

Desires

When I think of salvation I typically think of being judged on the basis of my actions. However, consider D&C 137:9, in which the Lord comments on salvation for those who have not received his gospel.

For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.

We can also heed the words of Alma to Corianton in Alma 41:5-6.

The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh. And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness.

God judges the entirety of our mortal existence in order to reward us eternally. *Doing* good is not enough. We must *become* good. This is not a work which we achieve simply by working at it, nor even just by desiring it, but by working, desiring, and exercising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence 2 Nephi 25:

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.

It is extremely important to remember that salvation is more than a set of actions or thoughts, but requires our whole effort plus the atonement of Christ. However, there is still an important role in all this for our desires. I had reflected on this for years in the context of Mosiah 5:2.

And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

When I read about the change that was wrought in the Nephites I too desired that my heart could be changed so that I would have no more

disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. One day when I was particularly vexed by this I mentioned this verse and my desires to my mother. Her response surprised me. She said that she thought I had long since passed the point where I had desires for evil, but that I truly desired righteousness.

At the time I did not understand her answer, but with the passage of the years I think I am starting to understand. I was still trapping myself by forming this image of how I would be when I became perfect, and denying myself the mercies of God until I achieved that state. In fact, the atonement of Christ – the most direct manifestation of the mercy of God in our lives – must be operative in all phases of our progression, or we are not truly doing “all we can do”. In general, my desires *are* for righteousness. I envision my life moving in accordance with God's plan for me. It is true that I stumble and fall along the way. It is equally true that I would not fall into sin if I did not at some point desire it. But I think it is fair to characterize these problems as the natural man in me, which I continue to seek to cast off. My life is not an unblemished move toward eternal exaltation, but the general desires of my heart – and the preponderance of my actions – are toward God.

The teachings of the gospel are supposed to give us hope. When I read these verses, I should obtain strength, not despair. I think that is a key to understanding them; to see how they can give me hope in Christ. In fact, any manifestation of despair is a sign that I am wandering into the adversary's territory. When I sin I must desire to repent. When I stray I must desire to return. When I am weak I must desire to be strong. If I allow these desires to work in me¹ then I can receive the grace of Christ, and I will have hope no matter what I see – or don't see – behind or in front of me.

1 Alma 32:27