

Zeal

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the necessity of zeal in the life of a disciple, urging Christians to passionately pursue their faith and God's glory.

Scripture: Exodus 17:9, Luke 12:50, John 2:17, John 9:4, Hebrews 1:7

Topics: "Zeal for God", "Passionate Discipleship"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes the critical importance of zeal in the life of a disciple, arguing that without a passionate commitment to Christ, one stands condemned. He illustrates this through the examples of Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Apostle Paul, all of whom exhibited fervent dedication to God's work. MacDonald challenges Christians to reflect on their own level of zeal, comparing it to the fervor seen in secular movements, and calls for a wholehearted devotion to God. He concludes that true zeal is characterized by a singular focus on pleasing God, regardless of personal cost or societal opinion.

Transcript

A disciple can be forgiven if he does not have great mental ability. He can be forgiven also if he does not display outstanding physical prowess. But no disciple can be excused if he does not have zeal. If his heart is not aflame with a red-hot passion for the Savior, he stands condemned.

After all, Christians are followers of the One Who said, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:17). Their Savior was consumed with a passion for God and for His interests. There is no room in His train for half-hearted followers.

The Lord Jesus lived in a state of spiritual tension. This is indicated by His words, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50). And again by His memorable utterance, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

The zeal of John the Baptist was attested by the Lord when He said, "He was a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35).

The apostle Paul was a zealot. Someone has tried to capture the fervency of his life in the following sketch:

He is a man without the care of making friends, without the hope or desire of worldly good, without the apprehension of worldly loss, without the care of life, without the fear of death. He is a man of no rank, country or condition. A man of one thought--the Gospel of Christ. A man of one purpose--the glory of God. A fool, and content to be reckoned a fool for Christ. Let him be called enthusiast, fanatic, babbler or any other outlandish nondescript the world may choose to denominate him. But still let him be nondescript. As soon as they call him trader, householder, citizen, man of wealth, man of the world, man of learning, or even man of common sense, it is all over with his character. He must speak or he must die, and though he should die, he will speak. He has no rest but hastens over land and sea, over rocks and trackless deserts. He cries aloud and spares not, and will not be hindered. In the prisons, he lifts up his voice, and in the tempests of the ocean, he is not silent. Before awful councils and throned kings, he witnesses in behalf of the truth. Nothing can quench his voice but death, and even in the article of death, before the knife has severed his head from his body, he speaks, he prays, he testifies, he confesses, he beseeches, he wars, and at length he blesses the cruel people.

Other men of God have shown this same burning desire to please God.

C. T. Studd once wrote:

Some want to live within the sound

Of church or chapel bell.

I want to run a rescue shop

Within a yard of hell.

And, incidentally, it was an article written by an atheist that spurred Studd to all-out dedication to Christ. The article was as follows:

If I firmly believed, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, then religion would mean to me everything. I would cast away earthly enjoyments as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought, and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. I should labor in its cause alone. I would take thought for the morrow of Eternity alone. I would esteem one soul gained for heaven worth a life of suffering. Earthly consequences would never stay my hand, or seal my lips. Earth, its joys and its griefs, would occupy no moment of my thoughts. I would strive to look upon Eternity alone, and on the immortal souls around me, soon to be everlastingly happy or everlastingly miserable. I would go forth to the world and preach to it in season and out of season, and my text would be, WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAN IF HE GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL?

John Wesley was a man of zeal. He said, "Give me a hundred men who love God with all their hearts, and fear nothing but sin, and I will move the world."

Jim Elliot, martyr of Ecuador, was a torch of fire for Jesus Christ. One day, as he was meditating on the words, "He maketh his ministers a flame of fire" (Hebrews 1:7), he wrote in his diary:

Am I ignitable? God deliver me from the dread asbestos of "other things." Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be a flame. But flame is transient, often short-lived. Canst thou bear this, my soul--short life? In me there dwells the Spirit of the Great Short-Lived, Whose zeal for God's house consumed Him.

"Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God."

