

Religious Zeal

by Wayne Goff

“For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge” (Romans 10:2).

The apostle Paul commended his fleshly brethren, Israel, for their religious zeal while affirming that it was borne of ignorance. We see many religious groups today who have a great zeal that is likewise ignorant of the truth. The Mormons send out their young men two by two, call them “elders,” and introduce Mormonism through them. The Jehovah’s Witnesses go knocking door-to-door, peddling the writings of the anonymous Watchtower Society, professing to be messengers of God. The fanatical Muslims go about compelling people to submit to the Koran or else! They all have one thing in common: ignorant zeal. So while we admire their zeal, we must be reminded that it is not enough!

Returning back to fleshly Israel, Paul said of them “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today” (Acts 22:3). Moreover, Paul said again of himself: “And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14). But when Paul had learned the Way of the Lord more perfectly, then he turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and was baptized in His Name for the remission of sins (Acts 22:16).

What Is Zeal?

Zeal is defined “(in a favorable sense, ardor; in an unfavorable one, jealousy, as of a husband [figuratively, of God], or an enemy, malice)” [*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of Bible Words*]. In our text, Paul speaks of it in a good sense, even though it is misdirected.

The Jewish nation were privileged to have the Law of Moses given to them and had the advantage of this Divine Revelation. However, knowledge is not enough; one must live according to that knowledge and the Jewish nation did not! Paul scathingly rebuked his kinsmen in the flesh when he wrote: *“Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ... You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written”* (Rom. 2:17-18, 21-24). So they did not practice what they preached! They failed in their religion when they substituted for doctrine the commandments of men (Matt. 15:7-9). They sought God in an external way by rules and rites and missed Him (Rom. 9:30-32)! They became zealous for their fathers’ traditions and failed to obey God’s commandments and laws!

Today, everyone professing to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, must continually *“examine (himself) as to whether (he) is in the faith”* (2 Cor. 13:5). The deceitfulness of sin is so great that it can sneak in upon us almost imperceptibly. The Jewish nation did not turn the Law of Moses into a man-made custom overnight.

Beware the **danger** of excusing your religious practices when you cannot give New Testament authority for their practice. You might be zealous for *your church, your religion, your doctrine* -- but it will do you no good if it is not of God. Even good people can be deceived! See Acts 17:11

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