

Why Is It Good to Be Zealous?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2009

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] So we have come to our third and final week on zeal. And we've answered two questions so far in the last two weeks. The first one is, what is Christian zeal?

We showed some examples of it and what exactly it meant. It means to be a man or a woman of one thing. One thing before you, and that's the glory of God.

And then last week we looked at what were some of the marks of true Christian zeal. There is fraudulent zeal and then there's real Christian zeal.

And we said that there's five marks to true Christian zeal. Does anyone remember what some of those marks were? Zeal according to knowledge.

We said that zeal is like a fire. And if it's kept in the fireplace, if it's surrounded by knowledge, then it warms everyone who comes near it.

[0:58] But if zeal jumps outside of the boundary of knowledge, then it can do great damage. What was another mark of true Christian zeal?

It comes from true motives, from right motives. We said that a lot of people can have Christian zeal for the wrong reasons. They want their own party to be glorified.

Or they want to please people. I want to look good in front of you so I prepare as well as I can. And those aren't right motives. What were some of the other marks?

Tempered with love and charity. We said that some people have a zeal and it makes them harsh and ungentle and unkind. But true zeal is always mixed with love and charity.

Any other marks? That's three. Right doctrine? As in the things that God's zealous for? Is that what you mean? Or, sorry I can't see you.

[2:10] Right, according to scripture. That's exactly right. We should have a scripture text, verse and chapters, to show us the things that we should be zealous for.

We just aren't zealous for any old thing. We're zealous for the things that scripture tells us to be zealous for. And then the last one that we touched on briefly. Right.

It must be mixed with humility. The truly zealous person is the last person to ever know that they're really zealous. Because they fall so far short of what they want to achieve.

So those are the five marks. Today we're going to have a third question. And it's probably the most important question for us. It is, why is it good to be zealous? Why is it good to be zealous?

Did it really matter that Thomas Cramner burned his own hand off? The hand that renounced the gospel? Did it really matter that Martin Luther defied the emperor and the pope and risked his own life?

[3:18] Did it matter? Did it matter whether the apostle Paul was beaten and flogged and stoned and shipwrecked? And eventually he lost his own head?

Did that matter in the long run? Was it good for him to be zealous? And the more important question is, does it matter if you're zealous or not? Is it good for you to be zealous?

Ryle says, yes. It is good to be zealous. It is worthwhile to be zealous. You want to be zealous.

Well, why is it good to be zealous? Because, here's the first answer.

The zeal is good for your own soul. Zeal is good for the Christian's own soul. Well, how do I know that? Because it's a command.

Romans 12, 11 says, Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord. All the commandments that God has given to us are for our own good.

[4:18] None of them are for our bad. They're all for our own good and happiness. We live in God's world. He's made it in such a way. And so there's physical laws and there's spiritual laws.

And as long as we abide by those laws, it's good for us. And it makes us happy. So, in respect to physical laws, you can think of maybe a young man.

And he doesn't quite understand how gravity works. He doesn't understand how hard concrete is. And so he's at the school park or wherever. And he jumps his skateboard up on the metal handrail. And he crashes to the ground. And he cracks open his head. And he breaks his arm. And he skins his legs and knees. And he doesn't take into account that there's physical laws that say, You probably really shouldn't do that.

It's not good for you. And so, the Christian, it's good for us to abide by spiritual laws, God's commandments.

[5:21] And God has commanded us to be zealous. So what happens when a Christian doesn't abide by that? They're not zealous. Is it a pathway to joy for them?

Are they happier because of it? Not really. They're not happier for it. They're full of doubt and worry. Sins plague them and wreak havoc in their life.

Sin hurts their family and it hurts them. Because they ignore the spiritual laws that God has made, they're more miserable for it. So if you're not zealous, then you're setting yourself up for misery and not happiness.

So I know that zeal is good for me because my heavenly Father has commanded me to do it. And it's impossible for him who loves me so much to tell me to do something that would harm me.

Psalms 119 says, Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find a light. I find a light there. When I'm obeying, there's blessing and there's pleasure.

[6:29] And so, like all of God's commands, this command to be zealous is good for me. There's delight in obedience. And so God's rich blessing, God's blessing is poured out on the person that is zealous.

