

Marks of True Zeal

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Date: 01 March 2009

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[0:00] So last week, last Lord's Day, we started the next chapter in J.C. Ryle's book, Practical Religion, which is on zeal. This week, like I said last week, we're going to talk about zeal again.

But as a way of review, before we get started, can anyone tell me what we said it means to be zealous? What were some of the attributes? What does it mean to be zealous?

Right. We repeated that phrase, a man of one thing or a woman of one thing. A zealous person is a man of one thing. And what is that one thing?

What sets apart Christian zeal just from a regular zealous person? Roger. Right. There's a burning desire.

Zeal is not any one action. It's not one, any one activity. But it's a burning desire that the Spirit of God puts inside of a Christian to please God.

[1:16] So the next question. I gave a whole bunch of examples of people that were zealous. Do you remember some of those examples? David fighting Goliath.

David fighting Goliath. What did we say he was zealous for? That all the nations might know that there's a God in Israel. Right. David was going to stake his life on this proposition that there is a God in Israel and he is worth fighting for.

And he's worth doing great things for. Another example, if you remember. The early church. How were they zealous?

The apostles. The apostles. The apostles. The apostles. The church. The authorities. They told him not to preach. And they even. Accused him publicly.

Murdering. Christ. Right. Talk about some courage. And. For that. They were beaten and flogged. And the disciples rejoiced.

[2:19] That they were counted worthy. To suffer for the name. That's what zeal. Will do for you. Today we want to continue painting this picture of zeal.

Of what Christian zeal looks like. Last week we did look at several examples. But we want to bring more of what it means to be zealous into the light. What does it mean?

What does it look like for a Christian to be truly zealous? We have five marks of true zeal. Five marks.

And I say true zeal because. For every virtue. Satan has a counterfeit. For every grace there's a counterfeit. That Satan tries to pass off.

And zeal is no different. There's many people who have the appearance of being zealous. And even zealous for Christian things. But they're frauds.

[3:14] They don't. They're not the real genuine thing. True Christian zeal has marks that fraudulent zeal never has. And so that's what we're going to be looking at this morning.

These five marks. The first mark of true zeal is this. It must be zeal according to knowledge.

Zeal according to knowledge. Romans 10. 1-2 says this. Brothers. My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites. Is that they may be saved.

For I can testify about them. That they are zealous for God. But their zeal is not based on knowledge. So the Israelites were zealous for God.

But their zeal was not based on knowledge. So we can learn from that. That it's not good enough to be zealous for God. And that might sound surprising.

[4:17] But these people were zealous for God. But it was misguided zeal. It was unintelligent zeal. And so it did no good. It did positive harm.

And so we can also notice here that we can be holding a counterfeit. The Israelites were holding this counterfeit zeal. And they thought they had the real thing.

And we can think we have the real thing when we don't. They were zealous. And Paul knew they were zealous. But they had a blind, ignorant enthusiasm. The truth wasn't standing behind it. The truth wasn't standing behind it. Real money has the U.S. government standing behind it. As comforting as that is, the counterfeit dollar...

The counterfeit dollar has nothing standing behind it. If you give someone a counterfeit dollar, what have you given them?

[5:16] It's not a trick question. What have you given them? A piece of paper. You've given them something that's completely worthless. So in the same way, zeal without knowledge is worthless.

It's nothing. So here's a young man. His name's Saul. He's trained by the best teachers. He is a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He's rising above his peers.

He's very unique. And as for zeal, he was persecuting the church. Zeal consumed Saul. And zeal pushed him to study for long hours.

You don't become a Pharisee without lots of study and lots of hard work. Zeal made him a violent man. I don't think we have any idea how violent Saul was.

He would kick in doors. He would arrest men. He would put families into poverty in his zeal. He encouraged the stoning of Stephen. He worked tirelessly to see Christians put to death.

[6:19] And so he says, I persecuted the followers of this way to the death. He was zealous for God. But his zeal was blind and it was ignorant.

Here's Manasseh, the bloodiest king in Israelite history. He sends his own children into the fire to atone for his sins.

