's time cannot keep His will.

An emotional believer will not wait for God because his desires are for himself. He likes to do everything on his own. He cannot trust God and allow God to work for him. He cannot commit the whole matter into God's hands and refrain from using his own strength. He is not able to trust because this requires the denial of his self. Unless his desires are banished, his self will always stay active. He loves to help God, as if God were too slow and needed his help. This is the working of the soul, the activity of the self under the instigation of emotional desires. If the believer acts in a hasty manner, he will see that God causes his work to be ineffective; then he has no choice but to deny himself.

Self-vindication is a very common behavior among emotional believers. Being misunderstood and misjudged are matters that are encountered regularly by the believers. Although sometimes the Lord wants His children to clarify certain things, unless they are clear that this is the Lord's command, at most it is being done by the soul-life. More often than not, the Lord desires that His people commit all things into His hand and not vindicate themselves. Oh, how the believer loves to plead for himself! How upsetting it is to be misunderstood, because this reduces his glory and lowers his dignity. The self will not be silent under the false accusations of others. He cannot accept what God has given to him nor wait for God to vindicate, because that is too slow; rather, he wants God to immediately clear him of any charge so that men would know his righteousness. This all comes from the soulish desire. If a believer would submit to God's powerful hand during a misunderstanding, he would see, through the

misunderstanding, that God is causing him to deny his self in a deeper way and deny his soulish desire more thoroughly. This is his practical cross. Every time the believer receives a cross, he goes through its crucifixion once more. However, if he vindicates himself according to the desire of the self, he will learn that the power of self is harder to subdue the next time.

If the natural desire of a believer has not been dealt with by the cross, he will seek someone to whom he can pour out his heart when he is cast down in afflictions and worries. His emotion motivates him to long to speak forth his troubles to others so that the sorrow within his heart can be released and his burden lightened. His natural desire is to make known his sorrows to others so that he may feel more comfortable. By making known his problems to others, he also hopes to gain sympathy and comfort from them. He lusts for sympathy and comfort because they make him happy. Because he has not lost his natural desire or the desire for self, he is not satisfied that God alone knows. He cannot commit his burden to the Lord, nor can he silently let God bring him into a deeper death through these matters. He prefers the consolation of men, apart from God. His life lusts after what others can give him and despises God's arrangement. The believer should know that the most effective way for him to really lose his soul-life is to not seek men's sympathy and comfort. The sympathy and comfort of worldly people are foods that feed our soul-life. The life of the spirit is to fellowship with God so that it is satisfied with God. The power that can endure loneliness is the power of the spirit. Whenever we seek for any of man's ways to lighten our burden, we are walking according to our soul. God wants us to remain silent to enable the cross which He has arranged for us to accomplish its work. Whenever a believer shuts his mouth in his affliction, he sees the cross working. Being silent is the cross! Whoever remains silent tastes the bitterness of the cross! His spiritual life is also nourished by the cross!

THE PURPOSE OF GOD

God's purpose is that the believer would live in the spirit and also be willing to completely put his soul-life to death. Therefore, God has no choice but to banish the natural desire of the believer. He wants to destroy all the natural desire of the believer. Many times the things and matters are not bad or wrong; in fact they are even good and proper. Yet God does not allow the believer to do or possess these things simply because they are the result of an emotional impulse and the believer desires them. If the believer walks by his own likes—even though these things may initially be very good—he is bound to rebel against God. God's purpose is to absolutely destroy the believer's desires which are apart from Him. God does not care for the nature of the things; He only asks what directs him—his own desire or the will of God? Even the best work and behavior, as long as it comes out of the believer's own desire and is not according to intuitive revelation, is absolutely and spiritually worthless before God. God may want to lead a believer to do many works, but because the motive is of the believer's own desire, God will immediately oppose this work. Only when the believer fully submits to Him, will He lead him to proceed to work again. God wants only His will (known in our intuition) to be the standard rule in our walk. Though our desires may coincide with His will, He will not let us follow them. We need to follow God's will alone; whatever is of our desire must be denied. This is God's wisdom. Although sometimes our desire may agree with the will of God, God will not let us walk according to it because it is still our desire. If we still follow our good and righteous desire, does not our "self" still have its position?