So, zeal is good for you. It's not only good for you because it has been commanded, but zeal promotes holiness. And there can be no holiness without zeal.

And so do you believe that the only happy person, the only really happy person, is a holy person, is a zealous person? See, zeal is like exercise.

Now, none of us really like to get up in the morning and work out, but we find that when we do, we feel better for it, don't we? We're tired, but at the same time we're energized.

It's a strange paradox. You feel tired, but you feel good. And so in the same way, zeal is like exercise. It gets the spiritual blood pumping. You start trying new things.

[7:33] You start trying out spiritual muscles that you haven't used before. And so you never feel so good as when you're hot on the path, hot on the trail of holiness.

And so when you're pursuing holiness, it invigorates you. It encourages you. It clears your eyes. It sharpens your spiritual senses.

You feel alive. And you say, this feels right. This is what I was meant to be like. I was meant to be pursuing this. And so you feel alive.

You feel like this is what life is about, pursuing God and holiness. And so zeal, it puts perspective on our life. It tells us what we're to be living for.

And that helps us. It helps us spiritually, and it helps us to be happy. So listen to Ryle. So laboring, toiling, working, striving, and toiling to extend the knowledge of Jesus Christ upon the earth.

[8:50] So laboring, toiling, working, striving. That's the pathway to happiness. It sounds like a pathway to misery to most people.

But those who walk it, and those who live it, know that it's the pathway to happiness. It doesn't seem like running five miles every day is the pathway to a good life.

But it is. So, do you believe that zeal will make you happy? Do you believe that zeal will make you happy? God says it will. He's commanded it.

He's told us to do it, and so we know it is. Zeal is good for you because, this is the third reason it's good for you, is that it's good for you because God rewards zealous people with a special smile and blessing.

A special favor. Now, I don't want to be taken to be saying that Jesus really doesn't like some of his children or something like that.

[9:56] Jesus takes great pleasure in all of his children. Every one of his children is like a plant that he's planted and he's cared for and he's watered and he's tended it.

He loves all of his people. So, we aren't really diminishing that at all. We're not saying that. But we are saying that Jesus will pour out his special favor and blessing on his zealous children, on those who are eager to serve him.

So, Jesus shows his special favor to the one who's pouring out his life for him, who pours out his life, body, soul, and spirit, and he reveals himself in a special way.

They have more of an understanding of God's grace. They have more of an understanding of the Scriptures. They have more comfort and trial. They understand more in their heart. And I'm not saying they get special revelation, but in their heart, God is communicating more love to them. And it only makes sense. It only makes sense. Now, you have a husband and a wife. Okay? Now, this husband is very zealous to please his wife.

[11:09] And he loves her. He's serious about loving her. And he goes to great lengths to sacrifice for her, to make her happy. And he's always thinking, he's always plotting and scheming, how can I please her?

How can I make her happy? And he's always doing little things to make her happy. And he's always thinking about something big that he can do. And he's sensitive to her desires, to her likes and dislikes.

And so he changes his habits for her. He picks up his socks. He takes the kids away so she can have a break. He's extravagant in his affection. So let me ask you, will the wife of that husband open up her heart more to him?

Will she, she might not be any more committed to him, but she's going to open up her heart more. She's going to be more affectionate towards him. And so, in the same way, Jesus is zealous, will show special love and affection for the people who are zealous for him.

So the wife isn't going to take any more pleasure, or she's not going to be any more committed to her husband, but she will have more pleasure in him than if she's married to someone who's sluggish and who's always just, you know, a brute.

[12:31] But a zealous husband will experience more love from his wife. And a zealous Christian will experience more love from Christ. So, zeal's good for you.

It's good for you because God's commanded it. It's good for you because it's good for your spiritual health. It's also good for you because it's good for your relationship with Jesus Christ.

This encourages your relationship. This makes your relationship with him better. And I think that's what we all want. We don't want a mediocre Christian life. We want a healthy life.

And zeal is the way to have a good, love relationship with Jesus Christ. So, is zeal worth it? Yes, it definitely is. Second, why is zeal good?