He's zealous for his religion. He's zealous for his God. But it was not according to knowledge.

Here's James and John. And they go into a Samaritan village.

And the Samaritans don't receive them. And so they say, Jesus, should we call down fire and destroy this village? And for all their zeal, all they earned was a rebuke.

That you, I don't have that spirit within me that you have. They burned with indignation, but it was just foolish. In our own day, if you drive around Plymouth, or if you live around Plymouth, you can see these two young men.

[7:28] And they have a suit and tie on and a backpack. And they walk around all day. And they're Mormons. And you can see them walking out in all weather.

They are zealous for their faith. But their zeal is misguided. They don't have zeal according to knowledge. So, zeal is like a fire.

It's like a fire. If the fire is in the fireplace, then it's good. But if the fire is running up the living room wall, it burns your house down.

In the same way, zeal is good when knowledge surrounds it. When there's scripture in front of it and behind it and all around it, protecting it and guarding it.

When it leaps over the boundaries of the fireplace, when it leaps over the boundaries of scripture, then it becomes dangerous. It becomes deadly.

[8:28] Saul's zeal was deadly. And it led him to kill people. Al-Qaeda is zealous. Zeal without knowledge.

But it's not according to knowledge. And it leads them to all sorts of violence and death. So, zeal without knowledge is not only dangerous, it's deadly.

It kills others. And it kills the person that has it. It sends that person headlong to hell and twice as fast as they could get there otherwise.

Zeal without knowledge ruins everything it touches. But true zeal is guided by knowledge. It's guided by scriptural truth.

It's kept in its place. And when the fire is kept in the fireplace, then it warms everyone who comes by it. So, if we were to run into a truly zealous person, it warms not only that person, but it warms us up as well.

[9:28] So, whenever you see a zealous person, ask, is this zeal according to knowledge? Do they have scripture to back their zeal up? Do they have verses and text that is motivating their zeal?

And if it's not otherwise, their zeal is a counterfeit. So, that's the first mark.

True zeal is according to knowledge. The second mark of true zeal is that it is from true motives.

So, what should be driving true zeal?

What should the motive behind true zeal be? There. To please God. To positively please God.

To make God happy. To glorify God. Now, the question is, what are some of the false motives that make people zealous?

[10 : 28] What are some of the false motives? Can you think of any? Why people are zealous. Even Christians can be zealous. Ed.

Ed. It motivates myself in the sense that God looks at me and thinks that I'm good. So, it's a self-mortem. Right. I can make myself righteous if I am zealous enough.

And that's the heart of what the Pharisees were about. They were zealous to please God and to earn enough, to have enough merit that God will look upon them and accept them.

What else? What else? What else makes Christians sometimes wrongly zealous? Please man. The love of praise. So, sometimes people can reap praise from Christians by being zealous for religious things.

[11 : 29] So, here's a pastor. And he preaches beautiful sermons. He spends a lot of time working on them and constructing them. He preaches with gusto.

He's constantly working. He's in people's houses. He's in hospitals. He's working hard. He's zealous in the fulfillment of his ministry.

And we can say, so far, so good. But then we open up his suit and tie and we look at his heart and we see it's not zeal for God's glory that's driving him.

It's zeal because he wants people to like him, to praise him, to think well of him. So, recall the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

They sold a piece of property. And they presented part of the money at the apostles' feet pretending like it was the whole price. Now, for the scam to work, if you think about this, for the scam to work, the price that they laid down, the money they laid down, and the price they received for it had to be fairly close.

[12 : 42] I mean, if they sold the property for \$10, people would be like, or if they said they sold the property for \$10, people would be kind of wondering, that doesn't sound right.

The price that they got and the price they laid down had to be fairly close or it wouldn't be believable. So, they're really only gaining very little bit of money percentage-wise from their deceit. But what were they gaining? What were they gaining? Esteem. They just saw Barnabas sell a field and everyone smiled on him and thought that was wonderful.

And so they went and did likewise. So, they gave their money, they sold their land and gave it to the church, not because they loved the poor, and not even so much because they were greedy.

