

ZEAL IN THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

by William M. Punshon

Punshon's address motivating Christians to passionate and wholehearted commitment to the cause of Christ and Gospel ministry, calling believers to fervent zeal in advancing the kingdom of God.

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It is always an advantage for the advocate of any particular cause to know the tactics of his adversary. He will be the better prepared for the onset, and repel the attack the more easily. Forewarned of danger, he will intrench himself in a position from which it will be impossible to dislodge him. The apostle Paul possess this advantage in a very eminent degree. In the earlier years of his apostleship, the Jew and the Greek were the antagonists with whom he had to contend. Having been himself a member of the strictest sect of the Jews, he knew full well the antipathy with which they regarded anything which set itself by its simplicity in contrast with their magnificent ritual; and he knew also the haughty scorn with which they turned away from what they deemed the unworthy accessories of the Nazarene. And, well read as he was in classic literature, and acquainted with all the habits and tendencies of the Grecian mind, he could readily understand how the restraints of the gospel would be deemed impertinent by the voluptuous Corinthian, and how the philosophic Athenian would brand its teachers mad. And yet, rejoicing in the experimental acquaintance with the gospel, he says, for his standing-point of advantage: "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them that are called, the power of God and the wisdom of God." And in the words of the text, addressing some of those very Corinthians upon whom the gospel had exerted its power, he seems to accept the stigma and vindicate the glorious madness: "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he, died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again." The great purpose of the apostle in these words is to impress upon us the fact that the cause of Christ in the world, sanctioned by the weight of so many obligations, fraught with the destinies of so many millions, should be furthered by every legitimate means; that for it, if necessary, should be employed the soberest wisdom; and for it, if necessary, the most impassioned zeal. He vindicates the use of zeal in the cause of Christ by the three following considerations: First, from the condition of the world; secondly, from the obligations of the Church; and, thirdly, from the master-motive of the Savior's constraining love. To illustrate and enforce this apostolic argument, as not inappropriate to the object which has called us together, will be our business for a few brief moments to-night.

I. The apostle argues and enforces the use of zeal in the cause of Christ, in the first place, from the condition of the world. The apostle speaks of the world as in a state of spiritual death. He argues the universality of this spiritual death from the universality of the atonement of Christ. "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all

dead”—dead in sin, with every vice luxuriant and every virtue languishing; dead in law, judicially in the grasp of the avenger; nay, “condemned already,” and hastening to the second death. We need not remind you that this is by no means the world’s estimate of its own condition. It is short-sighted, and, therefore, self-complacent. There is a veil over its eye; there is a delusion at its heart. In that delusion it fancies itself enthroned and stately, like some poor lunatic, an imaginary monarch under the inflictions of its keeper. The discovery of its true position comes only when the mind is enlightened from on high. “We thus judge,” not because there is in us any intuitional sagacity, or any prophetic foresight, by which our judgment is made more accurate than the judgment of others; but the Holy Spirit has come down, has wrought upon us—has shown us the plague of our own hearts—and from the death within us we can the better argue the death which exists around. And that this is the actual condition of the world, Scripture and experience combine to testify. The Bible, with comprehensive impartiality, concludes all “under sin”; represents mankind as a seed of evil-doers—“children that are corrupters”—sheep that have wandered away from the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. In the adjudication of Scripture there is no exemption from this common character of evil, and from this common exposure to danger. The men of merciful charities, and the woman of abandoned life—the proudest peer, and the vilest serf in his barony—the moralist observer of the decalogue, and the man-slayer, red with blood, all are comprehended in the broad and large denunciation: “Ye were by nature children of wrath, even as others.” And out in the broad world, wherever the observant eye travels, you have abundant confirmation of the testimony of Scripture. You have it in your own history. The transgressions and sins which constitute this moral death abound in our age no less than in any former age of mankind. There are thousands around you who revel in undisguised corruption. There are thousands more externally reputable who have only a name to live. You have this confirmation in the nations of the Continent—some safely bound by the superstition of ages; others subsiding into a reactionary skepticism. You have this confirmation further away in the countries which own Mohammedan rule, and cherish the Mohammedan’s dream—where you have unbridled lust, and a tiger’s thirst for blood. You have this confirmation in the far-off regions of heathenism proper, where the nature, bad in itself, is made a thousand fold worse by its religion—where the man is the prey of every error, and the heart the slave of every cruelty—where men live in destruction, and where men die in despair. Travel where you will, visit the most distant regions, and search under the shadow of the highest civilization—penetrate into the depths of those primeval forests, into whose original darkness you might have imagined the curse would hardly penetrate, and the result is uniformly the same. Death is everywhere. You see it, indeed, in all its varieties now in the rare and fading beauty which it wears just after the spirit has fled from the clay, when its repose seems the worn-out casket, which the soul has broken, and thrown away; now, when there is shed over it a hue of the sublime, and it is carried amid the tears to burial, and now, when corruption has begun its work, and its ill odor affects the neighborhood, and spreads the pestilence—you see it in all its varieties, but uniformly death is there. We gather from our melancholy pilgrimage no vestige of spiritual life. Mourners go about the streets, and there are mourners over many tombs.

