

Zealous for God

What does it mean to be 'Zealous' for God? To be zealous means to have an "ardor or fervor of spirit," filled with and showing a strong and active desire to get something done. There is an energy and an enthusiastic devotion to a cause. The word "enthusiasm" comes from a Greek word, en and theos, means "in God." Enthusiasm really means "God in you." *And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,*(Col 3:23) The word "heartily" literally means "from the soul." People are passionate or zealous about many things. We always have enough time, energy, money for those things about which we are passionate. For this kind of enthusiasm and strong interest or devotion in pursuit of something is called "zeal. If you have zeal, you're willing, energized, and motivated. The real question is: are we passionate about that which is most important? Are we passionate about God? The early church certainly was. Their holy zeal resulted in adding to their numbers daily. From their fervent preaching and heartfelt service, the early church exploded with new believers. Have you ever longed for that same experience? Have you ever desired to have the love for outreach and the zeal they had at Pentecost? Well, the Lord desires it for you too! Christians should be the most enthusiastic people in the world to proclaim the gospel. The Bible has much to say about our 'zeal' for God.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her."(ZEC8:2) God Himself is zealous, fervently passionate about His people and His plan. *and wrapped himself with zeal as a mantle* God enthused about His Coming Kingdom *Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice, From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this*(ISA9:7) God is a zealous God and He wears zeal as a cloak,(robe).(ISA59:17) If God is zealous about His Kingdom, shouldn't we too be zealous! He expects us to do the same. What biblical examples of zeal can we learn from? Levites were given responsibility of the priesthood because of their zeal in defending God's honor. During the Exodus the Levite tribe were particularly zealous in protecting Mosaic law in the face of those worshipping the golden calf, which may have been a reason for their priestly status. When Israel's sexual immorality with their pagan neighbors led them away from the true God toward worshipping the pagan god Baal, Phinehas took a stand. *Then Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal.*(NUM25:5-6) After God told His followers to kill all those who were worshipping Baal. Phinehas believed to obey laws against adultery & idolatry. He is on fire with zeal for God, followed the two to the tent and ran them both through with spear. It seems like a harsh response, but Phinehas receives commendation from God. God credits actions of Phinehas with stopping the plague and quitting His wrath. When God gives us a command, we are to keep it. The zeal of Phinehas is remarkable because, while the rest of Israel just stood and watched, he took the initiative, acting on the word of God. God does not command us to take lives today, but example shows the kind of zeal we must have, desire to please God.

Epaphras, a bondservant of Christ, ..For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you,(COL4:12) From this passage, we learn two important facts about the man. First, he was a member of the early New Testament Church; and second, he had zeal. Paul praises him to the Church *for always laboring fervently for you in prayers.* This was how his zeal showed itself: He cared deeply about his fellow laborers in Christ, as a result dedicated much of his time toward pleading God on their behalf. True zeal for God's way means a love for and a desire to serve our brethren, just like Epaphras. Prophet Elijah defended the worship of the Hebrew God over that of Canaanite deity Baal. He rebukes both people of Israel and Ahab for their acceptance in Baal worship. "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Elijah proposes a direct test of the powers of Baal and Israel's God on Mount Carmel. Elijah then invites the priests of Baal to pray for fire to light the sacrifice. They pray until evening without success. Elijah builds an altar; he asks God to accept the sacrifice. Fire falls from sky, consuming the sacrifice, the stones of the altar itself. Elijah had been so zealous for the Lord that it earned God's favor. Elijah was devoted to the work of the Lord. Elijah said, *"I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty."*(1KI19:10)

What better example of zeal could there be than our Savior Jesus Christ? In John 2:13–23, When Jesus saw that money changers and sellers of livestock had overrun God's temple and who were extorting and cheating worshipers. He drives crooked businessmen out of the temple, scolding for turning a sacred place into a market place. *When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, And He said to those who sold doves, Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise(a marketplace)!*(MAT21:13) Christ said they had made it a "den of thieves" The disciples recognized this as being motivated by godly zeal. *"Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up"* Jesus' passion was described as "zeal" for God's house or temple of the Lord. He had cleansed the temple. His concern was for God's holiness, pray and worship. This is symbolic of His transformation of human rituals into divine sacrifice.

Are we on fire for God's way? Do we care deeply about our Church? Are we willing to serve, live as God would have us live? Zeal should characterize spiritual life. For Christians, zeal is a burning desire to do God's will and to live according to His purpose. *Do not be slothful in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*(ROM12:11) So, if you're a fervent(boiling) person, your spirit is alive, quickened. Disciples on road to Emmaus—their hearts burned within them.