Because zeal is good for the church. So, it's not only good for the Christian personally, it's good for the church. Zeal preserves the church. Zeal's like salt.

[13:35] And the church has a tendency to fall into decay. But zeal preserves it and it keeps it from decay. So, Martin Luther and John Calvin and the other reformers rescue the church from total decay.

And they were zealous. It was by their zeal. God used their zeal and their passion for the truth to save the church. and then, in the local situation, how many churches have been preserved and kept alive and on the right path because there was a zealous pastor and zealous laymen who were praying and they would bring back a church to life.

They were nearly dead and they are brought back to life, so to speak. So, zeal moves the church more towards health. That works in the individual's life.

Zeal brings you from sickness to health and it works in the corporate life. We, as a church, have a tendency, and I'm not speaking about Grace Fellowship specifically, I'm speaking as a church, we have the tendency to rest on our laurels, to say, look at how much I've already accomplished.

Do I really need to do any more? Isn't this good enough? Look how much we've grown. Look how many people are here. Look at what we've accomplished. And so, a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty comes on us like a bandit.

[15:07] So, when the church rests, when the church is not zealous, it begins to rot. It begins to rot. If you've ever had a cast on for any length of time, maybe you know what I'm talking about.

If you break your arm and so you have a cast on your arm, you can't really use it for six, eight weeks. You can't wash it and you can't use it. So, six weeks passes and the doctor, it's time to cut the cast off.

And if you've seen it, they cut it off. And what does that arm look like? The muscles are all withered. It's all dirty. It stinks. It's pale.

And that's sort of what a lethargic church is like. They just sit there. And so they wither. They start to stink. They're useless and they're rotting away.

But zeal is like the exercise after you have your arm cut off or your cast cut off. I'm not sure what that would be illustrating, but...

[16:09] So zeal is like the exercise after you've had the cast cut off. Your muscles start to grow back. The dirt falls off and the decay starts to fall off.

You clean it and you scrub it and you start to use it and it becomes strong again. So, the health is returned. And zeal is kind of like physical therapy.

So, it brings back, it strengthens a church. So, think for a moment with me. What has zeal done in the past? We've talked about these things before, but we're going to talk about some other things. What has zeal done in the past at key points in church history? When the church was falling apart, when it was starting to rot? Well, in the 4th century, so we're talking the 300s, the church was bloated and decaying with Arianism, which is the belief that Jesus is not God in the sense that God the Father is God.

He's maybe a lesser God, he's the greatest creature, but he's definitely not God. He's not equal with God the Father. So, this teaching is gripping people and many people are believing it and it's causing the church to rot from the inside out.

[17:32] And really, a little push in the church and the gospel is gone. It's on the edge. Well, God raises up Athanasius and I've talked about him before. He was five times deposed from his office and exiled out of the empire.

So, he's in no man's land. He's brought back. He's reduced to poverty. He's falsely accused of murder. He's hated by most people. And so, the saying is Athanasius contra mundum, which means Athanasius is against the whole world.

And people said that to mock him. Can Athanasius be really right when the whole world is saying otherwise? Well, he was zealous. He wouldn't let go of the truth.

He wouldn't let go of the truth that Jesus Christ is God. So, he kept teaching. He kept teaching in public and from house to house. And when he was exiled, he kept teaching and writing.

And it cost him. But that zeal saved the church. God used that zeal to save the church and to save the gospel. So, let's move ahead to the Reformation.

[18:39] And we're not going to Luther's Germany or Calvin's Geneva. Well, let's go to England. Implying away as ours in study and in secret is William Tyndale.

He's translating the scriptures into English. So, up to that point, the English language had just scraps of the Bible where people like you and me could read it.

So, he wants everyone from the plowman in the field to the Lord in the castle to be able to read the Bible in their own tongue. See, before, only the university people could read it or maybe some of the priests but no one like us.

No one poor like us and no one uneducated. And so, he works. And he works in secret because it's against the law to do this. If he is found out he's going to die, well, authorities do find out.

And he's forced to flee England. He's in hiding in England and he's forced to flee England. He goes across the channel and he hides away again. But King Henry VIII's men, his agents, and the papal police are after him.