Although, as we have observed just now, a thorough and realizing estimate of the world’s condition comes only when the judgment is enlightened from on high, the wise men of the world, the minds that have in all ages towered above their fellows, have felt an unsatisfactoriness for which they could hardly account; they have had a vague and morbid consciousness that all was not right somehow, either with themselves or with their race; they have met with disturbing forces,

signs of irregularity, tokens of misery and of sin that have ruffled, somewhat, the philosophic evenness of their minds. Each in his own way, and from his own standpoint, has guessed at the solution of the problem, and has been ready with a suggested remedy. The peoples are imbruted; educate them. The nations are barbarous; civilize them. Men grovel in sensual pleasure; cultivate the esthetic faculty; open to them galleries of pictures; bring them under the humanizing influences of art. Men groan in bondage; emancipate them, and bid them be free! Such are some of the tumultuous cries that have arisen from earnest but blind philanthropists, who have ignored the spiritual part of man's nature, and forgotten altogether the Godward relations of his soul. All these, as might have been expected, valuable enough as auxiliaries, worth something to promote the growth and comfort of a man when life has been once imparted, fail, absolutely fail to quicken the unconscious dead. In all cases the bed has been shorter than that a man could lie on it, and the covering narrower than that he could wrap himself in it. The inbred death lay too deep for such superficial alchemy; corpses can not by any possibility animate corpses; and the compassionate bystander from other worlds, sickened with the many inventions, might be constrained to cry, "Amid all this tumult of the human, O for something divine!" And the divine is given—Christ has died for all men. There is hope for the world's life. This is a death whereby we live; this is a remedy commensurate with existing need, and intended entirely to terminate and extinguish that need. That squalid savage, whose creed is a perpetual terror, and whose life is a perpetual war—Christ hath died for him. That fettered and despairing slave, into whose soul the iron has entered, valued by his base oppressor about on a par with the cattle he tends, or with the soil he digs—Christ hath died for him. That dark blasphemer, who lives in familiar crime, whose tongue is set on fire of hell, whose expatriation would be hailed by the neighborhood around him as a boon of chiefest value—Christ has died for him. That dark recluse, whose awakened conscience harasses, and who, in the vain hope of achieving merit by suffering, wastes himself with vigilant penance well-nigh to the grave—Christ has died for him. Oh, tell these tidings to the world, and it will live. Prophecy of this name in the motionless valley, and the divine Spirit who always waits to do honor to Jesus will send the afflatus from the four winds of heaven, and they shall leap into life to His praise.

Now take these two points. Think in the first place, of the condition of the world—a condition so disastrous, that nothing but death can illustrate it—a condition which prostrates every faculty, which smites the body with unnumbered cruelties, which dwarfs the mind with prejudices or distorts it into unholy passion, which banishes the soul and mind within a man in hopeless estrangement from happiness and God; and then think of the death of Christ, providing for the furthest need, overtaking the utmost exile, pouring its abundant life upon the sepulchered nations, diffusing light, liberty, hope, comfort, heaven: and I appeal to your enlightened judgment whether you are not bound, those of you who believe in Jesus, to labor for the world's conversion with intensest energy and zeal. Oh, if temporal miseries elicit sympathy, and prompt to help; if the anxieties of a neighborhood gather around a drowning child, or are fastened upon the rafters of a burning house, where, solitary and imploring, stands a single man, already charred by the flame, how much of sympathy, of effort, of liberality, of zeal, of prayer, are due to a world lying in the wicked one, and panting after the second death! You will agree with me, that there is more than license for the poet's words:

“On such a theme, ‘Tis impious to be calm!” And you will rejoice—will you not? to take your stand to-night by the apostle’s side, and to cry, when men deem your zeal impertinence and your efforts fanaticism, “If we be beside ourselves, it is to God: and if we be sober, it is for your cause.”

