

## **Zeal Without Knowledge**

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**Rom 10:1** Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

**Rom 10:2** For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

**Rom 10:3** For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

**Rom 10:4** For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Among the humans of the earth there will always be some who will find something to be zealous about. Among the things that can provoke people to be zealous, religion is on the top of the list. I say religion, because, in my experience I have learned that many humans who are not particularly excited about God and Christ can get really excited about aspects of religion. In fact, I believe that there are far more people not particularly bowled over by the Lord but are involved in religion because that religion gives them a reason for a crusade. You see, the human mind is very adaptable to religion, even in its natural or carnal state. As it turns out, though, when people embrace religion without proper understanding, they will invariably adopt beliefs and practices that are far removed from the thoughts of God.

We have selected our text, because it is about some religious fanatics who had a lot of interest in the practices of their religion, but had only misconceptions about what God wanted, about what He defines as true religion.

They were not without zeal

- I. First thing we want to note is that these Israelites had a zeal of God
  - ❖ Some of the most misdirected zealots in the world stumbled through their religious life doing zealous things in the name of the Lord
  - ❖ What we should have learned about humanity is that as flawed creatures, we can find zeal for God when we can design a god that fits our concept of what God should be like – this is why the Israelites Paul was referring to could maintain that zeal

- ❖ I want to pause just a minute here on this point and remind us that the God these Israelites were zealous about was one which they had used the Holy Scriptures to define
- ❖ I am giving us a warning about this, because it is easier for the human mind to custom make God to fit our wishes rather than have the Word of God define Him for us
  - In the world of Christian religion there have been religious zealots who have zealously killed people who opposed and spoke out against the practices and doctrines that they had which were not according to scripture.
  - Right now, today, there are professing Christians who zealously condemn other people when those people do not believe every thing they believe
    - I know a group of independent Baptists who zealously campaign to demand that anyone who comes to their church services should...**MUST**...obey the dress code of the church. And this is regardless of what those visitors believe, or what their background is!

II. This brings us to the next feature the Apostle identifies: “they have a zeal of God, **but not according to knowledge**”

- ❖ When we look at the Israelite’s practice of religion, we cannot criticize their zeal about following the law. Today, this could easily be translated into what zealously religious people do when they toe the line of their denominational or congregational practices as though those things were the be-all, do-all of their service and obedience to God – as though the practice of those things is an absolute barometer of how spiritual they are. If such a thing was such a good measure of our spirituality, then the Israelites in our text would be far above us in spirituality.
- ❖ We live in a world of religion where each religion has its zealots, many who have a zeal for their god, but not according to knowledge
  - In the world of Islam, the women must wear their burkas, all must prostrate themselves on their prayer mats, facing east, they must read their Koran daily men must commit honor killings and proselytize the infidel Jews and Christians to become good Muslims
  - In the world of Hinduism, worshipers incorporate personal reflection, art forms and group activities to achieve some specific end or to integrate the body, the mind and the spirit in order to help the performer evolve into a higher being.
  - In the world of Christianity, zealots who have translated their practices into the way to earn salvation or earn favor with God, or impress their culture with their godliness also have their patterns that have been developed...but not according to knowledge. They go through their baptisms, they wear

certain clothes to display to their society that they are pious, they pray holding their rosaries, they read their bibles to be able to say they did, they attend their church services to be able to curry favor with God, they give pious speeches or witness to people so as to earn favor with God.

- You might think that I have just been naming things that believers should do, and you are right, as far as some of those things I named are true. But, let's be clear that a believer can do all these things with good intentions, but if they are not done according to knowledge, then they become a rejected thing with God. Now, what do I mean by doing these things according to knowledge?
- First I want to review just briefly why Paul could say that the zeal shown by those Israelites was not according to knowledge. We will then be ready to examine whether or not those things done according to the pattern I mentioned can also be “not according to knowledge.”
  - First, the Israelites knew their bible, but they still bumbled along not understanding the spiritual message that scripture taught
  - Paul has a great overview of this in Romans:
    - **Rom 2:17** Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,
    - Rom 2:18** And knowest *his* will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;
    - Rom 2:19** And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,
    - Rom 2:20** An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.
    - Rom 2:21** Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
    - Rom 2:22** Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?
    - Rom 2:23** Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?
  - This same kind of snare can capture a believer's service and worship to the point that they think they are doing the right things when they are not
  - They understood the ceremonial and doctrinal parts of their religion and they practiced them, but they:
    - Twisted some of those doctrines, ceremonies or practices until they were done from the energy of the flesh
      - ◆ Example: The rule the Lord gave them about being responsible for their parents (see Mark 7:10-13)

