

Boiling for Christ

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of serving Christ with intensity and focus, and warns against serving appetites, people's approval, and the law.

Duration: 42:26

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:9-16

Topics: "Serving Christ", "Genuine Love"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper emphasizes the importance of wholeheartedly loving and serving the Lord. He encourages believers to have intensity and focus in their devotion to God, not being slothful in zeal. The sermon is based on Romans 12:9-13, which instructs believers to let love be genuine, abhor evil, love one another, and serve the Lord fervently. Pastor Piper also highlights the freedom and joy that comes from serving Christ and not being bound by the law.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.desiringgod.org. I invite you to open up your Bibles with me to read our scripture text for this evening's sermon. It's in the Book of Romans, chapter 12, verses 9 through 13.

And if you don't have your own copy of the scriptures with you, you can find a pew Bible either underneath your pew or the pew in front of you. And in those, it's in page 948. Reading in Romans 12, verses 9 through 13.

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal.

Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope.

Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Let's pray together. Father, some love to you is more than no love to you. And so I pray for some love to you in hearts where there's no love for you.

May this service be the instrument in your gracious hands to awaken love to Christ where there's none. And for those who have some, and it's an embattled love, like a little spark with wind blowing against it or a wave breaking over it, protect that spark tonight. Protect that spark this morning.

Father, I ask that your name would be magnified in the conflagration of love that you produce in this people. Father, help me now to be faithful to the Word of God and not to preach myself, but to preach Jesus Christ as Lord and myself as the servant of this people and the servant of Christ. Use your word to establish us, empower us, so that in this year we are free from the love of money and are able to give lavishly to calamities in the world and to the ongoing ministry of this church and other good things.

Grant that we would be deeply satisfied in Jesus Christ so that our delight in Him would not be compromised by any appetite. So come and guard me from error and guard me from pride and guard me from the fear of man and be alive and powerful and gracious in and through me. Now I pray over your word in Jesus name.

Amen. So here we are now at verse 11. You remember we skipped it back in December because I said I thought the Christmas text worked better from verse 12.

And then after we did that for Christmas, we took two weeks, prayer week before, prayer week after, to talk about, well, how is it that verse 12 happens, rejoicing in hope, enduring or being patient in tribulation, being constant in prayer. And we said prayer is the way you rejoice in hope and being in the word is the way you rejoice in hope. And now we're back to the verse we skipped.

Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord.

Paul's already addressed the issue of zeal in verse eight. Remember that part? Let the one who leads lead with zeal. Now he's saying, don't be slothful in zeal.

Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. The way I would describe the relationship between verse 11 and the other verses around it, especially 12, is that verse 11 gives the intensity and the focus of our joy and our hope and our endurance and our prayer and our service.

So I want to talk about those two things, intensity and focus. And the intensity is in the first two phrases of verse 11, and the focus is in the last phrase of verse 11. So first intensity.

Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. I think those are a negative and a positive way of saying the same thing.

Don't negatively. Don't be lazy in zeal. Positively be fervent in spirit.

So if you collapse the two statements, negative and positive into one statement, I think it would go something like. Do lots of work for Christ passionately. Do lots of work.

For Christ passionately. Let's think about these two statements, the negative and the positive. I think when Paul does that, one of the effects it has is that each each statement protects the other from a misuse.

Each sheds light on the other so that if you take this one a little bit too far, this one grabs it and pulls it back. And if you take this one a little bit too far, this one grabs it and pulls it back. So let's look at them one at a time.

First, do not be slothful in zeal. So that's an address to those who should be very pragmatic, not lazy. The word is lazy.

Slothful means lazy. This is a summons to work and not be lazy, to be zealous and not lazy. Be eager and earnest and zealous to get things done.

A great virtue in that phrase is efficiency. Get it done. Make it happen.

Don't be lazy. Get up early. Go to bed late.

Work hard. Don't be slothful in your zeal for God, which could be very lopsided, I think. You might say, yeah, right.

That's exactly the way I think it should be. Get things done. Be efficient.

It's doing that matters. And then, of course, the next phrase comes in to protect people against you. You efficiency types.

You type A, get everything done and feel nothing types. So this comes in and says now be fervent in spirit. And the word fervent comes from the Latin fervens, boil.