[19:53] So, he's forced to flee from town to town to town and he takes on disguises and he's forced to live in secret and all the time he's translating. Well, eventually, as his work is almost done, as the whole Bible is almost nearly completed, translated into English, he's caught and he's hung.

His last words was, God changed the heart of the king. He's talking about King Henry VIII because the king didn't want anything to do with the English Bible and he hated the idea of the people being unable to read the Bible.

Within two years, within two years, King Henry VIII had changed his mind. God answered his prayer. But it was the zeal of William Tyndale that gave us Bibles in the language that we could understand.

And so, we owe him a lot. So we move ahead to 1786 and we're at a minister's fraternal in Northampton, England.

And one of the older gentlemen asked one of the younger pastors, one of the young pastors named William Carey, the older gentleman says, William, why don't you propose a topic that we can talk about?

[21:13] And this is what the young pastor stands up and suggests. He suggests this following motion. whether the command given to the apostles to teach all nations was not obligatory on all succeeding ministers.

So in other words, is it the responsibility of, is it our responsibility to take the gospel to the nations? Then the older man says, young man, sit down.

If God wants to save the he, then he'll do it without your help or mine. Carey's not daunted. He fought opposition.

He fought opposition from the church to go to the heathen, to go to, to go abroad. But he was tenacious and he was passionate and he wanted to attempt something great for God because God was worthy of it.

And so he became the father of modern missions. That's his title. The father of modern missions. Now, you know, he wasn't the first missionary. He wasn't even the first successful missionary.

[22:19] But he was the missionary that changed the Protestant mind about going because the Protestant church, more specifically, the Reformed Baptists of the Protestant church were frozen.

They weren't going. They were dying on the branch. They were withering away. But carry, God used carry zeal to inspire hundreds and thousands of missionaries of men to leave England, to leave the United States, to leave Christian Europe and go.

And so they started going out in the hundreds and the thousands and they went to China and they went to India and they went to South America and they went to Africa. They went north and south and east and west.

North and east and south and west. and they're still going. They're still going. So now, whereas before you could count the number of missionaries on one hand, now there's hundreds of thousands of missionaries.

And so now the number of unreached peoples! is actually numbered and counted and we know who we have to go to. So the Lord Jesus used carry zeal to save the Protestant church.

[23:37] We were dying on the vine and it was carry zeal that saved the church. Now, that all might seem really big picture. What does that have to do with me?

I mean, I'm not William Carey. I'm probably not called to do something radical like that. I can't translate the scriptures. I am not some doctrinal genius where I can defend the church against a major heresy.

And that might be hard to wrap our minds around. So let's narrow our focus on is zeal good for Grace Fellowship Church? Is it good for our body here to be zealous?

And we want to say yes. Grace Fellowship, we need people that are passionate if we're going to survive. We need passionate Christians here.

because zeal sets another brother and sister on fire. So, when my heart is stirred up and is zealous for the things of God, the fire spreads and zeal becomes contagious.

[24:45] I'm excited about God and you become excited about God and so we have this health and the church takes on this and we become healthy. Listen to what Ryle says. Nothing is more useful to the professors of Christianity than to see a real, live Christian, a thoroughly zealous man of God.

He opens their eyes. He makes them feel their own sleepiness. He makes their own great darkness visible. He obliges them to see their own barrenness.

He compels them to think whether they like it or not, what are we doing? Have you ever saw someone who was really zealous and you thought, what am I doing?

Where am I at spiritually? What is wrong with me? And there's a bad way to ask that question, but there's really a good way to ask that question where you say, what is wrong with me?

What have I been doing? What has gripped my heart? What idol is on the throne? So we need fervent Christians in this church and Grace Fellowship to quicken us, to inspire us, to make Grace Fellowship grow and thrive.

[25:59] So if we're going to conquer new ground, and I hope that's the goal of Grace Fellowship, that we don't want to just stay where we're at, but we want to conquer new ground for King Jesus. If we're going to teach the nations, like Matthew 28 says, if we're going to evangelize, if we're going to go deeper in holiness, in our relationship with Jesus, then we need to have enthusiastic Christians here.

grace because I can't do it by myself, and God has put us together so that together we can do it. You have grace that I need, and I have grace that you need.

