

Zeal - or Apathy?

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Titus 2, verse 11. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority, let no man despise thee. We're looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. We're looking for him who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

I want to talk on the theme of zeal, of zeal, of being zealous. Zeal is found 40 times almost in both the Old and New Testaments.

[1 : 35] What's the opposite of zeal? Apathy. Apathy. Apathy. Apathy is the mindset of, I don't care. It's that kind of attitude.

The attitude of indifference. No concern, could care less. No excitement, no motivation, no passion. Someone has said the fruit of apathy is apostasy.

No. Pulpits across our nation are silent about sin and the need for repentance. And preachers are steering clear on such things that would be counted somewhat controversial perhaps.

The people will actually have to get converted and there will be a transformation or repentance would happen. Apathy or zeal? That's the question. Most of us will have a zeal about something or other if not a few things.

There's some famous people who have had a lot of zeal, a lot of passion and energy and devotion. For example, John Milton got up at 4 o'clock every morning to write Paradise Lost.

[2 : 51] William Bryant rewrote his book 95 times. Noah Webster worked 36 years to produce the first edition of his dictionary.

36 years producing a dictionary. That's where it's all going. Many business executives put in 10 or 12 hours a day, 6 or even 7 days a week.

Not always because they have to but because they're enthusiastic about their work. Now I work with some people, some senior people in the government and as much as they've got a reputation as being fat cats or lazy kind of people, these high flying people, I see how they work.

Now they're checking their emails on the weekend, they're on call 24-7 and these people work hard. They've worked hard to get where they are generally speaking.

Most of them have and they have a zeal that's motivated them and driven them to get where they are and that's commendable. That's a good thing. We can commend them for that. Public servants who are doing a decent job or doing what they can.

[3 : 58] They're putting their heart into it and that's a good thing. People can get passionate about all kinds of things. About their work, about study, about hobbies. Some people get passionate about food.

Who likes food? Sometimes it can be a passion that's misguided, a misguided kind of zeal. For example, we can have a zeal for some kind of sin.

Some can have a zeal for material things, for fame, for a product. We've got a relative and he's passionate about his business, about the product that he sells, the work that he does.

He's an evangelist for his kind of business product. You can have a zeal for a sport, a zeal for traditions that you have. People have zeal for religion.

There are some people that will go miles and miles on pilgrimages and bow down before statues and throw money at images and revere holy books that are written by false prophets.

[5 : 01] It's a zeal, nevertheless. They've got a zeal. You know, you could say, well, at least they're keen about what they are on about. There's a zeal there. God's Word urges us to have a zeal.

Not a zeal without knowledge, but a zeal with knowledge. A zeal for the Lord. God urges us to have a zeal for Him. God's Word says in Galatians 4 verse 18, Paul writes, But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.

And not only when I am present with you. Paul says it's good to be zealously affected always in a good thing. You know, there's some good zeal. Zeal is good if it is a good thing.

If it's something that is worthy of Him, worthy of our Lord. When we have zeal, when we have that zeal, that relentlessness, that intensity, that being all out.

An old time preacher, J.C. Ryle said, Zeal in Christianity is a burning desire to please God, to do His will, and to advance His glory in the world in every possible way.

[6 : 16] Zeal. Zeal. It's a desire which is not natural to men or women. The zeal of God. It's a desire which the Spirit puts in the heart of every believer when they are converted to Christ.

He goes on, This desire is so strong when it really reigns in a person that it impels them to make any sacrifice, to go through any trouble, to deny themselves anything, to suffer, to work, to labour, to toil, to spend themselves and be spent, even to die.

Why? If only they can please God and honour Christ. Paul speaks of this passion. In Colossians 1.29 he says, Whereunto I labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily. It doesn't work in Him casually, it works in Him mightily. Contrast that kind of zeal with modern day casual Christianity. Casual Christianity.

Apathy. There was a little girl one day, she saw a sign on the church wall. And the hall had a sign that said, The zeal of thy house hath consumed me.

[7 : 28] And she was crying. An elder asked her, Why are you crying? She says, I'm afraid of the zeal. He answered, Don't worry little girl, there's no zeal in this place.

You know, the zeal. She was worried it was going to consume her. But the zeal of God should consume us. And we shouldn't have a lack of it, we should have an abundance of it. The question is for you.

Brother, sister here. Have you got zeal or apathy? Which do you have? Apathy. It's a spiritual virus that is invading the church.

And the opposite of zeal is apathy. It's a lack of interest or concern, a lack of enthusiasm. Someone has said, Apathy is the greatest enemy of the church today.

It's true. It's true. It's true here and now. In this place, in this church. Apathy is the greatest enemy of the church today. What have you got zeal about?

[8 : 32] Have you got idols? Have you got idols that you invest yourself in? We can all question that. Myself included. Idols.

