

## Christian Zeal

Fervor For God

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 14-Dec-13; Sermon #1189

Former American President Theodore Roosevelt said perhaps his best known statement in a speech titled “Citizenship in a Republic” which he gave at the Sorbonne in Paris April 23, 1910.

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

By all accounts, what you just read was Roosevelt's creed. That was how he lived his life.

Teddy Roosevelt seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of energy and drive and zest for life. The two words that he used—it seemed like every other word out of his mouth—all the time were ‘dee-lighted’ and ‘bully.’ These typify his vigor for life. By ‘bully’ he meant ‘wonderful.’ That is how he saw life in the things that he did. Everything was wonderful and he was ‘dee-lighted’ to be doing them.

Hunting in the pouring rain for four days was ‘bully.’ On a trip with John Muir to Yosemite, Roosevelt yelled “This is bully!” while enjoying the outdoor fire, only to proclaim “This is bullier!” when he awoke the next morning under four inches of snow. It could be the one or the other—everything that happened was wonderful.

Four years from his death, at age 56, after a jaguar hunt in Brazil where everyone in the whole party was just exhausted and lying on the ground, a reporter asked how he was doing and Roosevelt responded “I’m bully!” He infused vitality into every aspect of life.

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At home or at the White House, wherever he was, he would literally bound from room to room grinning from ear to ear. He had a huge mouth with big white teeth like the Cheshire cat, and so you could not avoid seeing it. He would give hearty handshakes where he shook the whole person and slapped them on their backs, and he laughed and he talked loudly. He was just full of life and energy.

Of course, as the President, he often had people over to meet him and people coming to ask him things. Often, when he had a dinner, he would have the British Ambassador over, who was one of his best friends in Washington. Roosevelt would go bounding over to somebody and take their hand and shake them until their teeth rattled, and slap them on the back and tell them what a nice dress or nice tuxedo they had on, and he would just be talking and laughing. Of course, the person who had never met him before would take a step back wondering what had just hit him or her. The British Ambassador would take the person aside and say, "Don't be offended by the President. You know he's only six years old."

Theodore Roosevelt was the youngest President we have ever had. He became President, after William McKinley's death, when he was only 42 years old. He was still and quiet only when he was reading or writing, both of which he did quite a bit.

He exercised regularly—he had to use that energy that he had just brimming out of him. So he took up boxing, tennis, hiking, riding on the rivers, playing polo, and horseback riding. As governor of New York, he boxed several times a week and kept up his boxing practice as President until his sparring partner hit him in the left eye detaching his retina, blinding him in that eye. But that was not enough to stop him. He stopped boxing and took up jujitsu and did that for the rest of his life.

He frequently took visiting leaders, diplomats, and dignitaries on long hikes around Washington. They would go into one of the parks around there where there would be a bit of a cliff or some hills or whatever. He would take these dignitaries—who were probably behind him, panting—up these steep hills and make them climb over rock faces to get to the top.

He habitually skinny-dipped in the Potomac during the winter time. He thought that was bully too.

With his unflagging energy and hard work and enthusiasm, he was able to achieve a great many things in his sixty years of life. Did you know that he wrote 35 books? He was probably our most literary President. He published his first book at the age of 18. It was the naval history of the War of 1812. And it actually got very good reviews at the

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time and established him as a historian on that part of American history and people sought him out. He read tens of thousands of books—sometimes he would read several a day—not only in English but in various other languages, especially classical languages like Latin.

He worked both as a state legislator and as Police Commissioner. As Police Commissioner, he turned around the New York City Police Department in just a few years. He would actually go out at night onto the beats and if he saw any policeman that was not at his post, or in a bar, or doing something that he should not be doing, he would fire him on the spot.

He was elected governor of New York after he came back from Cuba. He bought and worked a ranch in the Dakotas for a few years. He fought as a Rough Rider in the Spanish-American War (that was why he was in Cuba) and he led the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill, which is a very decisive part of that war, and he was promoted to the rank of colonel.

He served as the assistant secretary to the Navy. By doing so, he ended up setting things up for later victories that we had, particularly in the Spanish-American War but also things that lasted all the way through into the First World War.