Even though some of our own desires may be the same as God's will, God does not like them because they came out of our self. He wants us to completely cut off anything that

we love that is apart from Him. Though the things we desire may be excellent, He does not allow us any ground for our independent desire. We must depend on Him in everything. He does not want anything that is not dependent on Him. In this way, He presses on, step by step, to deny the believer's soul-life.

If the believer wants to gain a real spiritual life, he must cooperate with God to put his own desire to death. All of our interest, inclination, and love must be put to death. We must joyfully accept man's opposition, spite, rudeness, misunderstanding, and harsh criticism and allow all the things which are against our natural desire to deal with our soul-life. We should learn to accept all the sufferings, afflictions, and lowly positions given to us by God in His arrangement. No matter how much these cause our natural life to suffer, or how much our natural feelings become displeased, hurt, or uneasy, we have to experience these things in an enduring manner. If we practically bear the cross in this way, we will see that the practical cross we bear will crucify our self-life shortly. Bearing the cross is being crucified. Every time we silently accept something that falls upon us which is against our natural desire, we are adding another nail to firmly nail down our soul-life. All vainglory must be crucified. Our desire to be seen, honored, worshipped, exalted, and proclaimed should be crucified. Our desire to display our self needs to be crucified. All outward adornment to win people's praise needs to be crucified. All self-exaltation and self-boasting need to be crucified. We need to forsake our desire wherever it is expressed. Anything that is initiated by ourselves is filthy in God's eyes.

The practical cross which God gives is contrary to our desires. The purpose of the cross has always been to crucify our desires. No other part in our whole being suffers the pain of the cross more than the emotion. The cross must cut deeply into all that belongs to ourselves. How can our emotion not feel sorrow over our defeated desires? God's redemption requires completely getting rid of man's old creation. God's will and our soulish desires cannot co-exist. If the believer wants to follow the Lord, he must go against his own desires.

Since the purpose of God is such, God allows a believer to pass through many fiery trials under His sovereign arrangement so that all desire, like dross, will be fully burned by the fire of suffering. A believer longs for high position, but the Lord will not allow him to be exalted. He has many hopes, yet the Lord will not allow him to be successful in anything; rather, He causes all his hopes to be crushed. The believer may have many delights, but the Lord will cause him to lose all of his delights and have no way to gain them back. The believer covets glory, but the Lord causes him to suffer shame. Almost nothing in the Lord's arrangements agrees with the thoughts of the believer; everything is like a beating rod. Though the believer still struggles with great effort, he will soon see the Lord—yet not know that it is the Lord—leading him to meet death face to face. It is as if everything were dead; everything wants him to die, and everything wants him to lose the hope of life. At that moment, he realizes that he cannot escape death and that he owes this death to God; hence, he submits himself to God and dies willingly. This death causes him to lose his soul-life in order that he may fully live in God. It is for this death that God has done much work. A believer may resist for a long time, but once he passes through death, everything is fine, and God accomplishes His purpose in him. From then on, the believer can advance quickly on his spiritual way.

Once the believer has lost his heart for self, he can fully submit himself to God. He is willing to become whatever God desires of him; his desire is no longer contrary to God, and he no longer seeks anything other than God. His living is very simple. He expects nothing, he demands nothing, and he covets nothing; he just willingly submits to God's

will. A life that submits to God's will is the simplest life on earth because this life does not seek anything for the self but rather silently follows God.

When a believer is willing to forsake all his own desires, he gains a life of real rest. In the past he had many desires, exhausting all of his wits, strength, schemes, devices, and methods to gain them. Therefore, his heart was often confused. When he pursued his desires, he was anxious and troubled. When he failed, he was worried and irritable. How can he have rest? Believers who have not forsaken their own desires and completely submitted to God feel sad about changing human relationships, the unpredictable condition of their environments, the adversities in their life, their loneliness, and many other outward things. This kind of sorrowful feeling is commonly found in believers who are strong in their emotion. Desire can also arouse wrath. Therefore, the believer becomes vexed, anxious, and angry because many outward things are not agreeable or in accordance with his desire. To him they are unfair and unjust. These different expressions of the emotion are caused by people's treatment of him. Pleasant feelings can easily be disturbed, provoked, and hurt by others. The natural desire of a believer yearns for man's love, respect, sympathy, and intimacy. When he cannot obtain these, he murmurs and complains. But who can avoid sorrowful things? Is there anyone living in this bitter world who can fully realize his desires? Therefore, an emotional believer does not have a life of rest. Only when a believer completely walks by the spirit, not seeking the pleasure of his desire and being content with what God has granted, can he have rest.