And that's exactly what the Greek word means. Boil in the spirit. This is a statement.

OK, all of us efficiency, get it done. No nonsense business men type. Feel something.

Boil, boil in your spirit for Christ. So we have a balance against the pragmatic bent, which is in the Bible. It's not just a personality type.

It's a biblical bent. It's a good thing to want to get things done and not be lazy. And then it works the other way around.

If you were to linger over the second verse, be fervent in spirit. You were certain personality. You'd say, yes, that's what the Christian life is.

It's all about passion. It's all about feeling. It's all about loving.

It's all about zeal. Yes, that's what Christianity is. It's a heart religion, which is absolutely true.

And then the church needs to be protected from you. And so it brings in the other side, namely the pragmatic side and says, no, it's not just about feeling. It's about doing.

It's about not being lazy. It's about getting things done. It's not being slothful.

First Corinthians 15 58 is a great paraphrase. Maybe Paul has just finished a chapter on the resurrection of Christ and how it becomes the foundation and hope of our resurrection. And he concludes, I mean, where would you end after 57 verses, 57 verses on the resurrection of Jesus and our resurrection hope with him? Where would you end? And here's his here's his ending.

Here's his last verse. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. We ought to be doing lots of work.

I don't know any other way to say abounding in the work of the Lord means doing lots of it, lots and lots and lots of work. That's what ought to be happening in the church and in the saints of God. But not to the neglect of our hearts and not to the neglect of passion or feeling or boiling or fervency.

We should be both. So if you're the pragmatic type, you should not say I'm practical, not passionate. You should say, Lord, I'm practical.

Make me more passionate. And if you're the passionate type, you should not say I'm passionate, not practical or pragmatic. You shouldn't say that.

You should say I'm passionate. Lord, make me more practical so that I get things done and don't just dink around with my emotions all day. So let's just get the Bible together.

Let's pull the whole Bible together. And if we feel, yes, oh, this feels so good, let's be bumped into by the other text and pray over it and read the Bible and ask God to do the balancing work in our life. And I know we'll always be one or the other mainly.

That's the way most people are. And that's OK as long as you're not content to be only the one or the other, because the Bible says don't be slothful in zeal and the Bible says boil in the spirit. So we should make it our aim to be businessmen and poets, businesswomen and lovers.

That's your goal. Jonathan Edwards, when he was 20, wrote 70 resolutions and they're very famous for those who love Edwards. I mean, that's a very small fame.

Number six, I read these a long time ago and they had a profound effect on me. I go back to them periodically and I love this one. So simple.

He wrote, resolved to live with all my might while I live. Do you aim to live with all your might while you live? Whatever my hand finds to do, I will do it with all my heart. Is that the way you live? Do you boil? Do you boil in the spirit, in the service of Christ? Or are you just phlegmatic? If you are, then ask God to make you live with all your might while you live.

There's a warning, Revelation 3:15. I know your works, Jesus says. You are neither cold nor hot.

You're not boiling or freezing. Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth.

That's really scary. And so don't take this lightly. Don't say, oh, we're just talking about personality types here.

We're not. We're talking about a longing, a praying, a yearning, a questing for being passionately pragmatic. Poetically businesslike.

The great commandment is you shall love the Lord your God with some. No, all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind. How are you doing with the all of your life? C plus B minus D. Move forward in 2005 with the all of the great commandment.

So that's my first focus. This verse is about intensity. About working hard, not being slothful in zeal and about feeling deeply boiling in the spirit, this verse pulls together the two sides and says, let's be whole, healthy people for each other.

And now, secondly, and the only other part is focus, intensity and focus, intensity and focus. And the focus is the last phrase. Serve the Lord.

Don't be slothful and zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord.

It's the Lord, the Lord. We're not, we're not talking about general personality traits here. Like if I quit the sermon here and just said, oh, let's all be businesslike and pragmatic and let's balance that with poetry and love and passion and zeal.

We'd all go out. That'd be a pagan sermon. It'd be a pagan sermon.

No. How to win friends and influence people and succeed in business and make a good marriage and we'd all be Christless. And so the sermon is not ending here.

This has got a focus. This has got a focus. This this boiling in this pragmatism has a focus and the focus is serve the Lord.

Jesus is the focus here. The greatest thing in the world is to be saved. I like that sentence.