Many Christians are eager to fight for God and are more than willing to go confrontation with those they consider God's enemies. They too may be passionate, committed, loyal, but that doesn't mean that their heart or actions are a reflection of God's. In fact, passionate believers have sometimes done terrible things in the name of Jesus when their passion isn't guided by God's love. It is important that we have a zeal for God and the things of God. But zeal alone is not enough. Paul was once in this same state. Before becoming a disciple of Christ, he persecuted the church in his zeal for God.(PHI3:5-6) His zeal as a Pharisee was guided by legalism and religious fundamentalism, not a love for God or others. He was following a different path, trying to please God according to the Law of Moses. In this condition, he was lost. Ananias had to tell him "Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name"(ACT22:16)

After Paul obeyed the gospel and went about preaching to the Gentiles, he was viewed by many of his Jewish as a conspirator. When Paul reached the point in his defense where he talked about his work in preaching to Gentiles, they cried out, "*Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!*"(ACT22:22) Both were zealous for God, yet they were on opposite sides of this conflict. We must have zeal and the correct object for our zeal. But there is essential element—our zeal must be based in the truth. Paul told, *For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge*"(ROM10:1-3) Paul's honest desire and prayer for the people of Israel to be saved through faith in Christ. He acknowledges their zeal for God, but that cannot overcome their ignorance. It is thru Christ alone we can receive righteousness of God. They established their own way without seeking God, is foolishness.

When religious zeal is off target, it can be destructive in its effects on the kingdom of God. Religious zeal can be misguided in the area of doctrine(how we think) and in the area of means(what we do). Peter's response to his experience at the Mount of Transfiguration is an illustration of misguided zeal in the area of doctrine. In his religious zeal, he actually demoted Christ, the Son of God, to the level of mere men! Misguided religious zeal in the area of doctrine is seen in Christendom today. It can be evidenced in shrine-building (for man judged saints) & cause of Christ receives a secondary place. False doctrine leading to a zeal for doing evil that is abominable to the living God. Many-time a social gospel is preached and practiced, misguided doctrinal zeal is involved. Many today are zealously promoting prosperity gospel that God wants to make every Christian healthy and wealthy. God has not planned for all Christians to be poor or sick, but prosperity/richness are not guaranteed for any Christian. Many are tireless in promoting the interest of his own Church or denomination, ready to die for the distinctive opinions. Such was the zeal of the Pharisees.(MAT23:15) There is such a thing as zeal from party spirit. The religious zeal of gay activists for the acceptance of homosexual lifestyles, religious zeal of feminists for the ordination of women, and religious zeal of vanity Christians who favor one-world religion. Let's be careful that the doctrine we hold is not distorted by zeal without knowledge, discernment and wisdom!

Peter's defense of the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane was misguided zeal in the area of means or method. When Peter cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant, he was zealously committed to defending the Lord. He showed lot of courage and religious zeal here—but it was misguided zeal! Peter was not sensitive to the Lord's mind, direction at this point. The result was an action that God would never approve. Without direction from the Lord, religious zeal is an accident waiting to happen! Religious zeal out of God's control can disrupt and destroy the work of the Lord! Misguided zeal in methods comes in everything from discipline in the church to fundraising techniques can be mis-handled by religious zealots. In the area of discipline, many churches have been destroyed because of overly-zealous or overly-righteous perfectionists. While church discipline needs to be active but discipline to extremes is misguided zeal. Biblical emphasis in discipline is always on restoration. Unfortunately, church is filled with graceless discipline carried out with destructive zeal. Zeal in church discipline must be tempered with wisdom, gentleness and humility.

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.(JAM4:17) We sin when we break God's laws. Breaking the law of love by manipulating people and using excessive emotional pressure to force professions of faith. Breaking the law of truth by preaching gospel that the Bible doesn't proclaim--such as "all your problems will disappear if you'll accept Christ"? "if you do not take medicines and die, you will go to heaven"? Let's not break God's laws by using unbiblical pressure and preaching unbiblical promises and judgments. That would be misguided zeal without wisdom. God is the supreme authority. Jesus Saves us! Jesus is Healer; for by His wounds(stripes) you were healed for His glory. Let's be zealously committed to Christ and His kingdom, that our doctrine is sound, our methods are Christ-like-zeal that is wise in means! We need to be very careful of the means we use to channel our religious fervor and zeal. Zeal can be good or bad, depending on its objective: It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, to accomplish God's will, devotion to God's glory. While many are eager to serve God, but they are ignorant of whole counsel of God. So, they establish their own righteousness which puts them in a lost condition. Without Lord's direction, misguided evangelistic zeal can actually drive people away from Christ! Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes. Abstain from medicine should be personal decision/faith by the guidance of God. Jesus did not condemn using doctors and 'earthly' remedies.(MAT9:12) Better trust in God when you need Healing. Your faith has made you well. Or, in His great mercy.