And so it's important that we are living together in zeal. So the alternative, what's the alternative for Grace Fellowship? if we don't become zealous, or if we don't maintain our zeal, we'll fall asleep, and we'll just die slowly like so many other churches.

So zeal will make our church grow, or if we don't have it, we'll become like that broken arm, and we'll wither, and we'll decay, and eventually Jesus will just chop us off, because we're no good. So zeal is good for the church, and zeal is good for Grace Fellowship. So zeal is worth having. Now, for some points of application.

[27 : 23] Some points of application. The first is, can I speak for a moment to those who have no decided profession of faith, that you have some kind of faith, and I don't belittle that, you have some kind of faith, a faith in God, a faith that it's important to go to church, you have some knowledge of the things of the Bible, but if you are honest, you would say that your faith isn't central to who you are, it's on the perimeter.

So let me ask you, where is your zeal? Where is your zeal? God commands everyone to love Him with all of their heart and their soul and their mind and their strength, zeal?

And to be zealous. Jesus was zealous. And the apostles were zealous. And angels are zealous. And men in the past have been zealous.

And there's zealous Christians here. So where is your zeal? You might have a religion. You might have a faith. You might even have a Christian faith.

zeal. But if you don't have zeal, if you have no desire in your heart, if there's no burning desire in your heart, what is it worth to be, what is that faith worth?

[28 : 48] So you might have zeal for the news. You might have zeal for politics and high school sports and for whatever else.

You might be zealous for work and making money. But where's your zeal for Christ? Because if you don't have zeal for Christ, you're really wasting your life. Because you're living for something that God has told you not to live for.

He's made you for one thing, and that's for Him. And if you're not living for that one thing, then your life is wasted. So you need to wake up. You need to flee to Christ.

You need to find pardon there and mercy. Because it is a sin not to be zealous. God has commanded us to. And so it is a sin. So we all need mercy.

So may I speak for a moment to those who maybe are lukewarm? The church in Laodicea was lukewarm. They were neither cold nor hot.

[29 : 52] It would have been better if they were something. But they were just sort of sitting there. They're like that glass of water that's on your counter all night long. And you drink it in the morning and it's not refreshing.

So let me ask you. Where's your zeal? If anyone should be zealous, it should be a Christian. Listen to Ryle.

You know very well it is very low. You know well that your zeal is a little feeble glimmering spark that just lives and no more. Surely there is a fault somewhere if this is the case.

This state of things ought not to be. You the child of God. You redeemed at so glorious a price. You ransomed with such precious blood. You who are an heir of glory such as no tongue ever yet told or eyes saw.

Surely you ought to be a man of another kind. Surely your zeal ought not to be so small. So brothers and sisters, I don't say that to discourage anyone.

[31 : 01] I don't say that to whip anyone and to make anyone feel unnecessarily bad. I'm aware of my own weakness. You learn how much zeal you lack when you prepare three lessons on it.

But we need to nevertheless ask ourselves where is my zeal? Is this as much zeal as I can have? And most of the time it's not. Why am I so cold?

What idol has gripped my heart? What sin am I holding on to? So what do we need to do? We need to go over these lessons again to stir ourselves up, to think them over.

Zeal is good for you. If you want to be happy, you'll be zealous. If you want to have a vigorous spiritual life, you have to be zealous. So you pray. And we all need to pray.

And God has promised to answer prayer. So we pray for heat. And we pray for passion. We pray for a love. And we pray that our idols will be torn from our heart. And so we pray to see opportunities.

[32:04] Sometimes we're zealous, but we don't have the outlets that we need. And so we pray. We pray for opportunities. We pray for eyes to see the opportunities for service and prayer and teaching and encouraging and giving.

And so we pray. But we also examine ourselves. Think about how much of your life is gone. How much of your life is gone? How much time do you have left? If you live to be the average, which is like 76 or 78, how much time do you have left?

Someone said, someone told an old saint to, why don't you just rest? You need to relax. You're wired too tight. You need to rest. And he said, I have all of heaven to rest.