They were greedy, definitely, but because they loved the praise of men. And so they were zealous. Why else can Christians be zealous for wrong reasons?

[13 : 52] For our own party. For our own party? Yeah.

For party spirit. We can be zealous to be Reformed Baptists and not be zealous for Christ. Many people will work hard at their religion, not out of the spirit of love for God, but because it's good for their own church, it's good for their denomination.

And the Pharisees were that way. They would travel over land and sea to make a convert. And it wasn't a convert to God, it was a convert to the Pharisee, the party of the Pharisees.

They were zealous for their own party. Turn with me in your Bibles to Acts 23. Acts 23.

Let me set the scene for you. Paul has been dragged before the Sanhedrin. The chief priests are there, the Sadducees are there, the Pharisees are there. They're all ganging up on him.

[15 : 03] There's one thing they have in common, they want Paul's head. So let's pick up the reading in verse 6. 23 verse 6. Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee.

I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead. When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledged them all. There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously.

We find nothing wrong with this man, they said. What about if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him? And the dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them.

He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring them into the barracks. So, beginning of the meeting, the Pharisees hate Paul.

[16:22] They hate Paul. Then, he cunningly, very craftily, claims that the only reason he's on trial is because he's a Pharisee, and that he believes in the resurrection from the dead.

And that changes everything. Now the Pharisees stand up, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up, and they started arguing that this man's innocent.

Whereas, just five minutes before, they wanted his head. They loved to be a Pharisee. They loved their party to be right.

And truth didn't matter to them. It didn't matter whether Paul was right or wrong. It only mattered that he was a Pharisee at that time.

And, it's sad to say that in our circles, things are not completely different. We have, I guess I shouldn't say in our circles, in the church today, the reality isn't that far away.

[17:29] We have the worship debates where some people believe one thing and some people believe another thing. And, it's not so much the truth that is at stake, but my church or what I say.

Or, we have the debate about baptism. And some people are more interested in defending their particular view of baptism rather than what the biblical truth is.

And so, the same way with church government. They argue for a particular church government as opposed to another one. Not, not because it's biblical, but because it's their own party. It's what they want.

And I'm not saying those things are not important. They are very important. But, they're not important to us because we just want the Reformed Baptist to be raised up and glorified.

We want the truth. We want biblical Christianity. to be right and to be true. So, Christian zeal is guided by right motives.

[18:33] And the party spirit is not a right motive. So, last week we said the Holy Spirit produces zeal. So, if true Christian zeal comes from the Holy Spirit, we should ask, what is the chief end of the Holy Spirit?

Why does the Holy Spirit do what He does? that's a question for you. To glorify Christ.

To glorify Christ. To magnify Christ on the earth. And so, if that's what He's zealous for, and He's producing this work in us, then our zeal should be to magnify Christ by life or death.

Because true zeal comes from the Holy Spirit. And so, you won't have any true zeal unless the Holy Spirit is guiding it right to its target.

If the Holy Spirit's hand is not on the zeal, then it's going to be false zeal. If it's not aiming at the glory of Christ, then it's not aimed at the right target.

[19:44] So, zeal is according to knowledge. It's motivated by true motives, by right motives. And then this is the third mark of true zeal. It's zealous for the things that God is zealous for.

So, it's zealous for the things that God is zealous for. This just comes from just what we said about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit produces zeal, and so we should expect that it's going to guide our zeal into the areas where God himself is really zealous about.

So, what are some of those areas? Well, the first area I just thought of, or I thought of, is true zeal is enthusiastic about personal holiness. It's about personal holiness.

Zeal will make you do extraordinary things to put to death sin. And zeal will make you feel like there is nothing so wicked as sin, because the zeal is coming from the Holy Spirit.

And the conformity to Christ is the greatest of all blessings. So, Jesus, he was zealous for personal holiness. He was zealous for our personal holiness.