Is it money? Entertainment? Pleasure? A job? Church programs can be an idol. Sports? Sports? Exercise? What is it that consumes your time and your effort?

Christians are urged to have a zeal for the things of God. A zeal. God himself has zeal. In 2 Kings 19, 31 it says in part, The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this.

God himself has zeal. It's a very character trait of our Lord. As our very Lord, Jesus himself demonstrated when he went into the temple and he threw out the money changes.

He had a zeal as he wanted to motivate people to a spiritual life, to holy living. He wanted to cleanse the temple.

[9 : 35] He had a holy rage that possessed him as he demonstrated a passion, a zeal for the house of God, for the people of God.

What about us? Do we have that zeal? J.C. Ryle again, he said, The zealous Christian is preeminently a person of one thing. It is not enough to say that they are earnest, strong, uncompromising, meticulous, wholehearted, and fervent in spirit.

They only see one thing. They care for one thing. They live for one thing. They are swallowed up in one thing. And that one thing is to please God.

Whether they live, whether they die, whether they're healthy, whether they're sick, whether they're rich, whether they're poor, whether they please man or give offence, whether they're thought wise or thought foolish, whether they're accused or whether they are praised, whether they get honour or whether they get shame.

For all this, the zealous person cares nothing at all. They have a passion for one thing. And that one thing is to please God and to advance God's glory." End quote.

[10 : 55]

It's a divine word. It's got a sense of boiling over, of zeal, of fervency, of fire, of flame. The Bible urges you, brother, sister, it urges you to be fervent, fervent in your love.

1 Peter 4 verse 8, fervent in your charity. James 5 verse 16 talks about the earnest, fervent prayer of a righteous man.

Fervent prayer, fervent love. Fervent love. Is that your kind of love? Your kind of prayer? The only believers devoted themselves in Acts 2 from verse 41. There was a zeal there, a devotion.

They were sold out for the gospel and for Christ. Let's be unswerving, unrelenting, unwavering as they. 1 Corinthians 14 verse 2 it says, Forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts.

[15 : 26] It's another area we can have zeal. So seek after spiritual gifts that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. A zeal in service, in spiritual gifts, in your loyalty, in your devotion.

God help us that we'd have such zeal. A zeal in earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. Jude 1 verse 3.

Oh that we would be a church with zeal for God. As Paul urged, and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto man.

Whatever ye do, those little things that ye do, those unseen things, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto man. Even those secular things that ye might do.

Don't be half-hearted. Do it heartily. What about spiritual things? Brother, sister tonight, your witness. Are you passionate in your witness? Are you passionate in your worship, in your praying, in your working?

[16 : 29] Will you be like Epaphras? He was commended for it. In Colossians 4 verse 12 and 13 it writes of Epaphras. Paul says, Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluted you, always labouring for you, fervently for you in prayers.

That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record that he hath a great zeal for you, and then that are in Laodicea, and then in Hierapolis.

Epaphras, a servant of Christ, always labouring fervently for you in prayers. There might be some here tonight, you might be unseen, unknown, but you're labouring fervently in prayers.

That's a blessed work. That's a holy work. That's a work unto God. Thank you for praying. Thank you for praying. Witness with zeal.

Worship with zeal. Pray with zeal. Work with zeal. Labour fervently like Epaphras, a great zeal for the spiritual welfare of others. Now we've been talking about zeal.

[17 : 38] We can have zeal without knowledge. We can have misguided zeal. We can have zeal that's spent on things of little value. Or we can have zeal that's zeal with knowledge.

A zeal with love for Christ. A zeal with a fervency. A faithful service unto God. That's what we need, brothers and sisters. We need that kind of zeal. A holy zeal.

A holy zeal. To maintain it. To develop it. Someone wrote this. Wake up. Sing up. Preach up.

Pray up. Pay up. Stay up. And never give up or let up. Or back up or shut up. Until the cause of Christ in the church and the world is built up.

We should have that kind of endeavour to be zealous. How can we maintain that zeal? Maybe it's grown a bit dim. Maybe you've become somewhat lukewarm. Maybe that zeal that you had when you first trusted Christ has grown faint.

[18 : 39] You can refire it. You can refresh it. You can fan it into flame. One suggestion is read some Christian biographies.

You read some Christian life stories. Read of missionaries. Read of revivalists and preachers and Christians of old. Read the stories of men and women of faith of old.

And learn. Learn how you can be like them. Be zealous. Maybe you're not saved tonight.

The word says be zealous and repent. That's critical. Repent. Turn from sin and trust him. Turn around from a life of sin to a life of serving Christ.

A life of following Christ as your saviour, as your master. It's the least that you can do. A quote from Spurgeon. Never ever be lukewarm in your faith.