The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29). The word "souls" especially refers to the emotion. The Lord Jesus knows the trials His people pass through. Just as the Father dealt with the Lord, He knows how the heavenly Father will cause the believers to be lonely, misunderstood, and neglected by man (v. 27). He knows that the heavenly Father will allow many unpleasant things to fall upon the believers so that they may be weaned from the world. He also knows how the souls of the believers feel in the fire of the furnace. Therefore, He said that we should learn from Him so that our emotion may find rest. He was meek; He did not care how people treated Him but joyfully endured contradictions from sinners. He was lowly; He humbled Himself willingly and had no ambition. Ambitious ones are troubled, angered, and restless when they cannot attain what they desire. The Lord lived in this world meekly and humbly so His emotion never boiled. He said that we need to learn from Him, and that we should be as meek and lowly as He. He said that we need to take His yoke upon us. This is the restriction borne by the believers. The Lord also took His yoke. He took the yoke of God. He was satisfied with God's will alone. As long as God knew Him, it did not matter if others were against Him. He was willing to accept the restrictions given by God. He said we need to take His yoke, accept His restraint, and walk according to His will alone, not seeking after the freedom of the flesh. Then our emotion will not be bothered and troubled by anything. This is the cross. If the believer is willing to receive the cross of the Lord and fully submit to Him, he will see that the emotion will not be disturbed.

This is nothing less than a satisfied life. The believer desires nothing else because he has obtained the will of God. He is fully satisfied with the will of God. God Himself has filled his desire. He considers all that God has given him, arranged for him, required of him, and commanded him is good. He is satisfied if he can follow God's will and does not seek after his own desire. He had many wild desires before, but he has learned how to die to his own desire and be satisfied with God's will alone. Hence, he does not seek after

what he likes, not because he forces himself, but because the will of God has filled him. He is satisfied and has no other seeking. This kind of living can only be expressed fully by the word satisfied. The characteristic of spiritual living is satisfaction. It is not self-satisfaction or self-sufficiency, nor is it to consider oneself to be in abundance. The meaning of satisfaction is that the believer has obtained all that he needs in God (that is, in God's will), and he considers God's will as the best. Hence, he is satisfied and desires no more. Emotional believers have many desires because they do not consider that God has arranged the best. Therefore, they desire to gain more, become higher, bigger, and happier, have more glory, and be more prominent. Once the Holy Spirit has worked deeply through the cross, a believer no longer loves anything according to himself. His desires are filled by God; hence, he desires nothing.

At this stage, the believer's desire is fully renewed. This does not mean that he never fails after this. His desire has been united with God's desire. At this moment, not only does the believer not resist the Lord negatively, but he delights in what the Lord delights in positively. He does not compel himself to suppress his own desires; rather, he delights in what God requires of him. He delights in God's delights. If God wants him to suffer, he asks God to make him suffer. He feels this kind of suffering is sweet. If it pleases God for him to be wounded, he joyously uses his hands to inflict wounds on himself. He delights in the affliction more than in healing. If God wants him to be lowly, he is happy to cooperate with God and humble himself. He only likes what God likes. He does not seek anything apart from God. Unless God exalts him, he does not wish to be exalted. He does not resist God; he welcomes all of God's doings whether they are bitter or sweet.

The cross produces fruit. All crucifixions will gain the fruit of God's life. All those who are willing to accept the practical cross that God has given them will find themselves living a spiritual life without mixture. We have to practice taking the cross every day according to God's desire for us. Every cross has its particular mission to fulfill as part of God's work in us. May we not allow any cross to come upon us in vain.