I didn't make it up. I heard it on the deathbed of Dr. Wyden, the statesman who was at this church as the main man when I came. He died, I think, in 82.

And when I went to visit him, I think it was in United in St. Paul, I don't know if it's called that then. He was on his bed when I walked in, he looked at me and the first thing he said, hello, Pastor Piper, the greatest thing in the world is to be saved. I made a profound impact, as you can tell now, 23 years later, I'm quoting it to you.

It's true. Christ has given us eternal life. Christ cannot die.

We cannot die. Overwhelming joy is offered to us forever and ever and ever. Everything works together for your good.

If you are in him, an eternal weight of glory is being wrought by all the troubles right now. You're in trouble tonight. Awful things are happening in your life.

I hope that God will awaken you to the truth. This slight momentary affliction is working for me an eternal weight of glory. The greatest thing in the world in this trouble is to be saved.

Therefore, we should not be slothful. But passionate and boiling and serving this Christ, serving this Christ, the highest privilege in the world is to serve Jesus Christ. So let's do this.

Let's take that biblical call, serve Christ, serve the Lord, and let's compare it with three other things you can serve which are in the Bible that ought not to be served. But they're mentioned as possible objects of your service in the Bible. I think that's the best way that I can think of to unpack what's the nature of this service different from all these other services.

OK, so that's where we're going. Number one, serve Jesus, not your belly. That's a literal translation of.

Roman 6:17, I'll read it to you. 16:17 Roman 16:17. I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught.

Avoid them, for such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. There it is. Here's a group of people who have a service.

Everybody serves something, and this people do not serve the Lord Christ. They're in the church. They're causing problems because they serve their own appetites.

The literal translation is they serve their belly. Serving Christ is contrasted with serving your appetites. So what does it mean to serve your appetites? You serve your appetites when you treat them as the most compelling offer of pleasure.

You serve your appetites when you treat them as the most compelling offer of pleasure. If Christ calls you to self-control and chastity and purity of mind, and your appetites call you to self-indulgence and sexual license and impure thoughts, and you follow those appetites, then you are saying they are more compelling in their offer of pleasure than Christ and the service of Christ is. Serving Christ doesn't measure up to what these appetites offer me.

He doesn't measure up to what they offer. Now, that's very dangerous to say. It's called idolatry.

So the contrast here between serving the belly, the appetites, and serving Christ draws our attention to the fact that Christ is superior. Serving Christ is more valuable than serving the appetites. Serving Christ is better than eating food.

Serving Christ is better than sex, sexual intercourse, pornography, sexual fantasies, and masturbation. Christ is better than what those appetites offer. Faith embraces that.

Christ is better than what your appetites... So one thing we can say about serving Christ in is that it means experiencing His worth and beauty and fellowship as more compelling than what our appetites offer to us as desirable. Serving Christ means experiencing the risen Christ who died for us, who lives, who reigns, experiencing Christ as more compelling than our appetites are compelling when they lure us to what He disapproves of. Second, not only serve Jesus not appetites, but secondly, serve Jesus not people.

Well, yes, you're supposed to serve people in one way, but not another way. The Bible says both. So let's clarify here so you can really know what serving Jesus is.

Yes, we serve people in the sense that we put ourselves at the disposal of people's needs and help them and lift them and meet their needs. Galatians 5.13, do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, through love, serve one another. Serve one another.

So what do I mean when I say serve Jesus not people? I mean, Ephesians 6.6, Paul tells servants to do this, work not by the way of eye service as men pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with all goodwill as to the Lord, not, not to man. So there it is real clear, serve the Lord, not man. And the meaning is also clear.

Don't serve their approval. Don't make yourself the slave of other people's approval. Don't need other people's approval.

Don't always be looking over your shoulder when you consult with Jesus as to what to do, to wonder what so and so will think about this. And touching your words carefully, like the pastor I heard of last Sunday, who said on Sunday morning, God has nothing to do with calamities. When somebody asked him, really,

what about Acts four? And he said, well, that's for Wednesday night.

I lie on Sunday morning. I tell the truth on Wednesday night. That is pure people pleasing.

That's pure slavery. That's a service you ought not to engage in. Serve Jesus.

Care about one approval. Christ's. Let the chips fall where they will.

Don't serve man in that way. Oh, what a liberty in life comes from playing to one audience alone. How freeing it is.

You don't have to be looking around all the time, wondering who heard what. You're just always saying what he wants you to say and doing what he wants you to do. And his approval matters and nobody else ultimately matters.

And that ultimately is important. I could give a whole sermon here on texts like seek to please your neighbor for his good. I know life is complex and that you don't want to.

Run roughshod over everybody on your way to obey Jesus. You know, to hell with you and your opinions, it's me and Jesus, right? That's not the way you want to be. But mainly, mainly you want to say ultimately.

One audience matters. And that's Jesus. And if it costs me disapproval, I won't serve.

I won't serve the ears of different audiences. Third and lastly, don't serve the law. Serve Jesus.

So serve Jesus, not your appetites. And serve Jesus, not people and their approval. Serve Jesus and not the law.

Now this is going to get right at the heart of the gospel. Listen carefully for another few minutes. This is the best news that I've had for you all night long.

To understand the difference between serving the law and serving Jesus is the most wonderful thing about the Christian life. So listen very carefully. It's the heart of the book of Romans.

So we're going back to some of the heart of the book of Romans. Here's where I'm getting this idea. Chapter 7, verse 6 of Romans.

But now we are released from the law. That's a good news. Now we are released from the law, having died.

So don't think you're released from the law if you haven't died. Having died with Christ, having died to that which held us captive, made us slaves. So that we serve.

That's what I'm looking for. How, Paul? So that we serve not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit. So Paul contrasts serving the law, serving the do's and don'ts of the Mosaic covenant or any other covenant, serving the do's and don'ts, focusing, focusing on the demands of the Bible with a view to doing them to get right with God and thus being enslaved in misery and guilt and hopelessness.

Deadly. It's deadly, deadly, deadly to try to serve the law. Rather, we are to serve in the new life of the Spirit, which is a focus on Christ.

It's a focus on Christ. Not the law. Serving Christ is not mainly a new law.

Let's get this real clear now. We don't replace Sinai and the Mosaic law with the Sermon on the Mount. That's Jesus law.

That's Moses law. We got a new law here and you just basically deal with it in the same way. That's not the point.

The new thing is not new law. The new thing is person in place of law. I'm not focusing any longer on the list.

I shall not kill, not commit adultery. I'm focusing on the person of Jesus Christ. Why does this make a massive difference? That divine person that I'm focusing on is first and foremost a law fulfiller, not a law demander.

He's not like Moses. He's radically different from Moses. Nobody looked at Moses in his law as a law fulfiller first and then a law demander.

He was just a law demander. But when you stop focusing on the do's and don'ts of the Mosaic law and start focusing on this glorious divine person, the person you meet is first and foremost a law fulfiller and curse bearer. And that changes everything.

If you're burdened down tonight trying to fulfill the law, I've got good news for you. Christianity is not a new law. It's not replacing the old law with a new law.

It's replacing law with person. And the first thing you encounter, and you're encountering him right now, if you have ears to hear, the first thing you encounter is you meet Jesus as one who says, Matthew 3, 15, it is fitting that we should fulfill all righteousness. And he does.

It comes right into the human role and he's baptized. And at every point, he does what we could not do perfectly, perfectly. Every place the first Adam fell, he did not fall.

Every failure to trust, he trusted. Every disobedience, he obeyed. And as the second Adam, I now, by faith alone, am united to him and all of his righteousness is mine.

And that's not all that he did. But when he died, Galatians 3, 13, he became a curse for us as it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on the tree. So now he's done two massive things for me, this Christ that I meet first on my way to some do's and don'ts in the Bible.

The first thing he has done is fulfill all the demands of the law that I cannot fulfill. And the second thing he's done is bear the curse for all my failures so that a righteousness is provided and a substitute curse is endured. And I am the freest of all people in the Holy Spirit now.

And I will care with all my heart about this Christ's being known in the world for who he is. I can't steal anymore. That wouldn't tell the truth about Jesus.

I can't commit adultery against Noel. I wouldn't tell the truth about Jesus. Life becomes a focus on a person and we meet that person first and foremost as a law fulfiller, not a law demander.

So let me sum up where we've been and illustrate. We've seen three features of serving Christ by comparing it to what we ought not to serve. Number one, serving Christ is seeing the Lord as worth more than what our appetites offer.

