

## Zeal Without Knowledge

It is reported that the following story was one told by Napoleon to spark patriotism among his men:

*Once, while visiting a province he came upon an old soldier in full uniform but with one sleeve hanging empty. The man proudly wore the highly-coveted Legion of Honor. Napoleon asked him, "Where and how did you lose your arm?"*

*The soldier answered proudly, "In battle at Austerlitz, sire."*

*Napoleon inquired, "And for that you received the Legion of Honor?"*

*"Yes, sire," The man responded. "My arm was but a small price to pay for this decoration."*

*Napoleon continued, "You must be the kind of man who regrets he did not lose both arms for his country."*

*The one-armed man asked, "What then would have been my reward?"*

*Napoleon answered, "I would have awarded you a double Legion of Honor."*

*And with those words, the old soldier immediately drew his sword and cut off his other arm.*

What a great story of patriotism! It was apparently quite effective in stirring up in Napoleon's men a desire to sacrifice even more for the cause of France.

There is only one problem with this story. Perhaps you have already noticed the inconsistency, but apparently it was years before anyone dared to ask Napoleon the troublesome question: "How did the soldier cut off his arm with only one arm with which to do it?"

It was a great story. Stirring, moving, motivating... but it simply was not true.

In matters of religion, people get excited about a lot of different things. They might get all "fired-up" about a flashy preacher, stirring sermon, or exciting church project. I am not suggesting that it is wrong to be zealous about spiritual things, but I am afraid that too often people get excited about some religious activity without giving much thought as to whether it does or does not meet God's standard of truth.

As Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he spoke of some who were in that very situation:

*"Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that **they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.** For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." (Romans 10.1-3, emp. added)*

He did not say they were wrong to be zealous, but he did say they had not done their homework. Because they did not know what was pleasing to God, they were zealous about the wrong things. Instead of being fired-up about God's righteousness, they were all excited about their own. As a result, they were in rebellion against God.

The Lord intends for His people to be zealous (Titus 2.14), but He also expects them to be zealous about the right things. We need to be excited about spiritual things, but we need to first make sure that God will be pleased with those things. How can we know? He has revealed His standard (2 Peter 1.3). It is our job to learn that standard and live according to it.

Zeal is a wonderful thing, but zeal alone will not save you. Zeal according to the Truth will.