

Dealing with Stubborn Desires through Worship

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There is a line from the Disney movie “Frozen” that is destined to be quoted often. The wise troll Grand Pabbie said:

“The heart is not so easily changed, but the head can be persuaded.”^[1]

Whether the writers of Disney intended it or not they were capturing a thoroughly biblical idea and a tension that many feel regularly. It is easy to know intellectually what to do but our desires won’t cooperate. In other words, it is easy for desires to overwhelm the logical part of our being. Or as Paul said, “...But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members” ([Romans 7:23, NASB](#)).

This leads to the logical question of what do we do with stubborn, entrenched desires? These could come in the form of strong desires for over eating (when intellectually you know you shouldn’t), or to just relax (when you know you shouldn’t) or to turn to pornography for a little bit of pleasure (when you know you shouldn’t).

Maybe you’ve tried will power and a filter for your computer. You’ve tried Scripture memory but the desires are still entrenched. Despair then comes as you wonder if you are destined to struggle with these desires the rest of your life.

It seems that while we have done a good job in biblical counseling of identifying the source of these strong desires and why we keep giving in ([Proverbs 4:23](#)), I’m not confident that we have been equally clear with the solution. Let’s explore this further.

True Versus False Worship

Many have become experts at identifying idolatry of the heart as the source. Humans have false treasures in the inner person ([Matthew 12:33-35](#)). It is obvious what people need to “put off,” but is it equally as clear how to “be renewed in the spirit of the mind” and “put on” ([Ephesians 4:21-32](#)) related to strong desires and true worship?

We have been clear that false worship is the problem. I would propose then that true worship is the solution. And if so what does this worship look like in detail?

Sanctification through Worship

I believe we have the powerful tool of superior worship to kill the false worship of the soul. Instead of “lovers of pleasure” we can become “lovers of God” ([2 Timothy 3:4](#)). The essence of this view of sanctification would be that as the soul becomes more captivated with the beauty of the Lord “the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”^[2]

How then is the lion of desire tamed in the inner person? The mechanism of change is worship and this is made possible because of the gospel. Jesus said to the woman at the well that God is seeking

worshippers ([John 4: 23-24](#)). He said this as He addressed the false worship of her soul (which had something to do with lusting after relationship with men).

Grow in Worship

The theory sounds nice, but what does it mean? We all understand the need to grow in our understanding of and practice of worship. It's like saying, you should pray more. We all know it. The principle is more cogent than that though.

To demonstrate the power inherent in this principle think of worship words with me. By worship words I mean what we are commanded to do in Scripture in relation to the Lord. Among others we are told to praise, love, trust in, hope in, sing the praises of, believe, rejoice in, serve, fear, bow down to and obey.

Thus, to grow we need to rejoice in, praise, obey, love, hope in, and trust the Lord instead of the strong desires of our hearts. Each one of these words could also be used to describe what is happening in our souls with the areas where we struggle with strong desires. "I *love* food" can be like saying, "I use food to cope with the stresses of life." Or, "I look at pornography as an escape for life's pressures" can mean I *hope* this will make life more enjoyable.

As an illustration of this principle let's consider why "love one another" is the most often repeated command of the New Testament (see [John 13:34-35](#) for starters). We have already established that love is a worship word. Now, let's see how it can be used to fight strong desires.

Grow in Love

My father was a Sherman Tank machine gunner during WWII. I grew up hearing stories about Panzer Tanks and how difficult it was for our little Sherman to defeat a Panzer unless the correct strategy was used. One Sherman against a mighty Panzer was almost like trying to shoot it using a BB gun. But multiple Shermans ganging up on a lonely German Tank, aiming at the right spots, brought victory.

Our flesh is like the German Panzer. It is mighty and formidable. It's laughable to use mechanisms for victory that are more like BB guns against the desires of the inner person. I have come to believe though that one of the most potent weapons against the flesh is love.

Romans 13 clearly exhorts us to, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another. For this, You shall not commit adultery.... Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law" ([Romans 13:8-10](#)).

It is obvious; if I truly love my wife I will not commit adultery. So, how do I combat the adulterous tendencies of the heart (e.g. looking at pornography)? The answer: grow in love and keep growing in love since it leads to holiness ([Philippians 1: 9-11](#)).

Did you read that? Love leads to holiness. True worship (loving God and others, as an act of worship) pushes out false worship. This same principle is true of any worship word.

Growing in love can happen as we meditate on and then delight in the qualities of the Lord. Enjoy reflecting on Him as you do others you love. Think of how His beauty is revealed in creation. And then worship Him as a result. As true worship increases in your soul false worship is being pushed out.

So, are you desperate in your fight against strong desires? Then, grow in love and in using every other worship word you can think of.

Counselors, teach counselees how to love God and others and how to excel in every other area of worship.

Educators, let's teach our students the importance of true worship defeating false worship and how this, through the power of the Spirit, is the mechanism of change.

Therefore, there is hope in our battle against the flesh since we can always learn to love the Lord and others in greater ways.

Join the Conversation

How do you believe change happens?

What have you found helpful for experiencing victory over strong desires?

[1] *Frozen*, directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee (Disney, 2013).

[2] From the hymn "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus."