

“Misplaced Zeal”  
(Romans 10:1-2)  
(Preached at Trinity, January 17, 2009)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we've seen, **Chapters 9-11** have the Jews as the focus. Paul was seeking to bring unity between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Paul began the section in **Chapter 9** by lamenting the hardness of the unbelieving Jews. He said he would give his very soul if they would but turn to Christ.  
**Romans 9:2-3** – “That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.  
<sup>3</sup> For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:”
2. At the end of **Chapter 9** Paul shares why the Jews were continuing in unbelief. It is because they were seeking acceptance before God through their own righteousness. The perfect righteous demanded by God alluded them. Why? Because they did not seek it through faith in the righteousness of Christ.  
**Romans 9:31-32** – “But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. <sup>32</sup> Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.”
3. They were proud of their efforts and would not accept God's free gift through Christ. Jesus was a stumbling block to them. He was offensive to them. This situation causes Paul to return again to express his great desire for the salvation of the Jews.  
**Romans 10:1** – “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”
4. Paul tells us their problem wasn't a lack religion. It wasn't a lack of sincerity. It wasn't a lack of zeal. In fact, they were filled with zeal. They were passionate about Judaism and the Law. Their problem was their zeal was not based on ignorance.  
**Romans 10:2** – “For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.”
5. Paul explains their ignorance further in **Verse 3**  
**Romans 10:3** – “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”
6. Zeal is a good thing but ignorance is deadly.  
This morning I want to set before you three elements to this statement.
  - A. The importance of zeal
  - B. The indispensable need of knowledge.
  - C. The danger of zeal without knowledge

- I. The importance of zeal – Paul is in no way diminishing the importance of zeal
- A. Salvation demands coming with passion and zeal
1. Christianity is not cold and passionless. It isn't simply holding to certain doctrines. It isn't embracing a certain religion.
  2. The one coming to Christ is stirred to the depth of his soul  
**Psalm 63:1** – “O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;”
  3. Jesus described the nature of those entering His Kingdom  
**Matthew 11:12** – “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”  
Those entering the kingdom come forcefully  
“the violent take it by force”  
“violent” - *bia*, *zw* - forceful, violent  
“take it by force” - *a`rpa*, *zw* - to seize, carry off by force
  4. Again He describes it in the Gospel of Luke  
**Luke 16:16** – “The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.”
  5. Coming to Christ demands a great expenditure of energy  
*Thomas Watson* – “The right way to take heaven is by storm; or thus, none get into heaven but violent ones. Though heaven be given to us freely, yet we must contend for it. . . The Christian is resolved, come what will, he will have heaven.”
  6. When a man has a desire to enter the kingdom it becomes his chief work
    - a. It will never be entered by those who desire to keep one foot in the world
    - b. It will never be entered by those who toy with God.  
It is not for weaklings and compromisers  
*Thomas Watson* – “Where there is half a resolution—a will to be saved and a will to follow sin—it is impossible to be violent for heaven.”
    - c. Those coming to Christ always make it their primary concern  
*Jonathan Edwards* – “Besides desires after salvation, there should be an earnest resolution in persons to pursue this good as much as lies in their power. Those who are pressing into the kingdom of God, have a disposition of heart to do everything that is required, and that lies in their power to do, and to continue in it. They have not only earnestness, but steadiness of resolution: they do not seek with a wavering, unsteady heart, by turns or fits, being off and on; but it is the constant bent of their soul, if possible to obtain the kingdom of God.”

- B. The Christian life demands pursuing Christ with great energy and passion – The Christian is zealous for Christ.
1. Christianity knows nothing of lukewarm service to Christ
  2. The Christian has fallen in love with Jesus. There is a relationship  
**Song of Solomon 7:10** – “I *am* my beloved's, and his desire *is* toward me.”
  3. All of our works, our desires, our obedience rests in our zeal for Christ
  4. Christianity is not a set of rules. It's finding Christ irresistible. It's desiring His honor and glory upon the earth – above all else.  
It's being zealous for Him.
- II. The indispensable need of knowledge.
- A. Knowing God demands knowledge about Him
1. The word here is not the usual word **gnw/sij** but **evpi, gnwsij**  
It means exact or precise knowledge
  2. False doctrine is an assault upon the person of God – The Bible teaches that God is truth. The fullness of His being is truth  
Jesus said of the Father –  
**John 17:17** – “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.  
Jesus said of Himself –  
**John 14:6** – “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”  
In **John 14:17** Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of Truth”
  3. One of the great works of the church is that of teaching – an essential element of the Great Commission. Christianity is a religion of doctrine. James Montgomery Boice – “Christianity is primarily a teaching religion. It is an always has been.”
  4. It is the chief work of the pastor – he must be able to teach  
**Ephesians 4:11-15** – “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;  
<sup>12</sup> For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: <sup>13</sup> Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: <sup>14</sup> That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; <sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ.”  
**1 Timothy 5:17** – “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.”

5. This was Paul's chief command to Timothy  
**1 Timothy 4:13** – "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."  
**1 Timothy 4:16** – "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."  
**2 Timothy 4:2-3** – "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.  
<sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;"

- B. You have to have certain knowledge to be saved
  1. You have to know about the holiness of God
  2. You have to know about the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross
  3. You have to know about God's demand for faith and repentance.
  4. The Bible uses this word to describe this essential knowledge  
**1 Timothy 2:4** – "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."  
**2 Timothy 2:25** – "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;"  
**2 Timothy 3:7** – "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."  
**Titus 1:1** – "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness;"
  5. The problem for the Jews was their ignorance. They failed to see their absolute need of Christ. Only His righteousness will bring our pardon.

### III. The danger of zeal without knowledge

- A. Human beings have always been zealous about religion
  1. We've read of the Prophets of Baal  
**1 Kings 18:26** And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed *it*, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But *there was* no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.  
**1 Kings 18:28** And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.
  2. In the days of Christ's ministry thousands flocked to Him.  
**John 6:1** – "After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is *the sea* of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased."  
 When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday hundreds lined the street shouting the praises of Christ. All would forsake Him less than a week later.

3. The Apostle Paul before his conversion had a religious zeal that led him to persecute Christians.  
**Philippians 3:4** – “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”  
*Even on the very day of his conversion Paul was on his way to have Christians arrested.*
  4. The same is true today. Many groups are passionate about their religion  
 People flock to see Benny Hinn or hear Joel Osteen  
 Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are zealous for new converts
- B. Zeal is no substitute for Christian conversion
1. Paul is declaring the great zeal of the Jews. In a sense their zeal was a good thing. God demands zeal. Their problem was it was a zeal without knowledge.
    - a. Hosea warned 2700 years ago of the danger of a lack of knowledge  
**Hosea 4:6** – “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”
    - b. Their problem was they rejected Christ
  2. Zeal without Christ is a worthless zeal  
 Paul spoke of the worthlessness of religious zeal without a love for Christ and His people.  
**1 Corinthians 13:3** – “And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”
  3. Some people are sadly substituting zeal for a relationship with Christ  
 We can already hear the echo of their voices on the day of judgment  
**Matthew 7:22-23** – “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? <sup>23</sup> And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

#### Conclusion:

1. This is a message that needs to be heard in our relativistic generation where absolutes are frowned upon. What you believe isn’t important. The only thing that’s important is that a person be sincere. Anyone with zeal must surely be accepted by God.
2. Zeal is a good thing. Zeal is an essential thing. But a Christless zeal is worthless.
3. This demands careful examination. What are you zealous over. Look at your life. Look at what excites you. What stirs your heart?