II. The apostle argues the necessity for zeal in the cause of Christ, secondly, from the obligations of the Church, in that He died for all, that they should live—should not henceforth live unto themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. The apostle’s argument is this—none of us has life in himself; if we live at all, we live by imparted life; we live because life has been drafted into our spirits from on high. Then it is not our own; it belongs to Him who has purchased it for us with His own blood, and we are bound to employ it in His service, and for His glory. This also is the conclusion of an enlightened judgment. We judge this as well as the other, and this is in accordance with the whole tenor of Scripture. Time would fail us to mention a tithe of the passages in which devotion—the devotion of the heart and of the service of God are made matter of constant and of prominent demand. I will just mention one passage that may serve as an illustration of all: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye give your bodies as a living sacrifice.” Have you ever gaged the depth of consecration that slumbers in the heart of those words—“a living sacrifice”; to be absolutely and increasingly devoted to God, as if the knife were at the throat, and the life-blood streamed forth in votive offering? Nay, better than that; because the life-blood could stream out but once, but the living sacrifice may be a perpetual holocaust, repeated daily for a lifetime—a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. From the doctrine of this passage, and of numberless others kindred to it, it would appear that the regenerate heart is not at liberty to live for itself, nor to aim supremely at its own gratification; it must live for Him who has died for it, and who has risen again. You can not fail, I think, to perceive that compliance with this exhortation is utterly antagonistic to the ordinary procedure of mankind. In the age of organization against idolatry, there is one proud, rampant idolatry which retains its ascendancy amongst us. Selfishness is the most patronized idolatry in the world. It is the great image whose brightness is exceeding terrible, and before which all men bow; it is a throne, and an empire, and the likeness of a kingly crown; it equips armies and mans armaments to gratify its lust of power. Fastnesses have been explored and caverns ransacked to appease its thirst for gold. It presides over the councils of kings and over the diplomacy of cabinets; for it the merchantman grindeth down his manhood, for it the treader-under-foot of nations marcheth in his might and in his shame; its votaries are of all handicrafts—of the learned professions, and of every walk in life. It hath sometimes climbed on to the judgment-seat, and perverted justice there. The cowed monk hath hidden it beneath his robe, and it hath become for him an engine of oppression, and it hath occasionally robed itself in holy vestments, and entered the priest’s office for a morsel of bread. No grace or virtue of humanity is free from its contamination. It has breathed, and patriotism has degenerated into partisanship; it has breathed, and friendship has been simulated for policy; it has breathed, and charity has been blemished by ostentation; it has breathed, and religion has been counterfeited for gold; its sway is a despotism—its territory wherever man hath trodden, and it is the undisputed anarchy of the world. Now it is against this principle in human nature, throned within us all, doggedly contesting every inch of ground, that Christianity goes forth to combat. The gospel absolutely refuses to allow self to be the governing power, and assaults it in all its strongholds with precepts of sublime morality. To the selfishness of avarice it goes up boldly, even while the miser clutches his gold, and says: “Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” To the

selfishness of anger it addresses itself, even when the red spot is yet on the brow of the angry: "Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath"; "Bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." To the selfishness of pride, even in its haughtiness and arrogance, it says: "In honor preferring one another, be clothed with humility, let each esteem another better than himself." To the selfishness of indifference to the concerns of others, "Look not on thine own things, but likewise upon the things of others"; and to the selfishness of souls and criminal neglect of the great salvation, it speaks in tones of pathos which that must be a callous heart that can withstand, "Ye know the graces of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sins he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich." Oh, how small, alongside of august and heavenly precepts like these, are the sublimest maxims of any merely ethical morality!

It is said that, once, during the performance of a comedy in the Roman theater, one of the actors gave utterance to the sentiment, "I am a man; nothing, therefore, that is human can be foreign to me," and the audience were so struck by the disinterestedness, or so charmed by the novelty, that they greeted it with thunders of applause. How much greater wealth of kindly wisdom and prompting to unselfish action lies hidden in the gospel of Christ, shrined there as everyday utterances passed by the most of us very slightly by! Oh! let there be anything like the genial practise of this divine morality, and the world would soon lose its aspect of desolation and of blood; oppression and over-reaching, and fraud and cruelty, would be frowned out of the societies of men, and this earth would be once more an ample and a peopled paradise. By selfishness, as we have thus endeavored to describe it, we mean that grasping, monopolizing spirit which gets all and gives nothing; heedful enough of its own fortunes, careless of the concerns and interests of others. This is the principle in our nature which Christianity opposes, and with which it ceaselessly wages war. But there is a sort of selfishness which, for the sake of distinction, we may call self-love, which is instinctive, and therefore innocent—that merciful provision by which we are prompted to the care of our own lives and to the avoidance of everything that would disquiet or abridge them. This principle in our nature Christianity encourages; to this principle Christianity addresses itself; and hence it has connected, married in indissoluble union, man's chiefest duty and man's highest pleasure. Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is. What has the dark, morbid, unhappy sensualist to do with it? Godliness hath the promise of the life "that now is," as well as "that which is to come." In keeping Thy commandments there is a present reward. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." "In thy presence there is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for ever-more." Just as it is in man's physical organization, and its adaptation to the material world around him, when body and mind are alike in health, we can neither eat, nor drink, nor walk, nor sleep, nor sing, nor perform any of the commonest actions of life without a sensation of pleasure; so it is in the spiritual life: there is pleasure in its every motion. There is pleasure even in the sting of penitence; it is "A godly grief and pleasing smart, That melting of a broken heart."

