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## On Fire for God

**There are laws at work in the physical world causing us and all things around us to slow down, fall down, run down, break down, and eventually die. Gravity, the attraction between two objects, exerts its constant pull. Friction, the force resisting motion between two objects, hinders things from getting moving and slows them down. Entropy describes how all things gradually move from order to disorder. The flight of an aircraft demonstrates how energy must be expended to overcome these forces. The engines and wings provide power for the plane to overcome friction and lift to overcome gravity so that we experience the miracle of flight.**

Peter challenges us in his second letter to “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (3:18). Yet we know that living the Christian life is difficult because there are spiritual forces at work that constantly hold us down and hinder us from moving forward and upward in our walk with Christ. The Bible identifies these forces as the world, the flesh, and the devil, and they are a constant drag on our Christian lives. There must be spiritual power and energy at work to overcome these forces. God provides this power for those who follow Him, all through what Christ has done for us. There is one aspect of this power that will be helpful for us to study – our zeal for God.

J.C. Ryle, a pastor in the 1800’s wrote wonderful little book, *Practical Religion*. In one chapter he defines *Christian Zeal*:

*Zeal in religion is a burning desire to please God, to do His will, and to advance His glory in the world in every possible way. It is a desire which no man feels by nature — which the Spirit puts in the heart of every believer when he is converted — but which some believers feel so much more strongly than others, that they alone deserve to be called “zealous” Christians.*

*They only see one thing, they care for one thing, they live for one thing, they are swallowed up in one thing; and that one thing is to please God.*

*This desire is so strong, when it really reigns in a person, that it impels them to make any sacrifice-to go through any trouble-to deny themselves anything-to suffer, to work, to labor, to toil, to spend themselves and be spent, and even to die-if only they can please God and honor Christ.<sup>1</sup>*

In Romans 12 Paul moves from sharing the glorious truths of how we are made right with God through faith in what Christ has done to a rather lengthy description

of how believers should live because of that truth. In the midst of this Paul writes:

*<sup>9</sup> Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; <sup>11</sup> not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, <sup>13</sup> contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. **Romans 12:9-13***

In verse 11 Paul exhorts us to be “**fervent in spirit**”. “Fervent” comes from a word that means to “boil with heat” or “to be hot”. Perhaps this is why in evangelical circles a zealous Christian is sometimes described as being “on fire for God”. Zeal for God is described in other places. Elijah exclaimed how “I have been very zealous for the Lord” (1 Kings 19:10). Paul describes how believers should be zealous for spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:12) and zealous in giving (2 Cor. 9:2). He tells Titus to encourage believers to be “zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14). Paul challenges Timothy to “stir up the gift of God which is in you” (2 Tim. 1:6). Peter explains his second letter was written to suffering believers in order to “stir up their minds by way of reminder”. These last two passages exhort believers how to be more fervent and zealous in serving God.

J.C. Ryle is very helpful in describing true Christian zeal this way:

### **True Christian zeal is based on knowledge.**

Paul wrote of those who “have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (Rom. 10:2). These people had a wrong view of salvation and how to be right with God. We can be zealous for the wrong things. Our zeal can be based on emotional experiences rather than on the truth of God’s Word. True Christian zeal is based on the knowledge that we

are sinners before a Holy God and worthy only of His just punishment. Yet God sent His Son to live a perfect life and suffer and die, taking that punishment upon Himself. He rose from the dead, making it possible for those who repent and trust Christ to have new life, our sins forgiven, and His goodness credited to us. This is the knowledge that will give us zeal to live for God and serve Him!

### **True Christian zeal follows after God's Mind and finds examples in God's Word.**

- **Zeal for Personal Holiness.**

"Such zeal will make a man continually feel that sin is the mightiest of all evils, and conformity to Christ the greatest of all blessings. It will make him feel that there is nothing which ought not to be done, in order to keep up a close walk with God." (1 Corinthians 9:27, Philippians 3:13-14).

- **Zeal for the Salvation of Souls**

"Such zeal will make a man burn with desire to remove the darkness which covers the souls of multitudes, and to bring every man, woman, and child he sees to the knowledge of the Gospel."

- **Zeal Against Evil Practices**

"Such zeal will make a man hate everything which God hates and long to sweep it from the face of the earth. It will make him jealous of God's honor and glory, and look on everything which robs Him of it as an offense."

- **Zeal for Maintaining the Truth of the Gospel**

"Such zeal will make a man hate unscriptural teaching, just as he hates sin. It will make him regard religious error as a pestilence which must be stopped, whatever the cost may be. It will make him scrupulously careful about every word in the counsel of God, lest by some omission the whole Gospel would be spoiled."

### **True Christian zeal is tempered with Love.**

If not careful those who are zealous may come across as hateful and angry, particularly in the political realm. True zeal may "hate the sin, but love sinner". If we are truly zealous we will boldly speak the truth, but we will do so in love (Eph. 4:15).

### **True Christian zeal is joined with deep Humility.**

We all tend to pride and self-righteousness over our accomplishments. True zeal is based on the knowledge that we are sinners who can accomplish nothing by our own strength or effort. Any growth at

all is only by the grace of God through what Christ has done for us.

### **How do we grow in our zeal for God?**

The important question is how do we grow and maintain this true zeal for God. How do we daily overcome the spiritual forces that are constantly dragging us down and holding us back in our walk with God?

### **Constantly Focus on the Gospel**

Peter wrote his second letter to "stir up our minds by way of reminder". We need our minds constantly stirred up and reminded of all that Christ has done for us. We need to "preach the gospel to ourselves" so that we never begin to take for granted the grace and mercy God has shown to us.

### **Consider Jesus' Example**

It is helpful when pursuing any Christian action or virtue to consider Jesus' own example and how He fulfilled that perfectly. When Jesus overturned the tables in the temple, it was said of him "...Zeal for Your house will consume me." (John 2:17; Psalm 69:9). He was consumed with zeal for God's glory and God's will. That zeal is what compelled and sustained Him to go to the cross for us.

### **Heed Jesus' Warnings**

In Revelation 2 and 3 we find letters from Christ Himself to seven churches in Asia Minor. In two of those letters we find warnings to the churches to revive their zeal for the Lord. Jesus warns the Church at Ephesus that they had "left their first love" and they needed to "repent, and do the deeds they did at first" (Rev. 2:1-7). Jesus rebuked the Laodoean church for being lukewarm and that they needed to "be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:14-19). Let us remember these churches were made up of **church members** who needed to be more zealous for Lord!

***There are forces at work constantly holding us down and hindering us from moving forward in our Christian lives. These forces may be even more pronounced here in the statehouse. It is our zeal for God which will help us overcome these forces. We hope and pray that our Bible studies might be a help in maintaining and growing in your zeal for God as you serve in capitol.***

<sup>1</sup>Ryle, J.C. *Practical Religion* (Kindle Locations 2823-2824). . Kindle Edition.

#### **BIBLE STUDIES**

Thursdays, 12:00 Noon

TREASURER 'S CONFERENCE ROOM

(EB 54 – Basement East Wing)