[21:03] And we can talk about the cross as showing his ultimate zeal for our personal holiness. But just think about what he said. If your right eye causes you to sin, you pluck it out.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, you chop it off. And he wasn't speaking literally, but the force behind those comments were real.

You take serious, drastic action to kill sin. Jonathan Edwards, in his 70 resolutions, wrote this in number 56.

Resolved, never to give over, nor to slacken my fight against my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be. So, Jonathan Edwards, he put this as a resolution.

This is how he was going to live. That no matter how unsuccessful he might be against his corruptions, he was still going to do everything it took to put it to death. And that is personal, that's zeal for personal holiness.

[22:10] So, zeal will wake you up early in the morning, zeal will get you into the word of God, it will cause you to pray earnestly for holiness, and it will think, it will use its mind, the mind of the

person, to contemplate how can I be conformed more to Christ.

And it will pursue holiness constantly. It's not a race of one week and then you don't run anymore. It's a constant pursuit. This is what Jonathan Edwards said again, this is number 30, resolved to strive to my utmost every week to be brought higher in religion and a higher exercise of grace than I was a week before.

So do you see what his goal was? This is where I am this week, in grace and in holiness. And next week I want to be up here. And the next week I'll be up here.

And the next week I'll be up here. The goal is never to ever go down. And that's the admirable goal. That's a zealous goal. And it's probably not going to be like that in real life with our sin and with the way the world is.

But that is a good goal. So zeal, it will make a man scour the scriptures because he wants to find the lover of his soul.

[23 : 31] And it will make a man study hard to know and understand God better. And zeal will shut his mouth when it's going to sin because he wants holiness.

So true zeal is enthusiastic for personal holiness because God himself is enthusiastic for personal holiness. True zeal is fervent for personal evangelism because God is fervent to see men saved. saved. And the cross is that standing reminder that says that God is zealous to save souls. He has a burning desire to see men saved. And so a zealous man will take up that cause.

And a truly zealous man will want to see sinners saved. Richard Baxter was a Puritan and he was zealous for the souls of men. And so listen to what he asks about our pursuit of souls for Christ. This is what he asked. Is it under the influence of this feeling that I continually live and walk and speak? Is it for this I pray and toil and fast and weep?

[24 : 49] Is it for this I spend and am spent counting it next to the salvation of my own soul, my chiefest joy to be the instrument of saving others? Is it for this that I exist to accomplish this would I gladly die?

Baxter was a zealous man and he wanted to see men's souls saved and God honored that zeal. He went into the town of Kitterminster and no one, there was hardly anyone in church and by the time he left that city, 13 years later I believe, more or less everyone had been saved because he was zealous to see men saved.

True zeal is zealous for public justice, for public justice. Proverbs 11, 1, the Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.

So scales, that's where you measured food and all sorts of goods in the marketplace. dishonest scales, the cheating scales are injustice, they rip off the public, they make a man think he has more food than he does, and so it takes advantage of unsuspecting customers, and God says, I abhor that.

He hates that. He hates when people defraud the public. Our Lord is concerned about public justice, and if you don't believe me, which I'm sure you do, but read Amos, the book of Amos, and see what God thinks about public justice.

[26 : 28] Here's a taste from Amos 2. For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals.

They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed. So, a truly zealous person is going to be concerned about public justice.

A truly zealous person will do something, anything, something big, something small, to put an end to abortion, to sweep it off the face of the earth.

The zealous person will do something for our persecuted brothers and sisters in China and across the world. world. I read of a lawyer this week in China who's been arrested and tortured multiple times for defending his brothers and sisters in court.

And he's eager to suffer to defend his brothers and sisters. He's zealous for it. And we should have that same heart because it's the heart of our Lord.

[27 : 40] It's the heart of our Lord. He was zealous for public justice. And then true zeal.

Remember we're talking about the things that we should be zealous about.

These are things that God is zealous about and so we should be zealous about them. True zeal is passionate for right doctrine. For right doctrine. This is what Ryle says.

Such zeal will make a man hate unscriptural teaching just as he hates sin. So he hates unscriptural teaching. Because false doctrine and lies dishonor God.

