

Lord of Our Desires



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 1, 2; Rom. 1:3; 6:1-7; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 2:8; Col. 2:12, 13; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 1 John 2:1.*

Memory Text: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (*Romans 8:3*).

Key Thought: God created humans with powerful desires for our enjoyment. We, as Christians, need to keep those desires, which we should still enjoy, under divine control.

Submitting our desires to the will of God. The apostle Paul warned that in the last days people would be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (*2 Tim. 3:4, NKJV*). Talk about a perfect description of this generation! The guiding principle for many today is: Satisfy your own desires. Christian values are discarded as old-fashioned, unreasonable, and hopelessly out-of-date. The basic sentiment is: As long as you desire to do something that doesn't hurt anyone else, then there's no reason why you shouldn't do it.

In contrast, those who live under the lordship of Christ are called to submit all their desires to the will of God. Our Lord Himself declared, “ ‘For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me’ ” (*John 6:38, NKJV*). Jesus set the perfect example of submission to the will of God when He prayed, “ ‘Not what I will, but what You will’ ” (*Mark 14:36, NKJV*). This is our mandate, as well. Our will, our desires, must be surrendered to the Lord.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 23.*

Flesh and Spirit

The Christian faith began and spread amid Greek culture and philosophy. Though the Greek Empire itself had fallen to the Romans (see *Daniel 2*), its influence remained long after its political and military dominance faded.

Sin influences the human body with disease, old age, and so forth. But the body cannot be evil, because Jesus put on a human body when He came to this earth. Greek culture also taught that the spirit is something within us that is always fighting the body. But in Romans 8:4, 5; Galatians 5:24, 25; and Galatians 6:8, the spirit is our attitude of surrender and obedience to Jesus. People who live “in the spirit” are people who have surrendered their sinful natures to the Holy Spirit.

What’s the greatest example we have from the Bible that the human body, in and of itself, isn’t evil? *Rom. 1:3, 8:3, Gal. 4:4, Phil. 2:8, 1 Tim. 3:16.*

Although now affected by sin, the human body can’t be evil, because Jesus Christ assumed a human body. But what about those New Testament texts, especially in the writings of Paul, that seem to pit flesh against the spirit, such as Romans 8:4, 5; Galatians 5:24, 25; 6:8?

The basic issue here is not that our body, our flesh, is of itself bad. Again, Christ’s humanity proves this point. Paul’s emphasis, instead, deals with control of our flesh, the keeping of its desires under the control of God. Ephesians 2:3 helps clarify this point: “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” Paul talks about not letting the things of the flesh, that is, the carnal nature of fallen beings, dominate the Christian, who has died to this carnal nature, where passion and lust rule, and who now lives in the “spirit,” that is, in an attitude of faith and submission to Christ.

Part of the problem stems from the use of the word *spirit*, which, in Paul’s writing, isn’t this eternal holy entity that lives in constant tension or battle with the flesh. In the Bible, *spirit* can mean “mood,” “attitude,” or “feelings.” Oftentimes in the New Testament, *flesh* is simply the word used to symbolize the fallen carnal nature, while *spirit* symbolizes the attitude of submission and obedience to Christ. Those who live in “the spirit” are those who have yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit, which brings the desires of the flesh under control.

How can you know if you are walking after the “flesh” or after the “spirit”?

Key Text: *1 John 2:17*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that the human heart was created with natural desires intended for our enjoyment.
2. To show how human desires have become instruments for indulging in sinful pleasures.
3. To show how Christians can surrender their desires to God's will.

Lesson Outline:

I. In the Beginning (*Phil. 2:13*).

- A. How did God create Adam and Eve? What natural desires did He give them?
- B. How did the earth complement their life?

II. The Effects of Sin (*Rom. 7:8*).

- A. How does sin affect these natural desires? How can the things of the earth that God meant for our pleasure now affect our lives?
- B. How does Satan appeal to our senses in order to control our will?

III. Surrendering the Will to God (*Gal. 5:16*).

- A. How did Jesus teach us to surrender? (*Matt. 4:1-11, 26:36-44*).
- B. The Lord calls us to be holy, just as He is holy. How can we be holy?