As I mentioned before, he was obviously the President. He served for two terms and then ran for an unprecedented third term at the time, which he did not win under the Bull Moose Party (which basically described him).

When he was an older man in his fifties, he explored the Amazon rain forest. His company discovered an entirely new river and they decided to trace it to its source 625 miles away. For that achievement—putting that river on the map—they named it the 'Roosevelt River.'

When he was 59 years old, just a year before he died, he volunteered to lead an infantry unit in World War I. He died at 60. That is the kind of life he lived.

Let me just give you another example of Theodore Roosevelt's 'force of nature' personality. He was absolutely unstoppable, it seemed. This happened during campaigning for his third term as President.

Roosevelt was in Milwaukee and he was standing on the last car of a train and waving to the crowd when a man pulled a gun and shot him in the chest and knocked him back into the doorway of the car. He got himself into a position where he could check himself

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out and the first thing he did was put his hand to his mouth. He noticed that his mouth was not bleeding and so he concluded that he had not been shot to the point where it had perforated his lungs. So he said, "Alright, let's go."

What had happened was that the bullet had hit him in the chest. It had been absorbed by a steel eyeglass case and the copy of the speech that he had in his pocket and it had lodged in a rib.

So he got up and insisted on proceeding to the auditorium where he was supposed to speak that night where 10,000 people were waiting for him to give his speech. So he ascended the podium, looked out over the audience, pulled back his jacket and showed them his bloodied shirt, and said: "I've just been shot. But it takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose." Then he proceeded to talk for 90 minutes before finally condescending to go to the hospital.

Above all things, Roosevelt was fiercely devoted to his principles and virtues that he considered important and he ardently put those beliefs into practice. The things he wanted to do may not have been the best things, but he was enthusiastic about them almost to a fault. He advocated a similar life of vigor for everyone. And so he said, "I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph."

So certainly, on a physical, secular level, Theodore Roosevelt embodied the virtue that we call 'zeal.' He had a passionate enthusiasm for the things that he believed in and he pursued them with all the energy that he had at his disposal. He left nothing on the floor, nothing undone, as far as he could do it. And then he added some more. He was not content with just giving a little. He had to give his all.

Now my question today is: Can we say the same thing about ourselves in terms of our zeal for God and His way?

Have we given our all for Christ? Have we given our all for this way of life that we have been taught, that has been revealed to us from God? Have we given our all for the Kingdom of God? Are we truly zealous?

Let us begin in Galatians 4:18. It is in a section of Galatians where Paul is, in a way, castigating the Galatians because they allowed false teachers in.

Paul was a bit upset with them because they had shown a great deal of zeal for him while he was there with them in Galatia and they had ardently accepted the things that he was saying and preaching to them. But as soon as he left and these other people came in, they were just as zealous for these false teachers as they were for him.

**Galatians 4:18** But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you [it is kind of a little bit of jab to them].

He says it is good to be zealous in a good thing always. That is the main thing. Zeal is a good thing as long as it is put toward a good thing. It is always good to be enthusiastic, zealous, and ardent, to have fervor for the things you believe in, for the good things that you want to do, for the things that God wants you to do.

But we live in a culture in which zeal and enthusiasm—its secular cousin—are dismissed, if not derided. It is not cool to be enthusiastic about anything. This is an age of cool, of being detached, of having a cynical view of everything, of being even apathetic—do not care what other people do, do not care what goes on, just go with the flow. You are even thought to be like the young male models, some of whom have the smoldering look when they are bored. They just effuse cool and carelessness. That is the kind of way that is being taught in this world.

Someone who is zealous about a cause is suspect. A person who has little bit too much enthusiasm must have an angle.

“He’s trying to sell me something. He wants something that I’m probably not going to want to give him.”

“He’s a true believer. He is a fanatic. He won’t listen to reason. He’s a bit off.”

“That enthusiasm you have is just absolutely stupid and hokey. You’re not going to get me to buy that just by being enthusiastic about it, by telling me that it’s great.”

