

Radical Zeal

Lesson 1: What It Is

God's people are radical (reaching to the roots of faith in Christ, different from what is considered normal). This involves the expectation that every Christian who has been redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ must be zealous (Titus 2:11-14). Yet, true zeal is rare. This makes true zeal radical in that it is far different from how most people live, even among those who profess to follow Jesus. Therefore, those who truly desire to please God must desire, develop, use, keep, and spread the kind of zeal Jesus desires to be present in His followers. Ultimately, this zeal will only come through a study of the Scriptures and requires that one develops a proper understanding of what the zeal God prescribes actually is.

1) Common pictures of zeal. There have been many different ways people have come to think about zeal that differs from how God actually portrays it. First, some mistake a jealous desire for some physical thing/cause as being zeal that pleases God (as seen in Acts 17:5; James 4:2; Galatians 4:17; note that the same Greek word can be translated either "zeal" or "jealousy" depending on the context, as both involve a heated passion). Second, some mistake mean-spiritedness that demonstrates a lack of concern for others as being zeal that pleases God (contrary to Matthew 10:16; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 4:6). Third, some mistake enthusiastic and energetic attitudes and feelings without the appropriate works of obedience to God as being zeal that pleases God (contrary to James 1:22-25; Luke 6:46). Fourth, some mistake good works that are done without any passion (i.e. going through the motions) as being zeal that pleases God (similar to the situation in Revelation 2:2-6). Fifth, some mistake religious passion that is not properly directed in faithful and obedient ways as being zeal that pleases God (similar to Romans 10:2-3; Paul, Philippians 3:5-6; Acts 22:3-5; Acts 26:10-11).

2) Biblical pictures of zeal. Now that we can see many pictures of what the zeal that pleases God is not, let's consider some of the pictures God gives for what zeal that pleases Him actually looks like. To begin, let's recognize that the Greek word refers to passion. Perhaps the best illustration of zeal is that of a fire that burns in your heart (inner person). You might also consider the picture of a boiling pot of water. Specifically, it is a spiritual passion/fire in your heart that burns to accomplish the good works God desires from your life (Titus 2:11-14)! It simply cannot sit stagnant, like a pot of water before it boils. Instead, it is active in what it does.

Consider some Biblical pictures of the radical zeal that pleases God. First, consider Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:7-9). Although Jeremiah faced extremely difficult circumstances to do God's work of spreading God's message to people who did not want to listen, he could not hold God's word back and stop the work God had sent him to accomplish. Second, consider Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8). While many people respond to God's desire for people to do His work in different ways, Isaiah embraced the opportunity and volunteered to be sent by God into God's work. Third, consider Jesus (John 2:13-17). Jesus could not sit by while He watched people misusing the temple that was to be dedicated to the glory of God and did what He could to correct the situation. Fourth, consider the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 9:1-5). These Christians had embraced the Lord's cause so as to give themselves to the Lord and therefore gave themselves over to doing what they could in the Lord's work to contribute to the needy saints in Jerusalem. Fifth, consider Paul (Acts 17:16-17). Though there are many pictures of Paul's zeal in the Scriptures, this demonstrates the fire that was burning in him so much that he was ready and willing to do and say whatever was necessary to help people come to honor the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives.

3) Essential qualities of true zeal. When you consider the differences between the common pictures of zeal and the Biblical pictures of zeal, there are several characteristics that we find are necessary to develop true zeal that pleases God. First, true zeal that pleases God requires faith (2 Timothy 1:12). This zeal must be built on the foundation that truly believes in the promises and warnings that God has given so much he/she will obey whatever living for God requires. Second, true zeal that pleases God requires knowledge (Romans 10:2). This zeal must develop an accurate knowledge of who God is, what He has done for you, and how He desires you to live. Third, true zeal that pleases God requires wisdom (Matthew 10:16). This zeal involves being able to take the knowledge that comes through a study of God's word and make the right applications so that what your zeal leads you to do is pleasing to God and helpful in His kingdom. Fourth, true zeal that pleases God requires courage (1 Peter 3:13-17). This zeal must be willing to do and say things that others may not like or that pushes you beyond your comfort zone in order to please God. Fifth, true zeal that pleases God requires love (Matthew 22:36-40). This zeal does not just go through the motions of doing what is good and right but must have love for God and others at its core. Sixth, true zeal that pleases God requires good works (Titus 2:14). This zeal must respond to God by doing those things that actually please Him.

True zeal is like a spiritual fire. It is not a fire that is behind glass just for show. It is not a fire that is burning a path that is contrary to God's will. Nor is it a fire that is burning out of control and damaging everything in its path. Instead, it is a fire that burns to accomplish the will of God and bring glory to Him that is fully controlled by God! This kind of radical zeal stands out and stands above all other forms of zeal and service to God!

Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correcting: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?