Summary: God created humanity with natural desires; but because of sin, our hearts are filled with lust. When we walk in the Spirit, the Lord gives us power to deny this lust and to make Him Lord of our desires.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Desires.

In human growth and development, desires come before control. For example, infants eagerly suck whatever they can get into their mouths, and babies enthusiastically reach for any bright object they see. Meanwhile, toddlers brashly attempt steps they've never before tried. In these examples, impulse guarantees growth. Desire leads to development.

During such growth, it is the parents' responsibility to provide an environment in which it is safe for babies to reach, touch, and hold what they see. Such behavior is applauded, because Mommy and Daddy know their child is learning and practicing foundational skills that will help him or her grow.

Fortunate children have two parents who protect their children's urges to exercise these tasks. Carefully and tactfully the parents teach the children the difference between good and bad things to

The Creation

Review the Genesis Creation account of humanity (*Genesis 1 and 2*). What evidences do you find there that God intended for human beings to enjoy the physical creation He had made?

Even the most simple reading of the Creation account reveals nothing of the notion that the physical world, especially the human body, is bad. On the contrary, God created man and woman to interact closely with what He had made. Man came directly from the ground, which God had just created, and woman came from the man. Thus, humankind and the earth are intimately linked. Together, man and woman, living on this earth and drawing sustenance from it, were to be “fruitful, and multiply” (*Gen. 1:28*); they were to be involved in the process of creating more human beings, more human flesh. God gave them “every herb” (*Gen. 2:5*) for meat, and He gave them every tree that “is pleasant to the sight” (*Gen. 2:9*), and that was “good for food,” indicating they were to enjoy what they ate, that it would not only nourish but please them. Truly this was a paradise, and what helped make it a paradise was how well it pleased their human senses.

There’s no question: God created us as physical beings, and He gave us physical desires, which, in and of themselves, can’t be bad precisely because God gave them to us. The problem is not our basic desires but rather how we as fallen beings use them, how we keep them under control in order that we don’t allow them to take us where God never intended us to go. We can do this only through knowing what God’s will is for us and then surrendering our sinful selves to Him so we can have the power to keep our desires within that will and not enter into the paths of self-destruction.

Despite the ravages of sin, in what ways can you see, even now, indications of how wonderful the original creation was? What are some of the things we have been given that we should enjoy, and how do these reveal to us the Creator’s love?

grab and suck. The children will learn to view such instruction as a gift of love; and they will learn to love themselves by gradually exercising the same caring control over their actions. They will learn to protect themselves with acts of control because they had parents who protected them.

Other children may be less fortunate. Perhaps there are not enough parents to share the load; or perhaps childish impulses scare the parent. Then, too, perhaps the parent is emotionally unavailable to lovingly protect the children. Sometimes, emotionally depleted and frightened parents use fear to stop their children. They might scream to prevent them from acting on impulse, rather than specifically and lovingly act to protect the children. Such experiences teach children to be anxious regarding their wants. They are not sure whether to stop themselves or go ahead. When there is no parent in control, it is very difficult to learn the nuances of good self-control.

Sometimes control problems have nothing to do with the parents. Illness and stress can hinder the development of a good control system. It is hard to learn the joy of reaching for a brightly colored object when your hands are restrained to protect you from disturbing an intravenous tube or a surgical bandage. It is hard to practice walking away from Mommy when your brain and legs do not work together.

Jesus offers good news for all impulse disorders, regardless of our heritage. In Christ, we are not saved by how well we control our impulses. Nor are we lost because of our history of no self-control. Instead, we are encouraged to be born again and learn in the presence of a loving God how to bring order and expression to the wonderful impulses He gave us. Our past behaviors need not dictate our future behaviors. In Christ, we have new options and the power of God's grace to make new and better choices. These choices are not only pro-life, they are pro-eternal life.