We grow up in this age believing that it does not pay to be too enthusiastic or wholehearted about anything because everyone else will consider us to be a bit kooky. And do not be religiously enthusiastic—that is just weird (“Jesus freak”). That is the way people think.

Now zeal has received a bad rap because there have been too many examples of overzealous behavior that has jaded people about zeal—about being enthusiasts.

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Zealots are seen as hucksters or charlatans. People say, “It’s all made up. It’s just an act. They’re really not that enthusiastic about stuff like that.”

Or zeal is thought of as being Pollyannaish: “You’re an idealist. You don’t see reality. If you really knew how bad it was, you wouldn’t be so ardent about doing that. We could tell you how it really is. So don’t get all excited.”

Or it is thought of as being mindless, that you are just driven like an automaton being enthusiastic about something you have been made to feel is really good. Or the person is over-emotional or he just looks foolish.

*The Devil’s Dictionary* written by Ambrose Bierce has a pretty satirical way of defining things. Bierce defines zeal as a “certain nervous disorder afflicting the young and inexperienced; a passion that goeth before a sprawl.”

And others down through history have felt the same.

John Tillotson, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, said: “Zeal is fit for wise men but flourishes cheaply among fools.”

Sir John Davies, who was an English poet about the same time, wrote that “Zeal without knowledge is the sister of folly.”

Another English writer, Owen Felltham, said: “Zeal without humanity is like a ship without a rudder, liable to be stranded at any moment.”

Finally, Magnus Gottfried Lichtwer, a German fabulist (a writer of fables), said: “Blind zeal can only do harm.” Actually that was the moral of one of his fables.

A standard dictionary though, like *Webster’s American Dictionary*, defines zeal this way: “Fervor for a person, cause, or object; eager desire or endeavor; enthusiastic diligence; ardor.”

Zeal is a projection of passion, conviction, and confidence about something—whatever it happens to be.

So, as Christians, if we use Webster’s definition, we have to have zeal, fervor, ardor, wholehearted enthusiasm, eager desire for a person (Christ), for a cause (God’s righteous and holy way of life), and an object (the Kingdom of God). These are the things that we have to have zeal for: Christ, God’s way, and the Kingdom of God. And

we will probably all say that we are zealous because we do not want to be thought of as not zealous.

But are we really zealous? *Are we zealous?* Truthfully, realistically, do you show zeal for Christ? Do you show zeal for God's way of life? Does it fill you with fervor and ardor to think about doing God's way? Does the prospect of the Kingdom of God motivate you to do what God wants you to do?

Let us go to Revelation chapter 3. Zeal is a subject that we need especially at this time, as we will see here. These are the letters to the seven churches and this is the seventh church. So He says:

**Revelation 3:14-19** And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot [one or the other]. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are [really] wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may [truly] be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see" [because their spiritual sight was crooked and they were blind]. [Then He concludes:] "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."

We understand that this attitude dominates much of the end-time church of God. This is something that we can see in the churches of God, that there are people who are not zealous and who display this attitude.

In being lukewarm, the Laodiceans cannot be described as zealous. Lukewarmness is totally against everything that zeal is about. In fact, the most common word used to describe the Laodiceans is an antonym of zealous and that is 'complacent.' They are satisfied with how things are. They do not have a great drive for God's way. They are satisfied with knowing the truth and that is about it, as far as God goes. So they are satisfied with themselves and with their situations, as we see here.

They say that they are rich, wealthy, and do not need anything. That is their judgment about their lives. They look around them and they see their nice cars, nice houses, nice

clothes. They have good jobs. They can travel here and there. They have got the latest gadgets. They can go to the movies and do all kinds of stuff that other people in times past could not do. They think that they have got life pretty much by the tail and everything is great. "I'm sitting on easy street. We're looking pretty here."

And we can see by that attitude that all of their enthusiasm goes into those things. They are enthusiastic about being rich, about being wealthy, about not having to need anything—that they have got everything covered. Their life is good. That is what they are happy about. That is what they put their lives into.

So it is not that they do not have any zeal at all, they have the zeal for the wrong things. Their zeal is directed to the wrong things. They even brag and boast. It shows their zeal for what it is that they really pursue and they are bragging about their wealth, their riches. That is what they are focused on.

