

#212 “A Pure and Holy Zeal”
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There are many character qualities that people in the church aspire to such as integrity, purity, perseverance, kindness, etc. However, one that is not often considered and therefore often neglected is zeal. Revelation 3:19 says, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.” God says to the lukewarm, apathetic, and self-sufficient church at Laodicea that they had better repent and start being zealous for the things of God before He brings divine discipline upon them. The idea behind the word “zealous” in this passage includes the following meanings: to desire earnestly, to pursue, to strive after, to busy oneself about, and to exert oneself so as to hold onto another. The word oozes intensity, fervency, devotion, and commitment to a cause and Person believed to be of the utmost importance and transformational relevance. In 1 Corinthians 14:12, Paul mentions that the Christians at Corinth were zealous for spiritual gifts, and he gave instructions accordingly. The word for “zealous” in that passage includes the following definition: to defend, uphold, and vehemently contend for. The same word, *zelotes*, is used in 1 Peter 3:13 and in Titus 2:14, speaking of being zealous for what is good and for good deeds. Paul speaks again of *zelotes* in Galatians 1:14 when he describes how radically committed he was for Judaism before his conversion to Christianity. Thus we see that we can be zealous for evil just as powerfully as we can be zealous for good (Romans 10:2). Just because a person is passionate about a career, a hobby, a person, or an idea doesn’t make him or her holy. Zeal must be directed toward that which is pure and holy for it to truly transform us and honor God. God is not against us being devoted to doing the best at our vocation or enjoying our favorite pastime with fervency, but He is far more interested in zeal overflowing from our hearts in praise and worship for Him, the fruit of which is obedience and service in the kingdom. Too often, passion is evident in areas of sin rather than in areas of worship of the Lord. This is why the Scripture warns us against giving in to the fleshly passions (Galatians 5:24). Being zealous for evil can be just as disastrous as being zealous for good can be eternally rewarding. We must first seek to restore our zeal, and we must also be sure that we are zealous for the right things.

John 2:17 says, “His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.’” Jesus saw how the temple had been corrupted by thieving businessmen using God’s house as a place to buy and sell rather than as a place to consecrate themselves to God (Matthew 21:13, John 2:16). Jesus wanted the temple to be a place of worship, repentance, and life change. Instead, it had become a place where blasphemers apathetically conducted their activities. Jesus, however, was zealous for God, His purposes, and His house. He cast the tables over, dumped out the coins, and used a cord as a whip to scatter the moneychangers and the animals. Not everything evoked this kind of a reaction from our Savior. He was always passionate for the Father’s purposes, committing Himself to prayer, to teaching the ways of the kingdom, and to doing all that God had asked with fervency and devotion. But here we see just how intense the feelings of love for His Father were. Jesus didn’t lose His temper or injure anybody, but He did make His point about how zealous God is for worship. In

fact, God is the ultimate example of zeal, for He has said that He is a jealous God, seeking worshippers of Him alone (Exodus 34:14). He is zealous for His glory, for He alone deserves it. We, if we love our Father as the Son did, will also strive to worship Him in holiness and seek to convince others that they should worship Him as well. Zeal upholds and contends for the truth, it busies oneself about the work of the kingdom, and it seeks to take every aspect of life and make it an expression of love and devotion to God through faithful obedience and service.

If only we were zealous for holiness in our marriages, zealous to raise our children according to God's principles, zealous for the church to function as a unified whole, zealous for God's house to be a place of blessing rather than a bore, and zealous for the gospel to be preached everywhere we go, things would be different. Too often God's people have their senses so dulled by the world's intensity to distract us with the latest and greatest things that we probably don't need that we can't focus enough to be intense about God. God has truth and blessing that He wants to bring to bear upon all aspects of our lives, but we must yield to Him in willing obedience, repenting of where we have gone wrong and being zealous for Him. We need to be consumed with zeal as we are purified by God (Psalm 119:139), the consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29).

Zeal can be misused, misunderstood, and misapplied. Some people think that just because they are "type A" personalities that they are zealous. Others have a lot of energy and seem to be passionate. Some are mellower by nature, but the fire roars deep in their insides. Zeal is measured ultimately by how it consumes us, by what is left after the purifying fire of God's holiness refines us (2 Corinthians 7:11). A pure and holy passion is a zeal that yields the fruit of repentance, obedience, and service. Yet this is not a robotic, "going through the motions" discipleship but a life energized from the indwelling Holy Spirit convicting of sin, leading in direction, filling for righteous deeds, and guiding the expressions of our mouths. People zealous for the Lord are not people that seek to contain the inner fire, nor are they those who allow good desires to lead to fleshly, misdirected actions. Zeal can be smothered out or allowed to burn out of control like a wildfire (Proverbs 14:30). However, God's zeal is a controlled burn, orchestrated purposefully and with great precision for the purpose of refining us and leading to the purifying of others. May God make our zeal contagious, spreading to others the holy refining fire of God (2 Corinthians 9:2).

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