The last line is quoted from a fervent poem of Amy Carmichael. It is little wonder that Jim Elliot drew inspiration from it:

From prayer that asks that I may be
Sheltered from winds that beat on Thee,
From fearing when I should aspire,
From faltering when I should climb higher,
From silken self, O Captain, free
Thy soldier who would follow Thee.
From subtle love of softening things,
From easy choices, weakenings;
Not thus are spirits fortified,
Not this way went the Crucified,
From all that dims Thy Calvary,
O Lamb of God, deliver me.
Give me the love that leads the way,
The faith that nothing can dismay,
The hope no disappointments tire,
The passion that will burn like fire,
Let me not sink to be a clod:
Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.

The disgrace of the church in the twentieth century is that more zeal is evident among Communists and cultists than among Christians.

In 1903, one man with seventeen followers began his attack on the world. His name was Lenin. By 1918, the number had increased to forty thousand, and with that forty thousand, he gained control of the one hundred sixty million people of Russia. And the movement has gone on and now controls over one-third of the world's population. However much one might be opposed to their principles, one cannot help admiring their zeal.

Many Christians felt strongly rebuked when Billy Graham first read the following letter, written by an American college student who had been converted to communism in Mexico. The purpose of the letter was to explain to his fiancée why he must break off their engagement:

We Communists have a high casualty rate. We're the ones who get shot and hung and lynched and tarred and feathered and jailed and slandered, and ridiculed and fired from our jobs, and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive. We Communists don't have the time or the money for many movies, or concerts, or T-bone steaks, or decent homes and new cars. We've been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor, THE STRUGGLE FOR WORLD COMMUNISM.

We Communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty, personal selves into a great movement of humanity, and if our personal lives seem hard, or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind. There is one thing in which I am in dead earnest and that is the Communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife and mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens as time goes on. Therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, books, ideas, and actions according to how they affect the Communist cause and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideas and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad.

If Communists can be as dedicated as this for their cause, how much more should Christians pour themselves out in loving, glad devotion for their glorious Lord. Surely if the Lord Jesus is worth anything, He is worth everything. "If the Christian faith is worth believing in at all, it is worth believing in heroically"--Findlay.

If God has really done something in Christ on which the salvation of the world depends, and if He has made it known, then it is a Christian duty to be intolerant of everything which ignores, denies, or explains it away--James Denney.

God wants men who are completely turned over to the control of the Holy Spirit. These men will appear to others as if they were drunk with wine, but those who know better will realize that they are driven on by "a deep, enormous, haunting, never-sated thirst for God."

Let every would-be disciple take to heart the necessity of zeal in his life. Let him aspire to fulfill the description given by Bishop Ryle:1

A zealous man in religion is pre-eminently a man of one thing. It is not enough to say that he is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thorough-going, whole-hearted, fervent in spirit. He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed up in one thing; and that one thing is to please God. Whether he lives, or whether he dies--whether he has health, or whether he has sickness, --whether he is rich or whether he is poor,--whether he pleases man, or whether he gives offence, --whether he is thought wise, or whether he is thought foolish--whether he gets blame, or whether he gets praise--whether he gets honor, or whether he gets shame--for all this the zealous man cares nothing at all. He burns for one thing; and that one thing is to please God, and to advance God's glory. If he is consumed in the very burning, he cares not for it--he is content. He feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn; and if consumed in burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him. Such an one will always find a sphere for his zeal. If he cannot preach, and work, and give money, he will cry, and sigh, and pray. Yes: if he is only a pauper,

on a perpetual bed of sickness, he will make the wheels of sin around him drive heavily, by continually interceding against it. If he cannot fight in the valley with Joshua, he will do the work of Moses, Aaron, and Hur, on the hill (Exodus 17:9-13). If he is cut off from working himself, he will give the Lord no rest till help is raised up from another quarter, and the work is done. This is what I mean when I speak of "zeal" in religion.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/william-macdonald/zeal/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net