Their lives are oriented toward the material, the secular, wealth, and riches, and they are not concerned about spiritual things. They do not have any fire for spiritual things because all their energy is going toward these material areas. Their gaze is focused on what they can see, not on the invisible God whom they cannot see. He is out of sight, out of mind. And so toward God, they are essentially apathetic. They have no feeling. That is what 'apathy' means: without feeling.

That is why Jesus says here: "I wish you were one or the other. I wish you could show some sort of feeling or total lack of feeling. But right now you're in this kind of lukewarm, gooey nothingness that means nothing to me. You're not for Me, you're not against Me." And He says "It's all I can do not to vomit. But I'm getting ready to, though. So if you don't go one way or the other, I'll spew you out of my mouth." He is not going to take it for very long.

So what does He tell them to do? He says, "Your problem is you have no feeling. Be zealous and repent. Change! Turn your life around! Be excited about Me again and My way. Have a bit of fervor!" And so this is what we are facing.

I mentioned above that this is the world that we live in. This is an age of cool. This is an age of not feeling very much for anything. This is an age of being detached and cynical. And so it produces a people like this.

If you see Laodiceanism in the world, it is in the church. Because the people in the church have come out of the world and they have to live in the world. So they are being bombarded by this attitude all the time. So we, in the church—without maybe even

realizing it—have the same cool, detached, even bored, and apathetic feeling and it ends up being how we express ourselves toward God and His way. It is just bland, blah. There is no fire.

And so Jesus says, “I wish you were one way or the other. I can’t take this middle ground.”

Let us define what ‘zeal’ is before we go any further. The primary word for ‘zeal’ in the New Testament is *ze/los*. Obviously we get our word ‘zeal’ from *ze/los*. Therefore it really helps us very little in understanding the term. If you go and look in the lexicons, you will find that basically the Greeks use *ze/los* the same way we use ‘zeal’ and so it is very difficult to really get a grasp.

But if we look at the underlying word for *ze/los*, we find that its root is the word *zeo*. It is a primary word in Greek and it means ‘to be hot’—not as in ‘good looking’ but as in being ‘quite warm,’ to be very hot, to have heat.

If you are talking about a liquid, say water, this word would be translated as ‘boil.’ It is not just hot water, it is boiling water. We are talking about an extreme of heat, not just a little bit of heat. ‘Warmth’ would be a little bit of heat, but this is ‘boiling hot.’

If you are talking about something solid like wood or metal, this word could be used for the glow of the embers or the glow of the metal. It is that hot. It is so hot that it would burn you. It is not a little bit of heat; it is excessive heat, extreme heat.

So words like ‘ardor’ and ‘fervor’ which also express heat are very good synonyms for this word. It shows a kind of passion and intensity. As a matter of fact, ‘intensity’ is another good synonym for ‘zeal.’ So you have all these words that give the same type of meaning: ardor, fervor, fervency, and intensity.

*Zelos* also has a negative sense which has come down to us, except it is spelled with a ‘j’—jealousy. That is also a heat or a passion but it has been turned to evil purposes; it is no longer good, it is zeal for a bad thing. So it is kind of a fiery wrath to do harm to another, because as Shakespeare says about a jealous woman: “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” That is the kind of idea you get—just a white hot wrath against whoever did this terrible thing. But we are not going to get into jealousy. That takes us off into another area. I want to talk more about the heat of zeal and how it is used in the New Testament.

The New Testament contains four primary connotations on how the word ‘zeal’ is used

and how it works in, or against, Christianity. Maybe as we go through this, you will see what I mean.

1. Holy fervor: On the one hand, it is righteous indignation, righteous wrath against what is evil; on the other hand, it is great ardor for doing what is good.
2. Hostility and ill will: We will see this as we talk about how the Jews worked during the first century against the church. They had a zeal, but it was not a good zeal. It was full of hostility and ill will.
3. Human jealousy: You will find that *ze/los* and some of its forms are found in the list of sins that Paul goes through. He mentions jealousy as something that we have got to get rid of. It is the bad zeal.
4. Devotion to a person and/or a desire or enthusiasm to attain goals.

