

# The Nature and Need of Spiritual Zeal

by Mack Tomlinson

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*This sermon focuses on the importance of spiritual zeal as a mark of true Christianity, emphasizing the need for all believers to be fervent in spirit and zealous for the things of God. It explores the nature of biblical zeal, distinguishing it from emotionalism or fanaticism, and highlights the examples of zeal in the lives of biblical figures like Paul, David, and Jesus. The message encourages Christians to cultivate and embrace true zeal, recognizing its significance in honoring Christ, advancing the Gospel, and impacting the world for God's kingdom.*

**Scripture:** Romans 12:11, Psalms 69:9, Isaiah 59:17, 2 Corinthians 5:13, Revelation 3:19

**Topics:** "Spiritual Zeal", "True Christianity"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Romans 12, verse 11, and notice that this is an exhortation, it is a command, it's a moral and ethical responsibility of all believers, not just church leaders, missionaries, evangelists, but Christian mothers, Christian young people, Christian brothers, the whole church. Romans 12, verse 11, do not be slothful in zeal, but be fervent in spirit. The original language can be translated, be fervent in the Holy Spirit.

Either way, it's true, our own spirit, our own spiritual climate needs to have a fervor to it, a zeal, and we need to be fervent and zealous in the Holy Spirit, serving the Lord. The verse ends with. So we're going to speak this morning about the nature and the need of spiritual zeal.

So let's pray and ask the Lord to make this helpful to us. Father, thank You for the rain, and thank You for the sunshine, the glory of God in the earth. Whether it's raining, thundering, lightning, the God of glory thunders.

He sends the lightning to strike where it's supposed to. Lord, You send the rain to refresh and replenish the earth, and You give a glorious, sunny morning on a new day. It all comes from Your hand, and we're

grateful, we acknowledge it.

Bless our time in Your Word. Speak to us, quicken us, teach us, instruct us, stir us, and give us more of this grace of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The nature and need of spiritual zeal. Hello, Johnsons. It's about time you were back here.

We're glad to have you here. I could have titled this, Be a Zealous Christian. Be a zealous Christian.

Every Christian is to be a zealous Christian. Which, Paul's language here is, fervent in spirit. We're called here by the Apostle to be possessed by holy and true zeal.

Because, as Ian Murray said, a dull, half-hearted Christian is a poor representative of Christ and the Gospel. A poor, dull-hearted, half-hearted Christian is a poor representative of Christ and the Gospel. We should ask ourselves, am I that? Am I lacking in zeal, and thus am I a poor representative of Christ and the Gospel? If so, we need a good dose of more zeal.

And there's only one who can give that. You can't work it up, but you can yield to Him, and you can pray down more of the Holy Spirit. Think in terms, when you think of zeal, of conformity to the image of Jesus Christ.

Think in terms of sanctification, growth in grace, increasing in Christ's likeness. And when we think in those terms, of growth in grace, we think of things like love, don't we? Or holiness, more holiness. Or prayerfulness, or faithfulness, or endurance, self-denial.

But what about zeal? Thinking in terms of increasing in zeal. This too is becoming like our Lord Jesus Christ. What is biblical zeal that Paul has in mind here in Romans 12 and 11? Well, it is not emotionalism.

Zeal includes true emotions, right? True passion. God made us that way. But it is not emotionalism.

It is not fanaticism. Religious extremes where you're a fool, not for Jesus' sake, but because of your own stupidity and immaturity. Biblical zeal is not religious foolishness or embarrassing behavior, or rash, unwise fervor.

It is something pure, holy, controlled, produced by the Holy Spirit in the heart. In a word, it is Romans 12 and 11, being fervent in spirit. And this is a big biblical subject in terms of exhortation and example throughout the Bible, isn't it? Spiritual warmth and passion is what we're talking about.

Spiritual heat boiling steadily. Have you ever been cooking oatmeal and it boiled over on the stove? What a mess. I hate that stove mess more than anything almost.

What a mess to clean up. Zeal is not out of control making a mess. Holy Spirit zeal is simmering all the time.

Now, when we think about this term, this truth and reality of spiritual zeal, one thing that's interesting to note is that it's not listed as a fruit or a gift of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5, for instance. 1 Peter 1 has these lists.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith, self-control. Against such or concerning these, there's no law keeping that will produce those. They're

fruits of the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter lists some things too. Add to your faith godliness. To godliness, brotherly kindness, self-control, etc.

But zeal isn't mentioned in any gifts or lists by Paul because, quoting Ian Murray again, zeal is not one grace or one fruit. It's much more comprehensive. It's the whole tone and temperature of the Christian that affects the whole, that affects every gift and every grace.