Jesus' offer is an intervention aimed at changing our generational heritage. With Him by our side, the sins of the fathers no longer need determine our fate. When parents are born again, they have the chance to disrupt the inevitable course of self-destruction. When grandparents are born again, they can give their children and their grandchildren the nurturing guidance they never received and were not able to give the first time around.

God's love, expressed through His people and in combination with a new believer's desire to respond in kind, creates an opportunity for new learning and Christian development. Nurturing the desires of the newly born Christian requires greater skill than parenting one's natural children. This is because all skills must be relearned. Fears that formerly controlled the person will be transformed in faith to open new horizons. Yes, there will be limits; but these limits will be motivated by love, not fear. Then, addictions and delinquencies will recede into the background. The bondage of self-

The Fall

The Lord placed our parents in a paradise, a garden filled with things that delighted their senses, things that they, in their physical bodies, could enjoy. Unfortunately, some of these same things were used against them by Satan in order to cause the Fall.

Read Genesis 3:1-6. How did the devil use the physical senses to deceive the woman and get her to flagrantly disobey God?

It should be a powerful warning to us that, even in their unfallen state, Adam and Eve allowed their senses to turn them away from God. Satan knows that our senses, our appetites, though God-given, are a powerful means to control us. That's why the Bible tells us to keep them under control; otherwise, Satan will use them to destroy us.

Read 1 John 2:16. How do you see the principles here reflected in the story of the Fall? Notice, is it saying the eyes and the flesh themselves are bad, or is it saying something else? If so, what?

All around us we can see the results of humans who have allowed these wonderful God-given gifts to control them and their lives. God gave us sex, and we became pornographers. God gave us material possessions, and we became greedy and selfish. God gave us music, and we became punk rockers. He gave us fire, and we became arsonists. He gave us food, and we became gluttons. He gave us words, and we lie and we curse. He gave us grapes, and we became drunks. It's hard, really, to think of any God-given gift that we, as humans, haven't, one way or another, perverted or abused because of sin. The effects are seen everywhere.

Try to imagine a world where our God-given senses are in perfect harmony with the world around them (kind of sounds like heaven, does it not?). What do you think it would be like? And though you can't have that world now, what changes do you need to make in order to bring your desires and senses into closer harmony with the world as God originally meant them to be? Why would doing that make your life better now?

destruction will be forever broken and the capacity to freely live received.

We are earnestly to desire the gifts provided by God for the development of the body of Christ, so that body can function fully. These gifts include, but are not limited to, becoming apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, helpers, administrators, speakers of various languages, and interpreters (*1 Cor. 12:28, 29, NIV*). In the family of God, it is good to desire achievement. Repression is not God's order. He encourages us to develop ourselves. The psalmist tells us God desires to satisfy our desires (*Ps.*

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Romans 6:1-7, 8:1-4, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, 1 Peter 1:13-16, 1 John 1:8-2:2*

- 1 God created humans perfect and placed them in an environment where each of their five senses—sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell—would be stimulated often. What stimuli for each of these senses are you most grateful for? List at least one stimulus for each sense.
- 2 Ever since our first parents lost access to the tree of life, the appetites and desires God created for our benefit have become twisted and warped. Instead of enjoying simple pleasures in moderation, people have adopted extremes in diet and lifestyle. Think about some of the things God created to be a blessing that have now become a curse because of extremism.
- 3 “Since we live by the Spirit,” wrote Paul, “let us keep in step with the Spirit” (*Gal. 5:25, NIV*). This is good counsel for those who have been tempted to believe they must deprive themselves of every pleasure. There are legalistic fads that have nothing to do with the self-discipline Jesus requires of His followers. Read Colossians 3:20-23. What modern situations might apply to Paul's counsel?
- 4 What habits or appetites have you indulged innocently, only to discover they had a firmer hold on you than you thought? What did you do to break free? How was your relationship with Christ helpful in that effort?
- 5 “Be holy in all you do,” wrote Peter (*1 Pet. 1:15, NIV*). To be holy is to be set apart for a special purpose. The Sabbath is holy, set apart for rest and worship. When we are holy, what is the special purpose for which we are set apart?