Devotion to a person: A captain would be devoted to his superior officer and would model himself after that superior officer. You see this a lot in hierarchical systems, where a person would be devoted to another one whom he emulates. And of course, you can easily see how it would work in Christianity—our being devoted to Christ.

Desire or enthusiasm to attain goals: You are excited about reaching the top of Mount Everest—you could have a zeal for doing that. Paul had a zeal to go to the Gentiles. It was his goal to get to Rome, it was his goal to go to Spain, and he put in everything he could to get there.

Now, as we go through the New Testament and look at various places where zeal is used, you will have to really look at the context to tell which one of these is meant—whether it is holy fervor, ill will, jealousy, or an enthusiasm for reaching a goal or being devoted to a person—and it is pretty clear in the context how they are used. So we are not going to necessarily go into those. But I think if we see them in these four different ways, we are able to get a better grasp of what is going on.

Overall, if you get nothing else out of this sermon and any of the definitions that I have given you, or any of the ways of describing it, we could say that *zeal represents intense effort and emotional energy focused on a goal*. So you can see two areas there: It is an

emotional drive and it is the intense effort that you put into it. It is something where you just gear up and you put everything into whatever it is you are trying to attain whatever the goal is. So zeal represents intense effort and emotional energy focused single-mindedly on a goal.

Under that simple nonspecific definition (because you could use that in a wide variety of senses—spirituality, hostility, carnality, or jealousy—and it works for all of those) we can say that none of us is without zeal. We all are zealous about something.

The most bland person you know is zealous about something. You probably just do not know; you have not reached that person yet in his inner being to find out what it is that really gets him excited—it might be classical music or stamp collection. But we see it a lot in people.

People can be intensely zealous about a sports team. We call them ‘fans.’ And then there is the uber-fan who dresses in his team stuff when he goes to the game and he is the one who is crazy out there and he just thinks that his team is the best that has ever been and no one can change his mind. He is the fanatic.

Some people do the same sort of thing about a brand of coffee. We all have our feelings for this and some people really get into their coffee.

Other people will not drive anything but a Honda (or Toyota, or Chevy, or Ford) and they are fanatic in a way. They are zealous about the particular make of car. They just think it is the cat’s meow and there is just no arguing it.

Other people fixate on sportspersons or movie stars. They put up posters of their star on the walls and they idolize that person.

These are all aspects of zeal. People have this intense focus and energy on those particular things.

One theologian commented, “Zeal runs in our veins for what we love and against what we hate.” It is whatever gets us excited. Whether we are intensely *for* something or intensely *against* something, this is zeal coming out. We all have a zeal for something.

Now, as Christians, our zeal is to be properly motivated and properly directed. There is such a thing as a true godly zeal. It has to be differentiated from our extreme likes of things in this world and it has got to come first. Our zeal for God and for His way of life and for His Kingdom has to be our primary zeal—the thing we get most excited about.

So we can say that Christian zeal must be an earnest desire and a concern and a pursuit of everything that we know pertaining to God, His way, and His Kingdom. So we earnestly desire it. We are concerned about coming to a greater understanding of it and we are concerned about how we respond to it, and then we pursue. We cannot just feel; there has got to be that action, that motivation to do. Otherwise it is just an emotion, just a feeling, and that is not enough.

We understand that this godly zeal is not merely feelings, but motivation to action. It is not just feeling and not just motivation; it has got to include the action as well. It has got to work from how we feel about it to being driven to do something and actually doing it. It is the whole process. If it stops at any point along that spectrum of things—along that runway to takeoff—it is going to be a failure. It will not be real zeal. So it has got to have the feeling, it has got to have the drive and it has got to have the doing. It has got to lead to some sort of action. So if we understand that, we can understand that it describes the very opposite of complacency that we see here in Revelation chapter 3.