[19 : 43] Be single-minded. Be zealous. Don't be afraid what worldlings or the lukewarm may call you if you're faithful for Christ. Never forget that you are sojourners and pilgrims in this world.

Thomas Watson likened this world that we live into an inn or a hotel. It's just a temporary stopping place. Do travellers spend all their time talking and thinking about the hotel that they're staying in? What do you talk about with your fellow Christians? What do you spend all your time talking about? Is it about the inn? About the world? Are your priorities in keeping with the kingdom or are they lukewarm?

This quote goes on. Would you drive an hour, five days a week to get to work, but balk at driving thirty minutes for a prayer meeting? What gets cut first when you have a conflict? Church events or worldly pursuits? What is more important to you? Sunday school or sleep? Don't get caught up in thinking mere externalism as Christianity, but know that your zeal is for the spiritual.

[20 : 52] It's a good indicator of the condition of your heart. Now we're not saying here today that you're saved by your works. But as a Christian, you will be zealous of good works.

It will be something that will show. It will shine. One of the leading causes of lukewarm churches, I quote here, are lukewarm pastors and elders.

This is John Walford, a preacher. He says, hold your shepherds accountable. If they aren't giving you the gospel, if they aren't exhorting you to be zealous, then get rid of them. And if they can't be done, leave that church.

If you never feel uncomfortable in church, if you're never pushed out of your comfort zone by a sermon, something is dreadfully wrong. We should be encouraged. We should be exhorted to be a zealous people.

And it's not a man-made, manufactured kind of zeal. It's not some kind of high given by a pep pill, but it's a godly zeal. It comes from the Spirit of God working within your heart, moving you, stirring you.

[21 : 59] A zeal. We need to be confronted with such things. To not be afraid to stand alone. To not be afraid to have a zeal that others might count as extreme.

Your zeal can be contagious. Wouldn't that be a good thing? That would be something, a good communicable thing to have in your life is that kind of zeal.

A zeal that's contagious. We read in 2 Corinthians 9, 2, in part it says, Your zeal hath provoked very many. Would it be good if you catch that zeal tonight?

That you re-fire that zeal today. And that you would pass that on to others around about you. To people that you can contact. And be that contagious Christian. That your zeal can be transferred to others around about you.

Your zeal has provoked very many. It's a good thing to have. A zeal. A zeal that says we will do something. A zeal that will not shrink back.

[23 : 06] A zeal that will gain. A zeal that will care. Seek that zeal tonight. Seek that zeal. Tarry. Till you get that zeal.

Wait for the zeal. Ask the Spirit of God to re-fire you with your zeal. Cultivate it. Cultivate it. Grow it. Tend it. As you would a garden.

A zeal. A zeal that comes. As again I say. Not from some man manufactured thing. Not some emotional kind of influential thing. But a zeal that is born within.

A zeal that is born from your love for the Saviour. A zeal that comes as the Spirit of God. Works within your heart. And draws you closer to Him. As you draw closer to Him.

He'll draw closer to you. And you'll have that same cry. That the people in John 12, 21 said. As they came to fill it. They desired of Him. Saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

[24 : 07] Sir, we would see Jesus. I trust that's why you're here tonight. You're here tonight. Because you want to see Jesus. It's not anything other than that.

You want to see Him. You want to reach out. And touch the hem of His garment. He's here today. He wants you to reach out. And touch Him. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that you are here.

By your Spirit tonight. Thank you, Lord, that your Word urges us to be a people. Peculiar. A people zealous of good works. A people looking. Ready.

Waiting. Working. Watching. Wakeful. For your coming. Lord, that great coming. Of you, our great God. And our Saviour.

Help us, Lord, each one here today to be ready. Help us to be ready, Lord, if there's any who are not yet saved. They'll see that great transaction.

[25 : 04] They'll see that transfer that can be possible. That exchange of a sinful garment to a pure and spotless life. Lord, that a man can shed those dirty rags of his sin.

And can be clothed again with new life. With Christ Himself. Lord, that a man can turn from his wicked way. And find the grace that covers all his sin.

Because of the blood that was poured out. If there's any here tonight, Lord, they're yet to trust you. They're yet to find the peace of God. That can rule and reign in their hearts.

That peace that can replace the uncertainty. And the darkness of sin. Lord, if there's any here tonight. They'll cry out.

They'll cry out even this very instant. And cry out. As the word says that if any shall call on the name of the Lord. They shall be saved. Lord, I pray that people would cry out tonight.

[26 : 10] And we as Christians would be stirred again to a deeper fellowship. To a deeper walk.

Help us, Lord. Forgive us. We want to be zealous and repent of our apathy.

Of our indifference. Of those distractions, Lord. Those things that would deter us. Help us not to be held back. But to stand up.

And to stand strong. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen.