



Psalm 37:4 and Romans 1:18-32

Desires - we all have them. And often our happiness is directly proportional to the degree that our desires are fulfilled. So if there was a way to have our desires met, would that not be something we would all be interested in?

In psalm 37:4 we read that if we "Delight in the Lord, he will give us the desires of our heart." When we couple this with chapter 1 of Romans, we see an interesting principle come to light. In Romans 1:18-32 we read that as we turn away from God, God gives us over to our desires, and our desires consume us - it is a bad thing. So what is being said here? What is the difference in these two passages and what is God teaching us about life in his word?

In the Psalm, we see that if a person delights in God, God gives him the desires of his heart. That when our heart is set on God, we are free to receive the things we desire. They are not a danger to us, because we have not made an idol out of them. The power to destroy us has been removed from them. We are content with or without them, so it is safe for us for God to give them to us.

In Romans we read that we have made idols out of our desires, and as we get our desires fulfilled, they destroy us, consume us, drive us to ever worse behavior, destroying our relationships. We spiral downward into a pit of despair, getting worse at each phase of the process. Our idols corrupt our hearts, our actions and our thinking. We ultimately become people incapable of having relationships with other people, full of greed, envy, malice, deceit, murder, strife and so on. The list is pretty bad.

In both cases, the evidence of God is present, being made known in the creation. In the Psalm, we delight in this, marveling at God's work in the creation. We are filled with wonder and delight. God is our God, and we allow that truth to affect our life. The reality of God's existence impacts our life dramatically, changing us, creating in us a desire to obey his word, his law. We believe him, believe his word. We are born again.

In Romans 1, we reject God. We suppress the truth about God that is clearly evident in the creation. We become thankless, futile and foolish and it is downhill from there. We replace God with an idol of some kind. We often think of idols as statues of wood or stone or bronze that people bow down to. But that practice went out years ago for the most part. Idols are much more subtle today. When we learn this we immediately think of sex, drugs and rock n roll, or some bad habit as being idols that we must avoid. But an idol may be something very good, like marriage or our children, work or sports, man made religion or giving to the poor, it can be anything in this world. Once we elevate anything other than God to the status of an idol, we are on our way down the Romans 1 slide. We become slaves to sin and the only way out is through Jesus.

How can we identify an idol in our life? One way is to imagine our life without it. If we cannot imagine life without it, or if life is not worth living without it, then it is an idol for sure. We may be talking about our spouse or child here, or even a parent or a friend, or perhaps it is our profession that if we lost it tomorrow, we would be lost. Tim Keller has written a fabulous book

on this titled "Counterfeit God's". If you have not read it yet, please do. It addresses the issue of idols very well and is somewhat life changing to read.

But back to desire. So is it good to get our desires fulfilled, as in Psalm 37:4, or is it bad as illustrated in Romans 1:18-32? It depends. If we delight in God, if we see the evidence that he exists and embrace it, believing in him, believing in his word, letting it impact our life, then it is good to get the desires of our heart. But if we reject the evidence of God that is visible everywhere we look in heaven and on earth, if we suppress the truth and do not allow it to impact our life, it is actually a very bad thing to get the desires of our heart, and it ultimately leads to our slavery and destruction. We reach the point that we will even kill for our idols, to fulfill our desires.

Jihad is an example of Romans 1 idolatry. Divorce is an example of it. Stealing and lying are examples of it. Our idols are like a drug that we are addicted to. We will do anything to fulfill them, to meet the desires that spring from them. In the Old Testament they went so far as to physically sacrifice their new born babies to idols. Today we call this abortion. We still do it, it is just much cleaner and more sanitized, but it is the same practice. Idolatry will drive us to do the worst things imaginable, both individually as people, and corporately as a society. Martin Luther went so far as to say that idolatry is the basis for all sin. That all sin ultimately stems from some form of idolatry.

Wow. Perhaps this is why John finished the book of 1 John with the words "Guard yourselves from idols". Avoiding idols is the key to having good relationships with others and with God, and it is the way to have the desires of our heart. It is the way to avoid slavery to sin. When we are free from idols, we are free indeed.

Flipping this around, what desires is God withholding from you these days? Is there something that you really want that just seems to elude you? You have desired it for years but cannot seem to get it, to make it happen. What idol could this be tied to? How are you suppressing the evidence of God in this area of your life? What are you worshipping, really, in regards to this area of your life? Repent from this idol and turn to God, and perhaps he will fulfill your desires once it is safe for him to.

Or maybe God has given you over to your desires and they are consuming you? What was once fun is now slavery. Like heroin, it was fun at first but now it owns you. Have you suppressed the truth of God somewhere in your life. Do you believe He exists or have you suppressed your vision so that you cannot see Him? Or is there some part of God's word that you are not willing to believe? Perhaps you have decided that God's word on some particular issue is old and archaic, and that people don't really believe that anymore. But now it is killing you. You must repent and believe, or you will perish forever. The choice is yours.

If you hear his voice today, act now before it is too late. Repent and believe in the Word, the son of God and be saved.