Zeal is a comprehensive passion of heart and spirit that permeates our Christianity. We're to be zealous about worship. We're to be zealous about Bible reading and spiritual disciplines.

We're to be zealous about the souls of people. We're to be zealous about the unborn being spared to live. But we would not say about someone, you know, their love is really zealous.

Their service is zealous. No, we would say he is zealous. She's a zealous Christian.

So it's all-encompassing Christian zeal. A zealous Christian prays zealously. And that doesn't mean loud.

It means with sincerity and seriousness of heart. A zealous Christian serves God zealously. A zealous Christian lives for Christ in a serious-minded way.

A zealous Christian sings unto the Lord with great reality. So, let me begin this message this morning on Christian zeal by giving us this first point. Number one, zeal is a mark of true Christianity, and it's a mark of a true Christian.

A person who has no true spiritual zeal is in all likelihood not truly regenerate. Whenever the Spirit of God does a genuine work in a soul, in a church, in a nation, there will be spiritual warmth and passion. There will be reality.

There will be spiritual love. There will be hearts filled with the love of God. There will be heavenly-mindedness and kingdom pursuit being about the things of the kingdom.

Zeal is a mark of heaven. The angels in heaven don't read books, but they're filled with holy zeal for the name of God and to do His bidding. They're filled with zeal when they go forth to minister for you even when you don't know it.

Ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who are the heirs of salvation. God's work is even described in Scripture as being done by the zeal of the Lord of hosts. That's wonderful.

Formal, Americanized, nominal Christianity sees no need for zeal and has no desire for it. In fact, you're zealous in many churches you're a troublemaker. Settle down.

Can't have that here. My friend Bob Jennings one time was told in a men's conference, you can't say hallelujah that loud after a song. We're not used to that.

Formal, nominal Christianity is offended or made uncomfortable by a true zeal. But if zeal, the real thing, is not present, there is not biblical Christianity. Zeal is an essential fruit of the Christian faith.

Isaiah's lips when they were touched in Isaiah 6 by a lot of coal from off the altar, there was zeal for availability. Zeal about seeing His own condition. Zeal to view the King in His glory.

Elijah, Elisha were men of zeal. Prophets of zeal. There was no one that topped David in zeal.

Just a cursory reading of the Psalms, you see zeal almost in every Psalm. Psalm 119 in the 176 verses, you see zeal just dripping off that longest Psalm with every word that David said. Paul said, if I appear extreme, if I appear imbalanced, if I appear like I'm too much, he said, it's for your sake.

Because the love of Christ constrains me. The love of Christ in our hearts will constrain us to be zealous. Spiritual warmth in our hearts.

Jim Elliott, David Brainerd, the Hamiltons in Asia facing hard trial now, Anna Crystal Simm, Rami, Trevor Johnson, all have one thing in common. One holy passion. Zeal for Christ motivates them onward and upward.

And it must, you and I as well, though we never go overseas. Though we live where we are, we must be zealous. A zealous mother.

A zealous father and husband. Now let's talk about, before we define zeal more, let's talk about the wrong kind of zeal. Because there's a lot of it in the Bible.

The Jews were zealous for God without knowledge. The Pharisees were the most zealous bunch on the planet, but they murdered the Son of God. There is a fleshly, carnal zeal.

There's a prideful zeal. There's even demonic zeal. The devil and demons are very zealous, more than you and I. There's a demonic zeal.

There's a wrong kind of zeal that is easily produced, but it's always bad. James and John think they're brilliant. Think they're moving up in the apostolic ladder.

They want to call fire down from heaven. Jesus sternly rebukes them. You don't know what spirit you're of.

Peter cuts off Malchus' ear. Zeal. Peter with emotional zeal in the moment says, though all men forsake You, I will not.

I'm willing to even die for You if necessary. False zeal can be sincere and it can still be false. False zeal is emotionalism.

It can be natural excitement, natural personality, emotion-driven actions that are unwise, and it will always exhibit or promote self somehow. It tries to be something or tries to appear to others as being something. False zeal is imbalanced and it often becomes obsessed with one emphasis or one thing, one area of truth.

There are those extremely zealous about the end times and about prophecy or about politics or about family life or social issues, abortion, the homeless, apologetics. Some people are just one note. That's all they will ever talk about.

Or Calvinism or Reformed theology. Carnal zeal preoccupies itself with one thing usually, while true zeal, biblical zeal, occupies itself with the whole counsel of God, with Jesus Christ, with the Gospel, with the main things. Jonathan Edwards said, the devil drives zeal into fanaticism.

He will stir up zeal to just make you become a fanatic and lose your influence. False zeal is quite easy when natural personality or emotions is confused with spiritual zeal. So enough on the wrong kind of zeal.