So we're not talking about the defense of a party here. We're talking about the truth of God. And a zealous man is going to want to defend the truth of God because truth honors God and falsehood dishonors God.

So wherever you see false doctrine, you'll find all sorts of evil in its train. You'll see all sorts of sins cropping up when there's false doctrine and that will make a man zealous for right doctrine.

[28 : 54] So you're visiting the town of Antioch and you come in late and as you walk in you see a scene before you and there's Paul and he's in the face of Peter.

Peter. And so you nudge the guy next to you and say, what's going on? I mean, why are these two fighting? Why is Paul causing such problems here? And Galatians says because Peter was clearly in the wrong.

Peter was misrepresenting the gospel. If he wasn't saying it with his mouth, he was saying it with his life that the gospel, there was something needed more than grace.

And so he was dividing up the church. He wasn't eating with the Gentile brothers and sisters anymore. He was splitting up the church because he was holding to wrong doctrine.

And Paul was zealous for the truth. And so he withstood Peter to his face in front of everyone. So true zeal is passionate for right doctrine.

[29 : 56] And I think we could talk about a lot more things that God is zealous for. But we don't have the time and I think that's a good sample. So what have we seen so far?

True zeal is according to knowledge. True zeal comes from right motives. True zeal is zealous for the things that God is zealous for. And here's the fourth mark of true Christian zeal.

The fourth mark is this. It is tempered with charity and love. Christian zeal is always tempered with charity and love. It's sad to say but some Christians have a zeal that is fierce and it's angry and it's bitter and their enthusiasm is not at all winsome, not at all gracious, not at all submissive like we learned in James where it's easy to entreat.

There's a harshness to it. So some people have a way when they're standing up for the Christian faith, when they're standing up for the truth, that their zeal does more harm than good.

Their words are just needlessly careless, they're harmful, they're harsh. And so as they seek to defend the fort of Christianity with their zeal, they actually tear down the gate and let people, let the enemies make a mockery of Christianity.

[31 : 28] But a truly zealous person, their zeal is tempered with love and charity. So when you temper steel, that's where this comes from, when you temper steel, you mix chemicals into the iron and you make the steel stronger by the process.

And so when you temper zeal with love and charity, you don't make it weaker, you make it stronger. So every zealous act needs to be couched in love for God and love for men.

And the minute zeal overruns love, then it has become false zeal. It's become sinful enthusiasm. So, authentic zeal, there's a toughness to it.

There's a determination to it. There's a resilience to it. But there's a gentleness to it as well. It's not going to do any more harm than necessary.

It's not going to move ahead hurting people. So listen to Ryle. True zeal will hate sin and yet love the sinner.

[32 : 38] True zeal will hate heresy and yet love the heretic. True zeal will long to break the idol, but deeply pity the idolater. True zeal will abhor every kind of wickedness, but labor to do good even to the vilest of transgressors.

So true zeal is a surgeon. It's decided. Something has to be cut out. It's going to be painful.

We're going to have to cut you open, but we're not going to just, we're going to do the minimal amount of damage. And so, some Christians, the way they address problems in their zeal, it requires a scalpel and they take a meat tenderizer to the operation.

And they do more damage than good. So, true zeal will speak the truth, even when it hurts. But true zeal will always speak the truth in love.

So that's the fourth mark of zeal. And here's the fifth. Of authentic Christian zeal, it is joined to deep humility. The last person to ever know that they are really zealous is the really zealous person.

[33 : 55] The last person to ever know that they're really zealous is the truly zealous person.

Because they come so far short of their desires, of what they want to see happen, what they want to see happen in their life and other people's lives, that their zeal, instead of raising them up and making them proud, makes them humble.

So they aim for the sun. And when they only make it to the moon, they're humbled by it, by their weakness. So, Jonathan Edwards, again, was one of the most zealous men that you'll ever read about.

But he would have to shut himself up in his room for hours on end because he was sobbing and weeping over his sins. And then, George Whitefield.

God used him for the conversion of thousands and thousands of people. And that's a lot for a man to handle and be humble. But this is what he said on the 30th anniversary of his conversion.