The Laodiceans had zeal. But they had it for the wrong things. Maybe they had a feeling for God, but it did not lead to any sort of drive and certainly it did not lead to doing. They did not show Christ the proper response to Him. He says very clearly in verse 15: “I know your works.” He knew what they were doing, and the fact is they were not doing anything. All their efforts were for themselves. They were doing nothing on His behalf and their feelings for Him were lukewarm. They never got into the stage where they had built up enough steam because their water would not boil. It never got enough steam to move the locomotive as it were. They were just stuck. They were lukewarm, tepid for Him. They never did anything.

So remember that zeal is like a flame that brings a pot to a boil. And then, once that water is boiling, it can be used and it is used to do something good. So zeal causes our love and conviction for God to heat up so we pursue what pleases Him. Remember, it is ‘for’ something but it is also ‘against’ something. So the zeal heats up, we pursue what pleases God, and then it will also help us fight what dishonors Him or what is not good.

So it can work both ways: You can have a zeal for doing something good for God, but you can also have a zeal for doing something that will defeat sin, or maybe stop somebody from doing something bad against God. We will see this in one of the examples.

So we can say that zeal is spiritual heat, spiritual energy that flows out through the fruit of the Spirit.

Think of it this way: Our zeal flows out in love for the brethren. Our zeal flows out in joy and how we live our lives. Our zeal flows out in the peace that we keep in our family and amongst our families and in the church. Our zeal flows out in patience and how we deal with one another because we zealously want everyone to get along and to just wait for God to act. Our zeal flows out in gentleness towards someone who maybe have fallen, or someone who needs a bit of mercy and help.

But it is the zeal that boils the water to get us to act in a godly way and then we can act with passion, with compassion, with a bit of ardor in helping others, and it comes out in the fruit of the Spirit that we are supposed to show to one another. So we could say that zeal is not a virtue on its own.

Notice when you see ‘the fruit of the Spirit,’ zeal is not one of those things. It is not one of those virtues necessarily that we are trying to build like that. But we can say that zeal is a quality that affects every one of our Christian virtues. It is something that adds a bit more—value-added. It is value-added to our love. It is value-added to our patience. It is value-added to our faith. Because it makes it hot.

For instance, *agape* love can be shown in an almost cold way where you do what is right and you just do it because it needs to be done. But, on the other hand, if you add zeal to love, you get a compassionate love like Christ had. He did not do things without feeling. He felt for the people. He always had compassion on them and it affected how He acted toward them—He healed them, He taught them, He worked with them. Whatever it was He did, He did out of love, and it was His zeal that gave Him that value-added aspect to the various fruits of the Spirit that He showed.

So we can be zealous in the way we love one another. We can be zealous in the way we express our hope to one another. We can be zealous in extending mercy and dealing gently. Think about how zeal will make any of those virtues that much better because it is done with a bit of earnestness and fire that helps to bind us together and to get things done.

Let us go to an example of Jesus Christ. It is actually the only example of Jesus Christ where zeal is pointed out specifically. This is back in John 2—right at the beginning of His ministry. This is the section right after He turns the water into wine, so it is that early in the ministry. As a matter of fact, this happened at His first Passover—within that first year—during His ministry

**John 2:13-17** Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and

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sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

This is the only passage in the entire gospel that contains the word *zeal* where it specifically points out Christ doing something with zeal.

Zeal runs in our veins for what we love and against what we hate. That is what we are seeing here. Jesus exhibits His love for God and His honor and dignity and holiness, and He shows His zeal against those who defiled and degraded the house that represented His presence among His people and also against those who defrauded the people who came to worship. So His zeal—for what is good and godly and against what is evil—motivated Him to take action.

So He took the time to make a whip of cords. This was not something where He just went off and did a spur of the moment thing. It was certainly righteous indignation. He was hot. He was passionate. His little pot was boiling over, you might say. But He took the time to make a whip of cords. He thought about this and what He was going to do. He was angry and justifiably so. He went about and in His zeal drove out the moneychangers and all the animals there and really got some people excited. It made them hate Him.

The disciples were thinking about this. They were highly steeped in the Old Testament. When they saw what He was doing, this verse from Psalm 69:9 popped into their heads: "Zeal for Your house has eaten me up." They must have seen in Jesus that the zeal for God just totally consumed Him. They could see that He had blocked everything else out and all He thought about was just this single-minded intensity that He was going to uphold the honor of God's Temple.