Don't you recognize it when you see it in others? You kind of discern it. You recognize, well, something not quite right about it. But true zeal, you also recognize and you know in your heart by discernment.

That's the real deal. They are a godly, zealous person. True zeal is spirit wrought within us.

It is according to biblical knowledge. True zeal flows out of true motives for the glory of Christ and the good of others and the building up of the body of Christ. True zeal is warranted by scriptural examples.

It's tempered with love and humility. And it's marked by true godliness. J.C. Rowe said this, why is it good to be zealous? Number one, he said, it's good for a Christian's own soul.

Exercise profits our body. Reading profits our mind. And zeal also profits our spirit and our soul.

Be not slothful in zeal, Paul said, but fervent in spirit. Rowe also said, it's also good for the church when a Christian is zealous. It's contagious.

A believer who is zealous in prayer, in worship, in evangelism, in discipline, in diligence, in serving, a Christian who's serving the Lord with diligence and zeal, it is contagious. It rubs off on others. That's the good kind of leaven to spread.

Godly zeal. Zeal is a grace God loves to honor. Rowe also said this, true zeal has eyes to see, it has ears to hear, it has a heart to feel, a mind to plan and act, a tongue to speak, hands to work, and feet to travel.

All for Christ. Zeal is multifaceted. And it is spiritual warmth and fervor in action through the whole course of our Christian life.

It is heart simmering with love and spiritual desire and the pursuit of Christ and a serious seeking of Christ with spiritual warmth of heart. It is heart earnestness. It is Apollos in Acts 18.

Luke says he was fervent in spirit, speaking boldly in the synagogue. It is men risking their lives in service to advance the Gospel. Acts 16.

It is a church, zeal is a church continuing steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine. Fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Acts 2. No matter what comes.

Kingdom living. Zeal is Paul in Corinth keeping on in spite of fear. Don't be afraid, Paul.

I have many people in this city. And he continued for two years teaching the Word of God. Or Paul on Mars Hill with all the intellectuals, all the philosophers, all the eggheads, all the brainiacs.

Mars Hill, he courageously preaches the Creator, the resurrected Christ, the Judge of all the earth. Zeal moved him to do it. When he was stirred in spirit when he saw the city, what? Wholly given over to idols.

It's Paul saying in Romans 9, I have great sorrow and continual anguish in my heart for the salvation of my people the Jews. It's him one chapter later saying my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is for them to be saved. A zealous Christian will be burdened for people.

For their children. For their neighbors. For lost relatives.

For lost colleagues. Burdened for missionaries. Burdened for the events of the kingdom.

Paul's zeal brought him before King Agrippa and Festus courageously declaring before the king a full and an accurate Gospel. So much so, Paul was fervent and clear and authoritative and uncompromising, that Festus interrupted him and accused him of what? Being mentally imbalanced. Paul, your learning has kind of made you mentally off.

I think you need to go see a counselor. You need to get on some medication. Much learning has made you... you're insane.

Your thinking is not even right. And Paul corrected him. No, not true, Festus.

It is Paul being stirred in his spirit. It's him writing a white-hot letter to the Galatians who are being misled by lying Judaizers who are bringing another Gospel that will deceive and damn men's souls. He writes a white-hot epistle.

Zeal is Christ purifying for Himself a people, Titus says, for His own possession who are to be what? Zealous for good works. Are we? Zealous about good works. Zeal is the body of Christ and its members being seriously committed to honoring Christ, to sharing the whole counsel of God in the Bible, to taking the Gospel anywhere and everywhere possible, to advancing the Kingdom wherever, whenever, however we possibly can, even sacrificially.

What is zeal? It is real and passionate desire to know and please Christ and to make Him known. To seek the things of Christ and to glorify Him above all else. Think about it the next time you read through Hebrews 11.

What drove those saints? To leave home? To go places they had no idea where they were going? To give up the pleasures and riches of Egypt? To give up homes? To joyfully sacrifice all their goods? It was faith motivated by love fueled by zeal. For God, they wouldn't compromise. Luther, going to the Catholic Inquisition in Worms, or as the Germans would say, Worms.

Luther said, though there is a devil under every tile on every roof in Worms, in the name of the Lord I will go forward. That is zeal. Zeal is love aflame.

It is courage acting in the midst of criticism, opposition, slander, and persecution. It is passion in action. It is Andy just being arrested and banned from that country in Asia permanently, leaving in the next couple of days probably, who said these words before this event, I don't care about a stable place in this life, but only to live out my final days on the ragged edge of eternity.

That is zeal. Let's think about Jesus the zealot. The man of Nazareth.

The man Christ Jesus the zealot. Our Lord was a man of true zeal. Psalm 69, a messianic psalm, says there, it is for your sake, he's praying, it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's son. For zeal for your house has consumed me. And the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

Isaiah 59, 17, Isaiah says that he wrapped himself in zeal as with a coat or a cloak. Our Lord was consumed by zeal. In fact, Psalm 119, 39 says, my zeal consumes me.