He wrote in his journal, Lord, help me to begin to begin to be a Christian. Christian. I just want to get started because I'm not very far down the road.

[35 : 16] And then Martin Luther. Great man. Zealous man. He died with a piece of paper in his pocket that said, we are beggars, this is true.

And that's how he died. He did more good than most men will ever do, but he was humble. Robert Murray McShane was a 19th century Scottish preacher and one of the greatest blessings that God has ever given to the land of Scotland, to the church in general.

In a letter he wrote, none but God knows what an abyss of corruption is in my heart. It is perfectly wonderful that ever God could bless such a ministry.

So he does great good on one hand, but he's deeply humbled on the other. And so where you find self-conceit and selfish ambition and pride, you are not going to find true zeal, because authentic zeal is marked by humility.

So those are the five marks of a genuine Christian zeal. So I would ask you, as a rhetorical question, are you zealous?

[36 : 30] Are you zealous like that? And I think the obvious answer for everyone would have to be no, because if you said yes, you don't pass the last mark.

The answer is no, we're not that way. We're not that way. And so I don't know how anyone could sit here and listen to what I presented, what Ryle taught, and see what genuine zeal looks like, and not feel a little beat up about it.

Because whatever kind of zeal I have, it's not very much like that. So it's like holding up a mirror before our face, and we just find that we're cold.

We're not zealous, or our zeal is running off the tracks. So sometimes I have some zeal, but it's like a train off the tracks.

It's going fast, but to a disastrous end. So what else can we say? What else can we say about the lesson? What else could we do except run to Jesus after this lesson?

[37 : 43] Because I don't have that zeal. And most people here probably don't have that zeal. And so all we could say is, say, forgive me.

I've sinned. I've been cold. I have a cold heart. Will you help me to begin to begin to be a zealous Christian? And if we're ever to be zealous Christians, we have to be forgiven Christians.

We have to realize that Christ has paid the debt for our lack of zeal, for our coldness, and for our carelessness.

And it's not until we drink deep from the gospel that until then we won't be zealous. It's only the person who has drank deep from the gospel that is truly zealous.

So we might stumble across the finish line. We might make it to the end. But unless we drink deep from the gospel, we will not run to win the prize.

[38 : 48] The gospel must be standing underneath zeal. It must be the foundation for zeal. And so until the cross of Christ consumes me, until that's all that I see before my eyes, I will not have zeal.

And so until we see the depth of our sin and how unzealous we are, we will not be truly zealous. So Jesus was sitting in the house of a Pharisee.

His name was Simon, and an immoral woman crawled up, crawled to his feet, and she broke an alabaster jar of perfume. And then she began weeping and crying, and the tears came down onto his feet, and she starts wiping her, his feet with her hair, and kissing his feet.

And the question is why? Why did she go to such great lengths? Why was she so extravagant in her love? Why was she so zealous?

Well, Jesus tells the reason why, because she was forgiven much. She was forgiven much. And if we've been forgiven much, if we've been forgiven much coldness of heart and lack of zeal, then that should move us to be more zealous.

[40 : 10] And so I can say, brothers and sisters, we have been forgiven much. We have been forgiven much. So let's go and be zealous. We've been forgiven much, so we should love much.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Gospel. It's the only reason we can stand in your presence is because of Jesus Christ.

It's the only reason we have comfort in this life. And comfort as we go to die, comfort in the face of our sin, is because we have a mediator.

We have a great high priest who has died for our sins and pleads with God for us even now. And so we pray that you would make us truly zealous men and women, that you would give us zeal according to knowledge, and it would be humble zeal and motivated by true reasons and tempered with love.

Father, we need your grace to do this. We need zeal for the good of our church and for the good of ourselves. And so I pray that you would work in us.

[41 : 27] Will you make us holy? Give us that desire to be holy. just like Jonathan Edwards had, just like George Whitfield had, just like Jesus had, a desire for personal holiness.

And will you make that real in our lives and in our church. For Jesus' sake, Amen.