Two, serving the Lord is seeing the Lord's approval as worth more than the approval of people. We will not serve or be enslaved to the approval of other people. And third, serving the Lord is believing, believing who he is, divine son of God, and what he's done, become our righteousness, died in our place, and then longing, striving, being pragmatically passionate about becoming what we are in Christ perfectly.

Now, what's left to do? What's left to do is draw out this amazing implication from that last point. This means, and I would love this to be in the common vocabulary of this church and in the common mindset. This means that all of our serving is receiving service from Christ, which he bought for us when he died.

All of our serving others and him is a receiving of his service, enabling us to do our service. Moment by moment, as I put my foot down in a pathway of service, I am being enabled to put my foot down by the service of Christ. The son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom from any.

If you are not served moment by moment by Christ, you don't serve Christ to his glory. You serve him to your glory. The giver gets the glory.

Now, let me read you the texts where that is made so clear. There are at least four of them. I think I'll mention three.

I'll just read them and we'll be finished. Romans 15, 18, Paul says, I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring about obedience among the Gentiles by word and deed. Anything that I can talk about that ought to be talked about in my ministry, Christ has done through me.

So my serving of Christ is Christ's doing it through me. That means that when you think about serving, you think first about this person who loved you and gave himself for you and bought all the blessings of eternity for you that you don't deserve, including the enabling of your service. And so serving is a constant trusting, a constant leaning, a constant depending and a constant receiving.

Second text on that point, Colossians 128 and 29, Colossians 128. Christ, we proclaim warning everyone, teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this, I toil.

I'm a businessman. I'm not lazy. I get things done.

I'm a type A. For this, I toil, struggling with. With what? With all the energy that he powerfully works within me. You think I'm struggling? I'm not struggling.

He's struggling in and through me. I'm leaning. I'm trusting.

I'm a little baby in the arms of Jesus, enabling me to get things done. That's an amazing view of service. Run, John, run.

The law requires. The law demands. Remember that one? Run, John, run.

The law demands, but gives him neither feet nor hands. Far better news the gospel brings. It bids him fly and gives him wings.

Yeah, you got to flap them, but he's in there working these things. One more text. This is a whole worldview I'm giving you here on what it means to be a Christian.

First Corinthians 15:10. By the grace of God, I am what I am. So I'm passionate or I'm pragmatic.

By the grace of God, I am what I am. And his grace toward me was not in vain. But on the contrary, I worked harder than any of them.

Oh, he was not slothful in zeal. I worked harder than any of them. Though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

And the fourth text that I could recite is, and I will. First Peter 4:11. Let him who serves serve in the strength that God supplies so that in everything, God may get the glory through Jesus Christ to whom belongs the dominion forever.

That's an amazing verse. The whole of Christianity is in that verse. You want to serve Jesus? Oh, may you serve Jesus.

Serve him in the strength that he supplies. That is, he must serve you in order for you to serve him. And therefore, serving Jesus is first and foremost.

Trust in being served like a helpless cripple. Baby, unless you turn to become like a little child, you can't even enter the kingdom of heaven. Serving Jesus is not first mustering up a lot of self will and a lot of energy and a lot of willpower.

Now I'm going to get it done for Jesus. It's not the way you serve Jesus. You serve Jesus by hearing all those texts say he's mightily working in me.

He's stirring me up. His grace is working with me in the power that he supplies. Serving Jesus is first trusting Jesus.

That's what I would like to be a given in this church's mental life. Can we all think together? Serving Jesus is first trusting Jesus to serve me. The son of man came not to be served, but to serve.

Can we feel that first? I pray that we can. I said earlier, serving Jesus is the greatest privilege in the world. I'll sum up in one sentence now why I believe that's the case.

Serving Jesus Christ, the Lord, is the greatest privilege in the world because the greatest person in the universe has not just called me into his service, but has become our servant so that all of our serving is trusting and depending and receiving. That's why it's the greatest thing in the world to serve Jesus. The giver gets the glory.

The greatest life is life of serving Jesus. We get the help. He gets the praise.

And that's the way it ought to be. We get the joy. He gets the honor.

So don't be slothful. Don't be slothful in zeal. Boil in the spirit as you serve the Lord.

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