

Cloak Of Zeal

Becoming Zealous for Good Works

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At the conclusion of His admonition to the Laodiceans, Jesus tells the end-time church to “be zealous and repent”:

Revelation 3:19 (RSV) Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

We can infer that a primary characteristic of the Laodiceans is they lack zeal—they are lukewarm. As we examine ourselves during this period of pre-Passover reflection, a key question we must ask ourselves individually: does God consider us to be zealous? It’s a straightforward Laodicean litmus test. To be Laodicean and lukewarm is to lack zeal.

But what is zeal? The original Hebrew word, *qinah* (pronounced *kin-aw'*, Strong’s 7068), can be translated into English as both *zeal* and *jealousy*. In Isaiah 9:7 we see “The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this,” but in Zechariah 8:2, “I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy; with great fervor I am jealous for her.”

The Greek words translated *zeal* (*zay'-los*, noun 2205 and *zay'-la*, verb 2206) mean to have an enthusiastic devotion to a cause, ideal, or goal, and tireless diligence in its furtherance. Synonyms for *zealous* include fervent, ardent, passionate, devout, devoted, committed, dedicated, hard-core, enthusiastic, eager, vigorous, energetic, intense, fierce. The word *zeal* captures a notion of being on fire, inflamed, with ardor and fervor. Recall Hebrews 12:29 “Our God is a consuming fire,” and Psalm 119:139 “My zeal has consumed me.”

Psalm 69:9 (KJV) For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up;...

Paraphrasing several commentaries: “My zeal and strong desire to promote your glory, God, has absorbed all others and been so great as to literally consume me.” It is like a devouring fire that cannot be constrained. Zeal is represented by the idea of intense heat.

In John 2 we see this Old Testament verse quoted and applied to our Savior Jesus Christ as he made a whip of cords and drove the money changers out of the temple:

John 2:17 (KJV) And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

This zeal for the house of God in our Savior Jesus Christ literally and figuratively consumed him through His ultimate sacrifice. Our Savior is zealous for God’s temple! That burning zeal has been transferred from the physical temple to the spiritual temple in us where God dwells!

Isaiah 42:13 (KJV) The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.

We see the Hebrew word *qinah* translated as *jealously* this time, but we see the word picture here of a warrior prepared, enraged, heated up, and zealous for battle.

In Isaiah 59:17, we read the description of God's armor, and we should recall Paul's description of God's armor in Ephesians. But notice a difference here in Isaiah 59:17:

Isaiah 59:17 (KJV) For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

Our God wears His zeal as a cloak that surrounds Him and all that He does. We may not think of a cloak as a vital part of a soldier's armor. In fact, we likely have a false impression that the Roman soldiers went everywhere dressed in a tunic and boots. But without a cloak the soldier faced bitter and painfully cold nights unprotected from the weather.

The most common cloak consisted of a simple rectangular segment of cloth fastened by a metal clasp and worn on top of the armor. The fabric was made of unwashed wool, saturated with natural oil for water-resistance and traditionally dyed bright red. The cloak provided warmth, could be used as makeshift bedding, and even be combined with another cloak to form shelter.

To understand the importance of proper soldier clothing, one can simply read history. Countless examples, including the failed German drive towards Moscow in World War II and George Washington's army at Valley Forge, clearly show how important proper clothing is in battle. There is a noticeable edge to a better equipped warrior. A cold and wet soldier is demotivated and certainly not performing at peak.

Just as our Savior Jesus Christ is covered with the cloak of zeal and literally consumed with zeal for the house of God, we too, as Christian soldiers, must wear our cloak of zeal to ensure we are operating at our peak—fired up and hot for battle against our carnality. We must, as Paul exhorts in Ephesians 6:13, "take the whole armor of God," which we see includes His cloak of zeal.

Our Great God is zealous, and while some equate zeal with the sheer emotions of enthusiasm, eagerness, and excitement, this is not accurate. Godly zeal is grounded on determination, conviction, aggressive dedication, and unrelenting action. It is being passionately committed to and always actively and eagerly working towards the achievement of a goal.

If that definition sounds somewhat familiar, it should. It is also the definition of agape love. Agape is not a sheer emotion. Agape is being passionately committed to and always actively working towards what is best for the God family. Agape and zeal are inextricably linked—two sides of the same coin—a fervent desire always accompanied by action.

