

Do We Have Zeal for God's Redemption?

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Knowing the entire Bible by heart, and understanding it so well that you can explain every single verse, is of little use to you, unless the biblical Word penetrates your innermost being, as the rain penetrates the tiniest roots of a tree in order to rise and to fill the whole tree and to bring forth leaves and fruit.¹

Have we allowed the whole of God's Word to penetrate our hearts? Are we "lukewarm" or are we on fire for God? Has zeal for God's redemption consumed us? Are we lacking in zeal for the things of God? When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he set forth the measurement of zeal. We should listen to Paul as he presents the activities that measure our zeal for God. We should reflect upon Paul's catalogue of activities that he enumerates to demonstrate our zeal. He pens the following list:

Love must be sincere. **Hate** what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be **devoted** to one another in love. **Honor** one another above yourselves. ¹¹ **Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor**, serving the Lord. ¹² Be **joyful** in hope, **patient** in affliction, **faithful** in prayer. ¹³ **Share** with the Lord's people who are in need. **Practice** hospitality. (Romans 12:9-13)

Have we allowed our enthusiasm to fade? Do we still have the same eagerness that we exhibited when we first became Christians? Do we or do we not have our original commitment for sharing God's redemption? Zeal for God's restoration should be our passion for the One who brought about our emancipation "in" and "through" His Son Jesus. He is the window through whom we see God. If we wish to approach the Father of Light, this advancement toward God can only be done in the One who died upon Calvary. God's Eternal Being can only be seen in the Christ. Christians rejoice daily in the Incarnation—the coming of the Son of God into the World. Even though God's Messiah is the central message of the Gospel, nevertheless,

¹ Emil Brunner, *Sowing and Reaping: The Parables of Jesus*, Translated by Thomas Wieser (London The Epworth Press, 1964), 18. Emil Brunner (1889–1966) is one of the "Three Bs" (Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann) who shaped Christian theological studies in the twentieth century. He and Karl Barth are the undisputed champions of the theological revival known as neo-orthodoxy, and the two of them did more than any others to prepare for the resurgence of historical biblical Christianity in the Western world today. Brunner was part of the wrecking crew that dismantled the house of liberal theology with its humanistic view of Jesus Christ, its optimistic view of man's goodness, and its progressive idea of history as inevitably leading to the kingdom of God. The core of Brunner's theology was the coming of the infinite God to finite man in the person of Jesus Christ.

the Gospel of Jesus reveals the Eternal God—the Father of the universe. We should never forget that the word of salvation is both **Christocentric** (Christ centered) and **Theocentric** (God centered).

It is through Jesus our Lord that God the Father is revealed. To see Jesus who is the promised Messiah is to see God the Father. Shortly before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, He dealt with a question posed by Philip concerning the Father. John, one of the Twelve, recorded this incident:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." ⁸ **Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."** ⁹ **Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"** ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. (John 14:6-10)

We know the Eternal Son through His becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14). We know the Eternal Father through Jesus. He is the Go-Between connecting God the Father and us into a covenant relationship with the Trinity. Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, wrote: "**For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus**" (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus is the God-Man. He is the eye-opener for an understanding of God as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the One who brings salvation to us sinful creatures: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: " Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15). John, in his Gospel, wrote: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). **God the Father has come intruding into our personal lives through Jesus.**

As we contemplate the virgin birth of Christ (Isaiah 7:14), we are immediately aware that the Incarnation is the Divine and merciful answer to our restoration to God the Father. John penned the following words:

He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² **Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God**—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:10-13).

