



"A zealous man in religion is pre-eminently a man of one thing."
—J.C. Ryle

09-Mar-18

Are You Zealous? (Part Four)

At the end of last week's essay, we considered the zeal of [Jesus Christ](#) during His earthly ministry, showing that His enthusiasm for [God](#) and His way of life fueled all of His efforts. Despite not using the Greek term for "zeal," *zelos*, [the gospel](#) writers portray His zealous works for the people of Judea and Galilee. For instance, notice [Mark 1:32-39](#):

At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him. Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth." And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.

Also [Luke 6:17-19](#):

And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all.

Wherever Jesus went, huge crowds thronged Him, begging Him to heal them or their loved ones, and one after the other, He would do as they requested until He had seen to everyone's needs. He possessed an unflagging energy to do the will of God.

In [John 4:6](#), 8, the apostle writes that Jesus, being exhausted, sent the disciples into the city of Sychar to buy Him some food and bring it back to Him. After He had conversed with the woman at the well, His disciples returned to find Him much improved—not hungry at all:

In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work." ([John 4:31-34](#))

Doing God's will sustained Him in a way that the disciples could not understand. Instead of barely having enough energy to take another step along the road to Galilee, He was ready to preach to the whole city, where He stayed and worked for two days.

Jesus describes His attitude toward doing God's work in [John 9:4](#): "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work." He would finish the job the Father had given Him in the short time allotted to Him. As summarized in Part Two, Jesus' driven, indefatigable work exemplifies the first way in which the Bible's writers employ the concept of zeal in Scripture: as holy fervor—virtuous wrath against what is evil and great ardor for doing good for others.

What about us? Though we are nowhere near the level of the righteous and spiritually powerful Son of God, we can be zealous in our own way. How do we demonstrate zeal for God? Do we show any?

Of the zealous actions recorded in God's Word, the kind of zeal the Jews displayed for their manmade traditions and against their Savior and His church is obviously wrong. The pre-conversion Saul of Tarsus provides an example of this deplorable variety of zeal:

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ([Acts 9:1-2](#))

Such was the zeal of the Jews, a negative, destructive passion full of hostility and ill will, which is the second way the Bible writers employ "zeal." The apostle Paul describes himself in those days as "a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church" ([Philippians 3:5-6](#)). For the rest of his life, he regretted hounding the fledgling Christian church, writing in [I Corinthians 15:9](#), "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Yet, just a few verses later in Acts 9, God calls Saul, asking, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (verse 4), and trembling, he immediately replies, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" His heart changed that quickly. After his [baptism](#) a few days later, "Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (verse 20).

[Galatians 1:15-18](#), 21-24 describes how he plunged into the work Christ had called him to do:

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those

who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. . . . Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the [faith](#) which he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God in me.

In a flash, he transformed from the church's chief persecutor to its most diligent, most intense, most fervent advocate. And his zeal never wavered. Years later, he writes in [I Corinthians 9:16](#), "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" He declares in [I Corinthians 15:10](#), "I labored more abundantly than [all the other apostles], yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

Knowing that his life after his calling was utterly undeserved, Paul tirelessly preached the gospel in city after city, region after region, going to all the Gentiles he could reach in his lifetime. He was so grateful for God's calling and grace that he felt bound to give his all to God, and so he did. Do we?

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Seeking God's Will \(Part One\): Holiness](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Before our calling, we were in abject darkness, hopelessly corrupt and sinful, willing soldiers of the dark-side. After our calling, we have changed allegiances, having the darkness flushed out of us, becoming composed of light, and are consequently mandated to walk as children of light. God's Holy Spirit motivates our newly acquired behavior of righteousness, difficult to do without trusting faith. It requires wisdom and intelligence to walk the Christian life. Determining the will of God is difficult to do unless we know the character of God. Because we have limitations determined by our human

nature, we have difficulty finding God's will unless we meticulously follow Jesus Christ's behavior, extrapolating from principles modeled by His example. If we know the Lord, having the mind of Christ, we can solve a ton of problems. Holiness (set apart for special use) is the foundation for all of the other traits of God. The receipt of God's Holy Spirit has made us a "cut above" the rest of the world. Part of the holiness is imputed in us and part must result from growing in godliness, living lives of moral purity and unswerving loyalty to God. Mercy trumps ritual when determining the will of God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Why Was Jesus Not Crucified as Passover Began? \(Part One\)](#)

by David C. Grabbe

Many Bible students scratch their heads over a seeming discrepancy in timing between the Old Testament instructions about Passover and Christ's fulfillment of it in His crucifixion. Contending that the spiritual fulfillment is far more important than physical rites, David Grabbe relates that Jesus did indeed fulfill the Passover—just not as one might expect.

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