I have all of eternity to relax. And so this brief life, this brief life is all we have to work. We can rest later, but this is the only time that we have to work.

[33:14] And so, brothers and sisters, don't waste your life either. Because if you're living for anything less than God's glory, you're wasting your life. The Lord has saved you, and he called you to work.

He put you in the vineyard, and he told you to work. And if we work slothily, and we just sort of slouch about and do our work half-heartedly and do the minimum, what are we going to say on the last day when Jesus asks, what were you doing?

What are we going to say? And when we lay dying on our bed, which someday will happen to every one of us, are we going to say, I really wish I would have watched more TV.

I really wish I wouldn't have spent so much time reading my Bible or praying. I wish I wouldn't have spent so much time encouraging my brothers and sisters and thinking about God.

Because the hour of death is coming, and I don't mean that to be melodramatic, but it's coming for all of us, and we're going to be held accountable for how we spent our time. And then, finally, I want to speak just for a moment to the older believers here.

[34:26] There's two dangers that I see. The first is that you won't finish well. You won't finish well. We've talked about the danger of not finishing well, and what can we say about that?

What can we say about finishing well except for this? That Jesus is at the end, and you're not going to outwork his reward, and you're not going to be able to outwork his praise.

And so you finish strong. You finish strong. So don't give up. If you're growing a little cynical and maybe a little jaded, you just don't think it's worth the effort, just think again that Jesus is at the end, and he's going to reward you.

So don't give up. The younger people here, we need examples of what zeal looks like in older age. We have a youthful zeal, some of us, but we need to know what that means when you get older and you can't do so much.

We need to see zeal in our moms and dads. We need to see zeal in a Christian that's retired. What does a zealous Christian retirement look like?

[35:39] Does it look any different than anyone else's retirement? So there's still work to be done. The younger people, we need you. We need you to be zealous.

So finish strong. And then the second danger is that you would throw water on the young and on their zeal, and you squelch the zealous. And I don't think that's a problem here.

I honestly, I really don't. But we don't ever want it to be a problem. Where the old people, the older people, are always putting their foot down and slowing down the young.

Zeal is going to make mistakes. Isn't it? Youthful zeal is going to make mistakes. It's sort of like when the ancient armies, they would release elephants, you know?

And they'd send the elephants into battle. And half the time they'd crush the enemy and half the time they'd crush your own people. They were dangerous. And so youthful zeal, sometimes we're going to run over our own people.

[36:42] But, so what do you do? I mean, you don't say, don't be zealous. You guide them and you instruct them. You don't squelch them.

It is a possibility, but you don't throw water on the fire. You guide us. You be patient with us. You show us the right way. So you don't cut off the head of the flower if it's pointed the right direction. the wrong direction. So sometimes the young are pointed in the wrong way. You don't cut the flower off. You just turn it a little bit and that will work. So the conclusion is this.

Cultivate zeal. It's really worth having. Ask for zeal because God has promised to give it to those who ask. Meditate on our zealous Lord Jesus.

If you're ever growing cold, think about what he endured. Think about his reward that he's offered to you. Remember those who have gone before you. Read a Christian biography and you'll find that those stir your heart.

[37 : 45] They stir your heart in ways that so many things can't. Because you actually see what it's like for someone to be zealous who's like you, who suffers and it hurts and they're tired and they're sick and it shows what their faith can do.

So imitate their faith. Imitate their zeal. So let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, I pray that you would have mercy on us for we are not zealous like we ought to be.

We have been walking through this life and half asleep, half asleep to what you're doing, half asleep to what you've commanded us to do.

And I pray that you would open up our eyes, that you would set before us Jesus again, set before us the cross again, that we might learn to be zealous.

And not only what it means, but in our heart of hearts that you would teach us zeal, that you would change us in the deep places of our hearts so that we would be zealous.

[38 : 57] And that can only come by the gospel. So we pray that you would make the gospel all the more real to us, but you give us fresh faith and fresh grace.

Father, I pray that you would take away anything that was wrong, and we thank you that there is a Savior for sinners.

sinner. And I pray, Father, that you would do us good now, that you would encourage us as we go on our way, that you would stir us up, not to look to our own strength, but to the strength that is in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.