



"Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can."
—John Wesley

16-Mar-18

Are You Zealous? (Part Five)

As Part Four demonstrates, the apostle Paul was so grateful for God's calling—despite his having persecuted the newly formed church—that he spent his life zealously serving [God](#) by preaching [the gospel](#) to the Gentiles. Looking back on his many years of ministry, he writes near the end of his life: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the [faith](#)" ([II Timothy 4:6-7](#)).

He had given his all to Christ. Among the four ways the Bible presents zeal (shown in Part Two), the apostle's zeal can be identified as the first connotation, holy fervor, but it also has elements of the fourth, enthusiasm to attain a goal and/or a devotion to a person. His eagerness to attain to the [Kingdom of God](#) and his devotion to Christ motivated Paul in all his works.

So it is with the zeal of the biblical greats. We read in Scripture of the zeal of [Moses](#), Joshua, Caleb, Phinehas, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and many others in both the Old and New Testaments who gave every ounce of their strength and commitment in service to God. Some of

them died as martyrs, some of them quite gruesomely, and we marvel at their faith, endurance, and self-sacrifice.

But what about us? How can we show our zeal for God and His way? It is easy to see the incredible zeal displayed by a Paul or a Daniel and become discouraged, feeling we do not measure up. However, no two people show their zeal for God in the same way. We must express our zeal in the context of our individual circumstances.

Remember, zeal is not necessarily a virtue by itself. It would be fair to describe it as a "how," not a "what," in terms of its relationship to godly character. Zeal describes the heat, the energy, the motivation, the desire, the conviction, and the confidence behind our virtuous acts. It is our attitude and the feeling that propels us to do things that are right and good to please God.

Romans 12 contains the first salvo of the practical aspects of the doctrines that Paul explained in detail in the preceding chapters. He begins with a familiar argument:

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God, which is your reasonable service because of the grace God gave to you. The Father and [Jesus Christ](#) now own you completely; as slaves of righteousness, you are now bound to give yourself wholeheartedly to whatever He requires of you. ([Romans 12:1](#), our paraphrase and expansion)

From verse 9 on, the apostle presents a list of things that we should do as redeemed Christians. While many of his suggestions—commands, really—deal with our attitudes, others are concrete, godly acts that we can perform with zeal:

Let [love](#) be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and

weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ([Romans 12:9-18](#))

Since we are to live as sacrifices to God, having forsaken [this world](#) and its ways, we should endeavor to do every godly activity mentioned in Paul's list with zeal. If nothing else, we should be trying to do each of these things wholeheartedly with singleness of focus and dogged perseverance. We should be motivated to do these things, not just to serve our brethren and to live a peaceful life, but also to do them as a response to God's grace toward us.

It is likely that we have a weakness in one or two of these areas—or perhaps in all of them. Whatever the case, we should choose one directive from Paul's list to concentrate on and fulfill it with zeal, putting our all into exemplifying that particular Christian behavior—and then we should do it again and again until it is part of our permanent character.

If we decide to work on "continuing steadfastly in prayer," we must pray committedly and with perseverance for those whom God brings to our attention as needing prayer. As Paul says in [I Thessalonians 5:17](#), "pray without ceasing," and in [Philippians 4:6](#), "in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

If we choose "love . . . without hypocrisy," we should shower others with godly love, doing good for them wholeheartedly and without partiality. We should let nothing stop us from putting others first and helping them in their need. A half-baked love may be better than nothing, but love with zeal is the value-added kind of love Jesus displayed throughout His ministry.

If we pick "Do not be wise in your own opinion," we should immediately strive to restrain our proud regard for personal views. Due to social media, many people have a problem with stating their opinions as absolute truth. We must realize that our opinions are not superior to all others and begin listening to what others have to say, as they may be expressing valid points.

If we need to work on this weakness, we must zealously beat down our pride and humbly refrain from shoving our opinions down other's throats.

Within this list lies perhaps the best biblical definition of zeal: "not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" ([Romans 12:11](#)). Amid all of Paul's commanded Christian behaviors appears the attitude in which we are supposed to do them. In this exhortation to zeal, he defines it both negatively and positively and then provides its goal:

First, defining it negatively, zeal does not lag in diligence. It is not lazy, not slothful, not sluggish, but it is active, intense, and tireless. It is conscientious and thorough in getting the job done.

Second, he defines it positively as fervency of spirit. Zeal is an attitude, a drive, boiling over in desire and motivation to accomplish a godly goal. It is passionate, ardent, eager, enthusiastic to do what is right and good. At its most intense, it is the proverbial unstoppable force.

Third, the goal is to serve the Lord, to fulfill His desires for us, His church, and His Kingdom. For this cause Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" ([Titus 2:14](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Love God, Love Neighbor](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Popular music trumpets the theme of romantic love as the answer to all the world's ills, yet the composers of these lyrics have no idea as to what love really is. The fuzzy definition of love is responsible for tolerance of sin, deviancy and liberal, multi-cultural mis-evaluations. We should have a more mature understanding of love for God and love for neighbor. The outgoing concern toward other beings begins with God the Father to Jesus Christ to

us. Without godly love, real love does not exist. Real love does not exist in isolation; another being must always be the object of real love. God's plan involving the reciprocal sharing of love among members of God's Family began well before the foundations of the world, at which time a possible sacrifice for sin had to be factored in. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The love of God, through the mechanism of His Holy Spirit, works on our inner beings (our mind and spirit), making us like Him, demonstrating the love of God, loving God with all our minds (keeping His commandments) and our neighbors (including our enemies) as ourselves. The extent that we love our brethren may be an accurate gauge as to how much we love God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Serving Through Prayer](#)

by Mark Schindler

Prayer is a constant and necessary part of being a Christian. But just how well do we pray? Are our prayers effective? Mark Schindler teaches us how we can learn to pray more effectively!

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