There is pleasure in the performance of duty; there is pleasure in the enjoyment of privilege; there is pleasure in the overcoming of temptations, a grand thrill of happiness to see trampled under foot a vanquished lust or slain desire; there is pleasure in the exercise of benevolence; there is pleasure in the importunity of prayer. Hence it is that the apostle seeks to rivet the sense of

personal obligation by the remembrance of personal benefit. "We thus judge, that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who"—owns them? No. Claims them? No. Will judge them? No; but—"to him who died for them and rose again." Gratitude is to be the best prompter to our devotion. Those who live to Christ, those who live by Christ, will not tamely see His altars forsaken, His Sabbaths desecrated, His name blasphemed, the blood of the covenant wherewith He was sanctified accounted an unholy thing. Brethren, are you of that happy family? Have you obtained life from the dead through His name? Then you are bound to spend it for His honor, and, watching with godly jealousy for every possible opportunity of doing good, to spend and be spent for them who have not yet your Master known. I call on you to answer this invocation; it belongs to you. There is no neutrality, believe me, in this war—and if there be some of you that would like to be dastardly and half-hearted trimmers, you will find by and by that you have got the hottest place in the battle, exposed to the cross-fire from the artillery of both parties. I call on you decisively to-night to answer this invocation. Call up before your minds the benefits you have individually received; think of the blessings which the death of Christ has procured for you—the removal of the blighting curse which shadowed all your life, the present sense of pardon, mastery over self and over sin, light in the day of your activity, and songs in the night of your travail; the teaching Spirit to lead you into still loftier knowledge, and the sanctifying Spirit to impress upon you the image of the heavenly; that divine fellowship which lightens the present, and that majestic hope which makes the future brighter far. Think of the benefits which the resurrection of Christ has conferred upon you; light in the shadowed valley, the last enemy destroyed, support amid the swellings of Jordan, a guide upon the hither side of the flood, angelic welcomes, the King in his beauty, and "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And then, as the sum of favor is presented, and gratitude arises and the fire burns, and the heart is full, and the frame quivers with the intensity of its emotions, just remember that there is a world lying in the wicked one, that there are multitudes, thousands upon thousands, in your own city, at your own doors, for whom the Savior died, who never heard His name; that there are multitudes for whom He has abolished death who have never felt His resurrection's power. Let your tears flow; better, far better a tear for God's sake and the world's sake than the hard-hearted-ness and darkness of sin. Lift up your voice in the midst of them; lift it up, be not afraid. Say unto the cities of Judah, "Behold your God." Men will call you mad, but you can give them the apostle's answer, "If we be beside ourselves, it is to God; if we be sober, it is for your cause."

III. The apostle argues the necessity of zeal in the cause of Christ, in the third place, from the master motive of the Savior's constraining love. "The love of Christ constraineth us"—forces us along, carries us away as with the impetuosity of a torrent, or rather as when cool heavens and favoring air speed the vessel steadily to the haven. Love is at once man's most powerful motive and his highest inspiration, both in the life that now is and that which is to come. From love to Christ spring the most devoted obedience, the most untiring efforts in His service. There are other springs of action, I know, by which men are influenced to a profession of religion. Interest can occasionally affect godliness from sordid aims, and behave itself decorously amid the respectabilities of the temple-going and almsgiving religion; but it will give its arm to any man that goes down to the house of Rimmon; and if there is a decree that at the sound of all kinds of music they are to fall down before another image which has been erected in the plains of Dura, they will be the most obsequious benders of the knee. Men sometimes practise obedience under the influence of fear. A sudden visitation, a prevailing epidemic, an alarming appeal, will strike into

momentary concern; but when the indignation is overpast, and the craven soul has recovered from its paroxysms of terror, there will often be a relapse into more than the former atrocities of evil. Convictions of duty may and sometimes will induce a man, like an honest Pharisee of the olden time, to observe rigidly the enactments of the law; but there will be no heart in his obedience, and no holy passion in his soul; but let the love of God be shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him, let there be a perception of love in God, let there be sight of the Crucified as well as of the cross, and there will be disinterested, and cheerful, and hearty obedience. Zeal for God will become at once a passion and a principle, intensifying every purpose into ardor, and filling the whole soul with vehemence of absorbing desire. This is the emotion from whose natural and inevitable outflow the apostle vindicates impassioned zeal.