Fervent zeal as necessary for pleasing God. You become zealous because you have come to know God. It is awesome character and nature of God that creates zeal within those who worship Him. The more you know the Lord, the more you become zealous for Him. From this perspective, zealousness is more about earnestness toward God, consecration, and undivided service. To be zealous is to focus all our attention on the person of Jesus Christ. It is important for followers of Jesus, to be zealous is a command. Consider these scriptures which speak of a zealous life: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*" (Deu 6:5) Living the Christian life is loving desire to walk with Jesus day by day. With single-minded passion we draw near to Him and serve him with everything that is in us. Our prayer life moves from routine requests to zealously seeing the purposes of God.

It is important that zeal is characteristically good. You should be zealous about vital and righteous as daily praise, prayer and worship. Christians need to make sure we have godly principles grounded into our lives. Our energy and devotion should be focused on things that are of God! Not sinful pursuits. A lack of zeal can mean a lazy, self-sufficiency which is classified as "lukewarm." Jesus rebuked Laodicean church for lacking a zealous attitude: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (REV3:15-16) Jesus counseled them to be "zealous and repent." We must overcome being lukewarm by repenting—turning from sin to zealous for God. We should be eager, energetic followers of Jesus and have a strong interest in His Way and His Church. Christians should be passionate about serving the Lord, that passion should be evident in their attitudes and actions.

When religious zeal is on target, it can be extremely effective for the kingdom of God. The early Christians were zealous Christians. They were zealously committed to the Lord and His kingdom. Many of them even sacrificed their lives in order to share and to spread the word of the Lord. There was the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the first few centuries after Christ. Zeal is often used in a sense, meaning devotion to God like being a missionary. Zeal focused on God enable us to further, please God, glorify God, imitate God, serve God, love God, enjoy God. Zeal leaves no room for compromise on something as important as our service to God. *because he was zealous for his God,* (NUM25:13)

Bible has countless examples of people expressing their zeal for God through their words and actions. Apostle Paul who with incredible zeal, fearlessly travelled throughout the Roman Empire preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. His care and energy were persistent despite constant persecution. He continued to write letters to the churches even from prison. His zeal and faith were so great that after being put in prison, he and Silas began to sing praises to God! From the examples of Paul, we can see the power and blessings that having a zeal for God and His Way of Life can bring to us. One who is zealous for God recognizes the cost of following Jesus but fully committed to God's way of doing things and eager to embrace all that Christ wants to do in their life, even that means surrender or sacrifice.

How earnest and zealous are we in our Christian living and in our service for Him? The zealous Christian acknowledge a personal relationship with the Lord. *O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you;* (PSA63:1-7) They will be filled with praise, prayer and thanksgiving. "*My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods.*" They find complete satisfaction in the Lord Himself. They have developed holy art of meditation. It is referring to meditation in God's Word. They will study it, consume it, digest it, memorize it and put it into practice. They are confident, joyful about the future. that in and through them all the Lord will make him victorious. They prove strength of God upholding them. Think of being upheld every day by the mighty hand of God! What a glorious thing it is to be possessed by a burning zeal for the Lord! If we become zealous for God, we will have a heart for God's people to turn back to God. We are bold in proclaiming God's Name, to share God's love, stand for Christ. We will hold fast our convictions. (2TI1:13)

We should ask ourselves, "Do you have genuine zeal for the Lord". There are certain ways in which zeal is seen in one's life. In each of these, our zeal must always be directed toward God and be founded in the truth. If we are zealous for something, we will make it a priority. Our lives should reflect this priority. So, Be zealous about our Walk with God. Be zealous about our Witness for God. Be zealous about our Church. Zeal will lead us to speak out. We need a stronger zeal for God. We should be like Jeremiah who said, "*But His word was in my heart like a burning fire,* (JER20:9) Likewise Paul said: *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me;* (1CO9:16) Jesus expects us to be "zealous for good deeds" (TIT2:14; GAL4:14-18) Our zeal is to be consistent and sincere, not just to put on a show. When we are zealous for God, we are passionate for whatever He calls us to do. We have to do His work wholeheartedly, not as men-pleasers, but as God-pleasers—not with external service, but from the heart. Let us fulfill our missionary obligation. True zeal for the Lord is a confident and His will are necessary qualities for spiritual growth with the Lord.

Are we 'on fire' for God? If not, why not? Get on fire for God and men will come to see you burn. If there is something missing in our relationship and service to God, chances are it is our passion. . .our zeal! Healthy zeal is evident in natural fruit of one's fervor, which comes in Love. Zeal comes from within us, from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. God wants us to be a zealous disciple of Jesus Christ. We must pursue intimacy with the Lord. Knowing Him and walking with Him must be our highest goal. We must endeavor to restore our first love, faith, and zeal[consecration]