Times of Solitude

Read Matthew 4:1, 2 (see also Mark 1:12 and Luke 4:1, 2). **Why do you think Jesus fasted for so long? What’s the message here for us?**

“Many who profess godliness do not inquire into the reason of Christ’s long period of fasting and suffering in the wilderness. His anguish was not so much from the pangs of hunger as from His sense of the fearful result of the indulgence of appetite and passion upon the race. He knew that appetite would be man’s idol and would lead him to forget God and would stand directly in the way of his salvation.”—Ellen G. White, *Confrontation*, p. 51.

How fascinating that though Satan caused our first parents to sin on the issue of appetite, Jesus—in His first major conflict after His baptism—would go over the same ground and succeed where Adam and Eve failed. What a message His self-denial should have for us, we who are often enslaved to our appetites and passions.

Read prayerfully and carefully 1 Peter 1:13-16. **What is the essential message to us regarding our desires and lusts? How do his words “gird up the loins of your mind” focus us on last week’s study, and why is this crucial to keeping our desires under control?**

Amid these exhortations is the call to be holy. That’s a pretty intense command for beings who, at their core, are sinful and fallen. And yet, it’s obviously an attainable goal; otherwise, why would the Bible more than once call us to holiness? And, in this context and others—holiness, which basically means to “be set apart”—deals with the control of our lusts and passions. It says to be holy in all manner of conduct, behavior, and lifestyle. Though we have been given these basic desires by God, we are to be separate from the world and the world’s indulgences and abuses and perversions of these desires.

How much self-denial do you allow yourself to go through? In other words, when your desires are leading you where you know you shouldn’t go, how do you respond? What does your answer tell you about how well you’re following what the Lord tells us about the control of these desires?

145:16-19). No wonder! God created us to have desires and to satisfy them. He tells us, “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (*Ps. 37:4, RSV*).

God has created a new family for us. We are to come to that family to learn how to walk the Christian path. It is an amazing offer, one that should fill each of us with hope. Life is created when we make Jesus Lord of our desires.

Witnessing

It is often noted how human beings are born and “shapen in iniquity” (*Ps. 51:5*). In fact, it almost seems an excuse these days for our continued sinful behavior: “I can’t help it; that’s just the way I am.”

If you are a child of God, however, you should quote 2 Corinthians 5:17. If you are, indeed, born again, then the fact you were once “born and shapen in iniquity” no longer has any bearing. Instead, your desire should be for “Nothing Less Than Holiness,” singing:

I want to be like Jesus,
 I want to be more like Him.
 Every day He’s changing me and
 Making me as I should be.
 O, I want to be more and more like Him.

Until this is truly our desire, our witness is meaningless. Having said that, it is important to remember the Christian life is not a linear development but a complete transformation with various stages happening simultaneously. Never wait until everything is “right” with you before reaching out to others.

First, you will never be ready, and, second, in reaching out to others, you will grow in your own Christian experience.

While we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us. In the same way, we need to take the initiative and let people know Jesus died for them too.

It is natural when people first come to Christ to look at the one who brought them in as a role model. Being humans, however, we will all, ultimately, disappoint others. It is essential, then, that we continue to point people to Jesus “that we decrease so He might increase.” Only then, despite the fact we don’t yet have everything quite perfect in our lives, can we still be an effective witnessing tool. We don’t have to be perfect in order to witness effectively for a perfect God.

Yield

It's one thing, of course, to read the Bible admonitions to keep our desires under control; it's another to do it. Though we want to do what is right, sometimes it's so easy to surrender, not to the will of God but to our lusts and passions. Perhaps this problem was best expressed by Augustine, who once prayed, "*God give me power over my passions—but just not yet!*" Who, to some degree, can't relate?

Nevertheless, there is great hope for us as Christians. We can have victory over the things that can, otherwise, destroy us, but we can have that victory only through the power and Spirit of God working in a soul that yields to that power. In the end, we all yield: The question is—to what? To our passions, which bring death, or to God, who brings life? There are no other options.