What is interesting is that the admonition to the 7th church, Laodicea, is in fact very similar to that of the 1st church, Ephesus. Christ says to Ephesus that they had left their first love. They were less glowing and not as ardent as before. They were in a gradual state of decline, and while they still followed the motions and maintained the doctrines of religion, they showed less ardor of affection toward God and the God family. They lost their zeal

Another admonition from Paul is in Titus 2, where four successive scriptures really “pack a punch!” Let us reflect on the whole armor of God and His cloak of zeal that ties in perfectly here:

Titus 2:11-14 (NKJV) For the grace of God that brings salvation has 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 the great God and our Savior 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.

Paul makes it clear that the plan of salvation has been revealed and announced. God’s plan has been revealed to us and teaches us what we must do in this present world—deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live in self-control over our carnal propensities. We are to live righteously toward our fellow-man and in unity with God’s way of life.

God’s plan revealed through his Spirit creates an eagerness (might I say a zeal in us) to be always expecting, waiting, and anxiously preparing for the glorious coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are to be in a constant state of making ready, not knowing when it will come. As we have been clearly taught in Dr. Maas’ sermon, *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*, and Pat Higgins’ article *Watch What?*, the kind of watching that Christ commands requires diligent, focused activity and daily spiritual preparation. Awareness of world events and prophecy is important, but our zeal should be focused on what really matters!

In Titus 2:14, Paul summarizes what really matters. Christ has redeemed us—outright purchased our freedom from iniquity. Through His zeal and ultimate sacrifice, He purified and made us His peculiar people. *Peculiar*, as in Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 7:6 and Deuteronomy 26:18. Those that hear, respond, repent, and obey become a peculiar treasure to Him above all people that have ever lived on the face of the earth!

And why has Christ made us His own? So that we would become like Him. So that we would do what He did and does. So that we would become a people who are zealous of good works. Zealous for good works is a very broad admonition that includes service “to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). The Godly widow example in I Timothy 5:10 “diligently followed every good work”

We are called to follow Christ and to share in His zeal for the house of God that consumed Him. We are called to a life of self-sacrifice to be zealous for every good work. This means always actively working to give our obedience, our time, our energy, our goods, our money, our love, our forbearance, our forgiveness, so that in all we do, we Glorify God and build up His Church!

As we put on His cloak of zeal, we find the love of Christ now constrains us and we no longer live for ourselves. It is the link that unites us to Him who gave Himself for us, redeemed us from all iniquity, cleansed us and made us a special people of His own in the bonds of an everlasting loving kindness. We are transformed, with the love of Christ as the source and power of our love to Him and to His people. His agape love, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, creating the burning zeal that grows, consumes and overtakes us. It builds and builds the way of *give* until it is no longer able

to be constrained by our prideful way of *get*. And like a volcano of hot lava, God's Spirit in us erupts as we become zealous of good works for God and His people. This is our high calling, our sole reason for living.

Why then are we so distracted?

Philippians 1:9-11 (KJV) And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

As we complete our pre-Passover reflection, let us meditate on our level of zeal for the house of God. Our Great Omni-agape creator is zealous. He wears His zeal as a cloak that surrounds Him and all that He does. His zeal for the house of God literally consumed our savior—He held and holds nothing back!

How about us? Do we find ourselves distracted by this world and not giving God our zealous works? Do we find ourselves not giving God's family our zealous good works? Can we readily point to daily actions of self-sacrifice (prayers, emails, cards, calls, gifts, forgiveness, love)? Is it hard to remember the last time we entertained the brethren? Do we find ourselves guilty of choosing to not spend time with our brothers and sisters in Christ? If so, we are in danger of being spewed out as lukewarm. Let us acknowledge our lukewarm state, return to our first love, and be zealous and repent!

Let us put on "the whole armor of God." As Christian soldiers, let us wear our cloak of zeal to ensure we are operating at our peak, fired-up and hot for battle against our carnality. Let us ignite—through the warmth of His cloak of zeal—our agape love for Him and His family. Let us become like Him—covered, filled, and burning with zeal for the house of God. Literally stirred into flame and consumed by His Spirit of power, agape, and self-control.

Yes, let us do our part to build up the Church of God by being zealous for good works that Glorify Him!