Jesus is our means of reunion with the Father (John 14:6). When we recognize Jesus as our "sin offering," we demolish our self justification. We are, as Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, "poor in spirit," that is to say, we are bankrupt. We totally depend upon God's grace "in" and "through" the Atonement of Christ upon Calvary. The righteousness that justifies us is the righteousness that belongs to God. **It is His righteousness, not ours. This imputed righteousness is **furnished** by God, **devised** by God, and **made available** by God. **This righteousness is something that is given, not earned.** The Gospel sets forth a righteousness**

from God apart from law (Romans 3:21). It is only when we recognize that grace is incomprehensible that it becomes grace. This righteousness from God is outside of us. Paul goes right to the heart of how grace (God's righteousness) is received: "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a **righteousness** that is **by faith** from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17). In other words, our acceptance of this grace **begins** with faith and **ends** with faith. **Imputed** righteousness is the **doing** and **dying** of Jesus.

It is by the proclamation of the Gospel that we know the One who is the Go-Between between us and God the Father. In hearing the Good News of God's Way of salvation through Christ, we accept Him through faith. In faith, God strips away all our self-importance. God is the actor in our redemption, not us. Justification is what God does for us. Paul defines the meaning of the Gospel in Romans 3:25-26:

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. **He did this to demonstrate his righteousness**, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

We can only expect deliverance from condemnation through God's act of mercy "in" and "through" His Son. The word *faith* should cause us to stand in awe of God's wisdom in His scheme of redemption. He provided the means of rescue through Jesus—faith in Jesus. **Faith** is the means of allowing ourselves to be humbled and, at the same time, to approach God as we accept His unspeakable mercy. Remember, it is in Jesus the Mediator that we are able to receive God's clemency. Jesus stated that no one could come to the Father except through Him. It is only in His Person that we meet the Personal God. **This understanding of God's scheme of redemption should awaken within us a greater desire to exhibit zeal in our daily walk with God.**

Jesus is the gift and act of God's kindness and love toward us sinners (John 3:16). God took the initiative, and He is known through His action—the giving of His Son as an offering for our redemption. God acts on our behalf in the Incarnation of His Son. Having said this, we must never forget that this action of the Atonement involved the whole Trinity. In Jesus, God established a firm footing with humanity. God's presence for our redemption begins in Christ. Are we sharing this message of redemption with others? Do we tell others about the Cross of Jesus? **It is in the Cross that God actually does something to justify His actions of acceptance of sinful humanity. The Crucifixion of Jesus is an objective transaction, which maneuver was/is absolutely necessary for our escape from the bondage of sin.**

As we contemplate the Death of Christ, we are immediately aware that Christ's sacrifice is presented throughout the writings of Holy Scripture as a cosmic necessity—He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8). This fact of God's love should create within us **a desire to serve God with zeal**. It is in this vein that Paul writes: **"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord"** (Romans 12:11). Has our enthusiasm for God waned? Do we read the Holy Scriptures frequently? Have we abandoned the meeting together with the saints on Sunday? We come together to remind ourselves of God's actions in Christ Jesus. We come together in order to strengthen one another

in the faith. We come together to sing songs of praise to our God and Savior. We come together as a corporate body of believers to reflect upon the Cross of Jesus and its implications for us in our daily walk. In these gatherings, we are reminded of God's love. As a result of what God has done for us, we are encouraged to live holy lives. Do our actions deny our profession of faith? Again, Paul pens the following words of admonition about God's grace to Titus and its implications:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. (Titus 2:11-12)

What does God's grace mean to us? Has His grace changed our behavior? Are we lukewarm for spiritual things? If we wish to maintain our **zeal for the things of God**, we should reflect upon the **Cross of Jesus** as the supreme demonstration of the depth and splendor of God's love to the world. Since the Kingdom of God is a sheer gift of grace, this should create within our hearts an enthusiasm for God that cannot be quenched. **In the preaching of the Cross, we are awakened to the reality that the Gospel of God brings us to God by bringing God to us.** When we are forgiven "in" and "through" God's act of offering His Son Jesus as Atonement upon Calvary, we then have a new center of gravity. What is our center of gravity? Is it the world or is it the Christ?