Read prayerfully and carefully the following texts: What's the basic message in them all? What personal experience are they all talking about? *Rom. 6:1-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 2:12, 13.*

Those who have totally surrendered their lives to Christ will, through the Spirit of God, die to their old selves and be "born from above" (*John 3:3, NRSV*). They have surrendered to God their whole existence, including the desires of the heart and flesh (*see Rom. 6:13*). Now, they live under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, which gives them a new life in Christ (*see Gal. 5:25*). Unlike before they knew the Lord, those who have died to self and live again in Christ can, through this power, live with their desires under control.

This new existence, however, is a day-by-day existence. Though we sometimes hear stories of those who, having surrendered to Christ, suddenly have their lifelong habit of smoking, drinking, or whatever just simply vanish, for most Christians that's not the case. Plus, too, character doesn't change in an instant. There's a day-by-day battle with sin, with self, with the carnal nature, which, though subdued through the power of God, is always there trying to break through. In and of ourselves, we can't win against our fallen flesh; all we can do is, moment by moment, surrender our wills to Christ and claim His power over our sinful desires. This takes self-denial, vigilance, a struggle, and lots of prayer, but victory is promised. Otherwise, defeat is certain.

How, in your own life, have you experienced what these texts listed today have talked about? Why is knowledge of the Cross so important for you to understand when, at times, you fail?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Creativity to design and make something useful or beautiful is a quality God implanted in every human being. We craft songs, artwork, lush gardens, even inviting meals. Share about what you most enjoy making. Why is it fulfilling to you? God saw what He had made and said “it was very good” (*Gen. 1:31, NIV*). How does knowing God was pleased when He fashioned you affect your relationship with Him? Discuss your feelings about His expectations of you and His plans for you.

Thought Questions:

① We were created with holy desires. Through the Fall, those positive desires were replaced with unhealthful, weak, even destructive ones. Thankfully, the story of humanity and, consequently, our personal lives do not have to end with failure. We can choose to be united with Christ and, therefore, “no longer . . . slaves to sin” (*Rom. 6:6, NIV*). Consider what this freedom means for the daily practice of your life. What changes will you make as you yield even your leisure time to God’s direction?

② When we look back on our lives, what usually stands out are the glaring mistakes we have made. Review just this past week; when a poor choice or missed opportunity shouts *Failure*, repeat 1 John 2:1 using the personal pronoun: *I* have an Advocate with the Father! Why is quiet time in prayer so helpful to change your experience from defeat to victory?

Application Question:

“Prepare your minds for action” (*1 Pet. 1:13, NIV*). Write 1 Peter 1:13-16 on an index card and carry it with you. How will time spent memorizing this portion of Scripture and reflecting on its implications impact your daily agenda? Review such biblical stories as those of Cain, Moses, David, Peter, and Judas. What practical lessons can you learn from both their successes and their failures?

Further Study: Consider the stories of various Bible characters who failed to yield their desires to the will of God. Note the consequences of their actions. Some of these individuals repented of their sin and trusted in God’s grace for forgiveness and salvation. Others continued in their sin and will be eternally lost.

Bible Character	Consequences
Cain (<i>Gen. 4:3-15</i>)	
Moses (<i>Exod. 2:11-15</i>)	
David (<i>2 Samuel 11-18</i>)	
Peter (<i>Matt. 26:69-75</i>)	
Judas (<i>Matt. 27:3-5</i>)	

“You may live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and bear the fruits of the Spirit; you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Then you will be living channels of light, having your life hid with Christ in God.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 49.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, talk about what it means to die to self and live a new life in Christ. Share your own experiences and how some person may have changed your life. What advice would you give to someone who, wanting to be a Christian, admits that he or she never had such experiences with God before?
- ❷ In our struggle to keep our desires under control, why is understanding the good news of Christ’s substitutionary death so important, especially after we make a mistake and yield to our sinful desires?
- ❸ In your own community, where do you see businesses exploiting our fallen condition? Though there are limits, of course, to what you could or even should do, is there anything that, as a class or a church, you could do to help limit the damage these businesses are doing to your community? If so, what?