So, in the earthly life of our Lord and His humanity, the zeal continually was wearing His life out. It was zapping Him and draining Him. He said my food is to do my Father's will and finish the work.

Remember in John 3 there were many being healed, many being delivered from demons, and there was such a vast crowd. It says Jesus told them get a boat lest they crush Me. Pressing in upon Me.

And family came and said, hey, He's out of His mind. That was a typical day in the life of Jesus. That was just nothing special.

Typical, normal day of the power of the Son of God clothed with zeal. Jesus said, I came to cast fire on earth. And would to God it were already accomplished.

I have a baptism to be baptized with. And how great is My anguish and distress until it's accomplished. Zeal drove our Lord on to accomplish the work of redemption.

To leave heaven on a mission of mercy to ransom rebels. Zeal drove Him to act for His Father's name and His Father's house and His Father's purpose. Zeal drove Him at the beginning of His ministry and at the end of His ministry to clean house and the temple.

Even calculatingly making a whip to drive them out. My Father's house shall be called a house of prayer. Zeal drove our Savior to endure anger and hate from this world.

Rejection. Denial and betrayal by close friends. Zeal led Him to set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem.

And to give Himself to the agony of Gethsemane. The torture of Calvary. Dying alone.

Abandoned and judged. Zeal for the divine purpose consumed our Lord. None was more loving than the Lord Jesus.

None more tender. None more caring. None more faithful and loyal and courageous.

And none more zealous than our loving Savior and our Friend. He is your example in zeal. And being Christlike means being a zealous disciple.

No half-heartedness. No lukewarmness. No dullness.

Now, we must remember that zeal at times will make mistakes. Peter made some big mistakes. But he got to preach at Pentecost.

The Lord didn't put him on the shelf because of zealous mistakes. Zeal will need directing and maturing and guidance and control. And it needs wisdom.

But don't ever quench it. Don't quench it in yourself. Don't quench it in your husband.

Settle down, honey. You're going to embarrass me. Well, we shouldn't wrongly embarrass our wives or our husbands.

Don't quench it in your husband. Don't quench it in your wife. Don't quench it in your children.

What if God's putting zeal in them? Don't quench it. Encourage it all the more. It doesn't need to be dampened in a wretched, dark world like we live in.

The more light, the better. The more spiritual sanity, the better. The more salt, the better.

The more spiritual zeal, the better. Demons will flee at the sound of His name when they're zeal. With His zeal, John Knox hurt the feelings of people in Scotland by exposing and closing all the monasteries.

His zeal wasn't quenched. Zeal will offend religious lost people who hate true Christianity and they hate change. But true zeal in the long haul does much more good than harm.

Don't quench it. In conclusion, stir up your zeal more and more. Take Romans 12 and 11 seriously.

Don't be slothful about zeal. We try not to be slothful in getting to work on time. Moms and wives aren't slothful about their homes.

Paul says don't be slothful about zeal, but be fervent in spirit. Boil that oatmeal in your heart, but just let it simmer. The Holy Spirit produces true zeal in the heart.

Stir yours up in all areas by thinking of perishing souls. Think of the shortness of time, the shortness of your own life. Think of the devil and his zeal for evil.

Think of your Savior and His zeal for good. Think of Him in Gethsemane. Him at Calvary.

Think of His loving, sacrificial life and His dying love. The Savior admonishes you even in repentance. Be zealous and repent.

May God produce this in our hearts. And as I think it's that hymn, O Church, Arise, the Gettys have a line, O Spirit come, give strength for every stride. That's zeal.

Give grace for every hurdle. That's zeal. Pressing on no matter what.

Zeal, when it's spirit given, brings fragrance and power and freshness to the Christian life. And it is the early Christian zeal that the world noticed. Behold, how they loved one another.

It was seen. And zeal drove that. Brethren, be a zealous Christian.

Let's pray. And we have plenty of time for questions. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You for this grace in the reality of what the Holy Spirit can produce in our hearts. We ask You to work this in us. Conquer our timidity.

Rule over our personality. Strengthen our souls. Fill us with courage.

Fill us with faith in the Holy Spirit. And make us more fervent in spirit. Make us, because we've been called to be, because, Lord Jesus, You redeemed a people who are to be zealous for good works.

Make us more like You in this area. For Your glory and in Your name we pray, Amen. Why don't we sing a hymn? It's a little fitting.

Can you play? 325. It's easy, I think. No stage fright for Victoria.

Let's sing 325 in light of this hymn, in light of this truth, this message. More like the Master. You can remain seated.

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