The quotation here that the disciples remembered can be understood in two different ways, and I think both of them apply. The first might be the easiest to see.

What is said here ("zeal for Your house has eaten me up") could mean that Christ's zeal would ultimately lead to His death. His zeal would be the reason why He would be crucified because it would finally push things to a crisis point and the Jews would act. And it did.

As I mentioned before, this happened at the beginning of His ministry. So, immediately, He was set as an antagonist to the Sadducees especially because they were the ones controlling the Temple. But the way the Jews were doing things at that time, He showed by His actions here that He was totally against what they were doing—they had defiled the Temple and they were doing things against how God had said that they were to be done when He set things up in the Old Testament. So this act, at the beginning of His ministry, foreshadowed His later cleansing of the Temple right before His crucifixion and that became the final straw.

Let us go to Mark 11 and we will see from Mark's standpoint how this second cleansing of the Temple affected the Jews.

**Mark 11:15-18** So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.

This is only a few chapters away from His arrest. This is in the final week of His life. They said, "Enough is enough." Caiaphas the high priest said, "One man must die for the people".

So that is the first way we can look at it, that the zeal would ultimately end with His death. It would consume Him.

The second, and it may be more applicable to us, is that "zeal for Your house has eaten me up" can be paraphrased as "My zeal for God has consumed my life." In other words, His zeal to do what God wanted Him to do was His chief desire and He would spend every ounce of His energy—all His life would be poured into doing it. I think that one actually works a little better, but the other is certainly applicable.

So, Jesus, in showing what He did here in John 2, illustrated or exemplified that He would do the works of God until He dropped in His tracks. It totally consumed Him. He was there to do a job. He was there to preach a message. He was going to do it and nothing would stop Him. The fire of His fervor for God and His way would consume all

His time and all His efforts.

We can see this in several accounts in His ministry. Let us go to Mark chapter 1. This is also early in His ministry.

**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 [all the sick and the all demon-possessed in the whole area came to Him]. 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.

Let us move over to Mark 6. Mark writes:

**Mark 6:53-56** When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. Wherever He entered into villages, cities, or in the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.

We get the impression here that wherever Jesus went, all of these huge crowds came to Him and they asked Him to do these healings, and He would do one after the other until just about anyone—if not everyone—had been healed. He was kind of like Teddy Roosevelt that way. He had an unflagging energy to do the work of God.

Let us go to John chapter 4. This is after He had spoken to the woman at the well. We find out in the first few verses of this chapter that He had been very weary and He had sent the disciples to get Him some food and bring it back to Him because He was weary, so He was going to stay there at the well.

**John 4:31-34** 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” [of course the disciples misunderstood]. 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.”

That was His sustenance that would keep Him going and He was ready to move on.

**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.

Jesus was going to finish the job in the time that was allotted to Him.

So what we have seen with Jesus and His fervor for God—to do the work, to finish His ministry, to help the people—is connotation number one that we saw earlier. This is holy fervor, as only Jesus can show. But that is Jesus. He is the Son of God. He had the Holy Spirit without measure. He had a clear mission. He knew what God’s will was and He went ahead and felt He had to do it. That is Jesus.

What about us? We are not nearly to His level. How do we show proper zeal? Now, clearly, the kind of zeal that the Jews displayed is wrong. Let us go to Acts 9. We will use the apostle Paul (or Saul, as he was at the time) as an example.

**Acts 9:1-2** 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.

This was the zeal of the Jews: It was hostile and full of ill will. This is connotation number two. This is zeal that is full of hostility and ill will. So this is the wrong kind.

But in the same chapter we have the calling of Paul and things changed just like that. In Galatians 1 we find how that remarkable change happened. He says:

**Galatians 1:15-18** 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

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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.

**Galatians 1:21-24** 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.

He changed from persecuting the church to being its most diligent, most intense, and fervent advocate in the blink of an eye. He was so full of the commission that God had given him to do that he immediately did not choose to go to flesh and blood, he said, but went out into the wilderness where he could commune with God.