Zeal for God comes when we realize that **the Cross is a place where one long road ends and another new road begins.** If we wish eternal life, this life can only be found in the One who gives eternal life. Are we prepared to meet God? Death is inevitable! It is appointed unto us once to die physically. As humans, we are not only conscious of spiritual and physical death, but we are also conscious of life after death, which perception is ours alone. **This realization does not belong to the animal kingdom, only to the kingdom of humanity.** Death is the universal fact of all humanity; death claims the human race itself. **Since in this life, we do not have an abiding city, we should reach out to God with gusto and passion for spiritual things.** What can liberate us from our paralysis? The answer is Jesus. Jesus is the *seeking* God; He is the One who seeks to bring us home. God represents us all at the **Cross of Calvary.** Jesus is our advocate! Have we forgotten the words of Paul to the Christians in Corinth? Perhaps, we should reflect upon the following words: "**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God**" (2 Corinthians 5:21)

It is only the ones who believe in God that win the victory over despair and spiritual death. Have we committed our lives to Him? Are we prepared to meet God? **We need to remember that our new life in Christ sets some very definite directions.** When we cross the gulf that separates this present age from the age beyond, we are always aware that the current time ends with an event that is in itself the beginning of something new. **Death is the inevitable and only gateway to the eternal world of God.**

If we wish to maintain our former **zeal for God**, we must live our lives within the circle of ascended glory as we did when we first committed our love to the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, the "milk and honey" is beyond the wilderness of this world. **For us to refuse zeal**

or dedication toward God is to rebel against the Prince of human life. To revolt against God is the very meaning and measure of sin in all its ugliness. Are we resisting God? Does the fact that Jesus poured out His soul unto Death for our sins awaken within us a sense of awe and grandeur? **The Divine initiative of God should create excitement for spiritual things.** This zeal, or eagerness, for God is possible for every individual who is confronted with eternity. How do we face time without end? It is in the Gospel of God that He gives us hope. In the Gospel, God announces forgiveness and eternal life. **Are we lacking in zeal?** Are we **lukewarm** in our walk with God? Or are we hot for spiritual things? I wish to call attention to one of the letters written to one of the seven churches of Asia Minor. How are we in our dedication to Jesus? This Epistle to this congregation is quite revealing concerning their way of life in spite of their confession to follow Christ:

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, **because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold**—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that **you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.** ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. **If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,** I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. ²¹ To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² **Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**” (Revelation 3:14-22)

Are we lukewarm or are we boiling for Christ? Are we “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” concerning our relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? I wish to relate the following story that Emil Brunner wrote about in his book of sermons (*The Great Invitation*):

On one occasion—it was in the year 1940, hence shortly before Russia was attacked by Hitler’s Germany—he was present at an Easter service in the region of Odessa. It took place in an isolated church, the only church in a vast area of hundreds of kilometers. But no less than 40,000 Christians came to this Eastertide celebration in order to worship at what was for them the greatest of all Christian festivals. The communists had organized a counterblast assembly and attempted to disturb the Christian worship in every possible way, thus they later compelled these 40,000 people to listen to their godless communist propaganda for four hours. Then one of the Christians got up and announced his desire to speak. He was at first refused, but when he promised to say only four words they allowed him to come on to the platform. In unbroken tense silence the following words were heard: “Brothers and sisters, Christ is risen”—and the whole 40,000 responded with the Easter antiphon: “Yes, He is risen indeed.” For 23 years amid bitter sorrows and dangers these men had safeguarded the word of Jesus and had held fast to what they had. It was a great comfort to me to learn that nearly half of the Russian people are still Christians after 30 years of godless propaganda and persecution, and that this percentage includes very many young people. My informant was himself an example and in him I

became acquainted with a sincere and convincing Christian. Those men preserved and held fast the word of the gospel. They have stood the test. Would we endure with equal success?²

² Emil Brunner, *The Great Invitation and Other Sermons*, Translated by Harold Knight (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 75.