Opinions are divided as to whether the constraining love spoken of in the text refers to Christ's love to us or to our love to Him, which the sense of His love has enkindled in the soul. I do not think we can go far wrong if we take both meanings, inasmuch as no principle of exposition is violated, and as we need the pressure of a combination of motive, that we may be zealously affected always in this good thing. Ye, then, if there are any of you here who need rousing to energy in the service of Christ, think of His love to you; how rich its manifestations, and how unfeigned; how all other love of which it is possible for you to conceive shrinks in the comparison! There have been developments in the histories of years of self-sacrificing affection, which has clung to the loved object amid hazard and suffering, and which has been ready even to offer up life in its behalf.

Orestes and Pylades, Damon and Pythias, David and Jonathan, what lovely episodes their histories give us amid a history of selfishness and sin! Men have canonized them, partly because such instances are rare, and partly because they are like a dim hope of redemption looming from the ruins of the fall. We have it on inspired authority, indeed, "Greater love hath no man than this"—this is the highest point which man can compass, this is the culminating point of that affection which man can by possibility attain, the apex of his loftiest pyramid goes no higher than this—"greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend; but God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." A brother has sometimes made notable efforts to retrieve a brother's fortunes, or to blanch his sullied honor; but there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. A father has bared his breast to shield his offspring from danger, and a mother would gladly die for the offspring of her womb; but a father's affection may fail in its strength, and yet more rarely a mother's in its tenderness. And "can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." O Jesus of Nazareth, who can declare Thee? "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins." Think of that love—love which desertion could not abate—love which ingratitude could not abate—which treachery could not abate—love which death could not destroy—love which, for creatures hateful and hating one another, stooped to incarnation, and suffered want, and embraced death, and shrank not even from the loathsomeness and from the humiliation of burial; and then, with brimming eye, and heart that is full of wonder: "Why such love to me?" you will indeed be ungrateful if you are not stirred by it to an energy of consecration and endeavor, which may well seem intemperate zeal to cool reckoners with worldly wisdom.

Then take the other side of the argument; take it as referring to your love to Christ, which the sense of His love has enkindled in the soul. The deepest affection in the believing heart will always be the love of Jesus. The love of home, the love of friends, the love of letters, the love of rest, the love of travel, and all else, are contracted by the side of this master passion. "A little deeper," said one of the veterans of the first Napoleon's old guard, when they were probing in his bosom for a bullet that had mortally wounded him, and he thought they were getting somewhere in the region of the heart—"a little deeper and you will find the Emperor." Engraven on the Christian's heart deeper than all other love of home or friends, with an ineffaceable impression that nothing can erase, you find the loved name of Jesus. Oh! let this affection impel us, and who shall measure our diligence or repress our zeal? Love is not bound by rule; there is no law that can bind it; it is never below the precept, it is always up to the precept, but it always has a margin of its own. It does not calculate, with mathematical exactitude, with how little of obedience it can escape penalty and secure recompense; like its Master it gives in princely style; it is exuberant in its manifestations; there is always enough and to spare. And if meaner motive can prompt to heroic action—if from pure love of science astronomers can cross the ocean familiarly, and dare encounter dangers, just that they may watch in distant climes the transit of a planet across the disc of the sun—and if botanists can travel into inhospitable climes and sojourn among inhospitable men, only to gather specimens of their gorgeous flora—and if, with no motive but love of country, and no recompense save bootless tears and an undying name, a Willoughby could sacrifice himself to blow up a magazine, and a Sarkeld could fire the Cashmere Gate at Delhi, surely we, with obligations incomparably higher, with the vows of profession on our lips, with death busy in the midst of us, and souls going down from our doors into a joyless and blasted immortality, ought to present our life-blood, if need be, for the cause of Christ, and for the good of souls. Let the scoffers spurn at us as they will; we are far superior to such poor contumely. Heaven applauds our enthusiasm, and we vindicate it in the apostle's words: "If we be beside ourselves, it is to God; and if we be sober, it is for your cause."

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