**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!

**I Corinthians 15:8-10** Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

So he put his whole heart into the commission that he had been given from God. He tirelessly preached the gospel in city after city, region after region, and it went to all the Gentiles that he could possibly reach in his lifetime. He knew that his life after his calling was absolutely undeserved, that he had been given this glorious ministry, and he was so grateful for God's calling and grace that he felt bound to give his all to God. And so he did. By the time we reach the end, in II Timothy 4, he says:

**II Timothy 4:6-7** 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.

And boy did he! He had given his all to Christ. We can say that this could be holy fervor

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(connotation number one) but it also has parts of connotation number four (enthusiasm to attain a goal and a devotion to a person). That was what motivated Paul to do all his works.

And so it is with the zeal of all the biblical greats. We can read about the zeal of Moses or Joshua, Caleb, Phinehas, David, Elijah, Daniel, and others that were in Scripture who gave everything that they had for God. The prophets died giving their all and we can marvel at their faith and self-sacrifice.

But what about us? How can we show our zeal for God and His way? Because even what Paul did seems beyond us.

Let us go to Romans chapter 12. Remember that zeal is not necessarily a virtue by itself. It is a 'how,' not a 'what,' meaning that zeal describes the heat, the energy, the motivation, the desire, the conviction, and the confidence behind our virtuous acts. It is our attitude, our feeling that we express and which motivates us to do things.

So here we have Romans 12. Romans 12 is the first salvo of the practical aspects of the doctrine that Paul had explained in the first 11 chapters. He starts it saying, "Well, now present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God. That's your reasonable service because of the grace that was given to you. You now are owned lock, stock, and barrel by Jesus Christ and God the Father, and so you are now bound as His slave—the slave of righteousness—to give yourself wholeheartedly to whatever He wants you to do—to lay down your life as a living sacrifice to do all these things."

From verse 9 on, we have a list of things that Paul suggests that we do. Let us go through this and think of zeal.

**Romans 12:9-18** 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.

Any kind of godly activity can be done with zeal. I have just given you, from Paul, a list of godly activities. Every one of these things can be done with zeal. You could do any of these things or all of them wholeheartedly, meaning with singleness of focus and with dogged perseverance, that you are motivated to do these things and to do them for God.

So, because we have been granted grace and our lives are now supposed to be lived as a living sacrifice, we have the freedom to do these things with zeal because we do not care what the world thinks. Because we are fully owned by God and these are the things He wants us to do.

Maybe you have a weakness in one or two of these areas or all of them; you have to decide for yourself. But pick one of these things to concentrate on. Pick it, focus on it, and fulfill it with *zeal*, putting your all into exemplifying that particular Christian act—whatever it is.

If you decide to pick ‘praying steadfastly,’ put your all into praying and pray steadfastly with perseverance. Do it a lot, all the time. As Paul says, pray without ceasing.

If you choose, let us say, ‘loving without hypocrisy’ (let us say you have a problem with that—you love one person but not another because of this reason or whatever), love without hypocrisy. Put your all into it. Loving without hypocrisy can be done with zeal. Put others first. That is another one.

Or ‘don’t be wise in your own opinions.’ If you have a problem with stating your opinions and thinking that you are right and no one else is, work on this one. Be zealous that you are not going to put your opinions before other people and shove it down their throats.

I have just given you a few examples.

(Romans 12) verse 11: “not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Did you know that is probably the best biblical definition of zeal? Right there in the midst of all these things he is telling us to do, he tell us the attitude we are supposed to do it in. And what he does is he gives us this exhortation to zeal and defines it negatively, positively, and then he gives us the goal of zeal.

First, negatively, zeal does not lag in diligence. It is not lazy, it is not slothful, but it is active and intense and tireless.

And then he defines it positively. He says zeal is fervency of spirit, meaning, it is an

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attitude or a drive that is boiling over in desire to accomplish the goal—whatever that goal is. So it is passionate, ardent, eager, enthusiastic to do what is right and good. So it is fervent in spirit. And the goal of course is to serve the Lord to fulfill His desires for us and for His church and for His Kingdom.

As we go from here, let us remember what it says in Titus 2:14: 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.”