- ◆ They had so defined righteousness that they felt justified in accusing the man whom Jesus cured of blindness of being a sinner, and by their statement implying that they were not sinners (John 9:34).
- How can we translate this into modern day “Christian” behavior?
  - ◆ Professed believers convincing themselves and their associates that breaking God’s laws are OK when they are put in a bind
  - ◆ Button-holing and rebuking other professed believers or even lost people about their sinfulness when they hang on to their pet sins
- They used their status as religious Israelites to browbeat fellow citizens:
  - ◆ The hypocrisy of that group who had the woman corralled and accused of adultery (John 8:4-11) – their zeal without knowledge here led them to accuse her of sin without involving the man, and with them standing there laden with sin (proven by the fact that none of them would cast the first stone)
  - ◆ We see other signs of browbeating of fellow Israelites when we read John 3:1-2 and John 19:38
    - **John 3:1-2** There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: **2** The same **came to Jesus by night...**
    - **John 19:38** And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but **secretly for fear of the Jews**, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave *him* leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.
  - ◆ These guys were afraid of their religious peers, their fellow believers
  - ◆ A practice or doctrine in religion that allows us to browbeat our fellow believers is a doctrine or practice that **is not according to divine knowledge**
  - ◆ A practice in religion that builds fear of peers in fellow believers is a practice that **is not according to divine knowledge**
- How can we translate this into modern day “Christian” behavior?
  - ◆ Professing believers coming to the wrong conclusion about sin in someone’s life; and by that wrong conclusion (zeal but not according to divine knowledge) rendering a one-sided judgment and making very erroneous conclusions

- ◆ Causing professing believers to hide themselves from us, or avoid us when they can because we criticize them or rebuke them about things that we think they should be doing or not doing
  - I want to remind us here about one of the Lord's principles that we should fix firmly in our hearts and that should cause us to think twice about how we approach our fellow Christians about their shortcomings or weaknesses: **1Cor. 4:7** For who maketh thee to differ *from another*? and **what hast thou that thou didst not receive?** now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it*?

### III. The zeal was generated from some source besides spiritual knowledge

- ❖ Zeal in someone that is not according to knowledge from the Lord has certain earmarks
  - This was not ignorance concerning the scripture
    - This was not because they did not study their bible (the OT)
    - Rather, they were **ignorant of God's righteousness**
    - Now, we really need to get a handle on what God's righteousness is, because when we see that term we usually think just about the salvation experience...but it means more than that...it begins there, but understanding God's righteousness requires a deeper understanding of how God works
    - **Rom. 3:21-22** But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; **22** Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:
  - Emphasize that the righteousness of God that they were ignorant of is the **righteousness of faith provided to us by Christ**...the implication is that these **did not understand where and how God's righteousness came** and existed in a person, and they **did not have knowledge concerning proper understanding of God's body of doctrine (the faith)**.
- ❖ Next cover **“going about to establish their own righteousness”** and **“had not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God”**
  - Explain that their own “righteousness” was interpreted by them to be God's righteousness...it was them doing and saying and proselytizing and working...these things came to stand for the action of God in their religious life.
  - So, their own righteousness was actually their own interpretation of what the doctrine of God said and it became the source of their behavior, the source of their zeal, in their religion.

- I hope everybody can see here that it is possible for folks to turn their own way of doing things into something they call the Lord's leading.
- ❖ Explain again how this can become the mindset of people following the "Christian" path and translate this into "Christian" behavior where people rely on their own energy, their own intellect, their own interpretation of scripture, their own techniques to do what they see as the work of God, when it is really simply self-works
  - There is a great messages in a type in the bible about how the Lord's people should learn to know when to act because God was acting, and when to sit still and wait on the Lord when He was still. That message is found in the stop and go travels of the children of Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 9:17-23). When the pillar of cloud stopped, Israel stopped; when the pillar of cloud moved, Israel moved "according to the commandment of the Lord."
- ❖ How can we self-test to make sure we have not deviated off into practicing religion instead of acting by faith-this originates from having zeal not according to knowledge:
  - Test it by seriously matching it with bible truth
    - For instance, where believers hold a belief that is not according to bible truth,
      - use example of pastor who believed that all saved people would become members of one of the Lord's churches
      - Use example of the many independent Baptists who believe it is OK for women to go cold-door knocking up against the rule of God that God does not suffer a woman to teach nor usurp authority over a man, and the women are taught by scripture to be discreet and managers of the home (**Tit. 2:5** *To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.*)
      - We read in **Act 18:24-26** And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, *and* mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. **25** This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. **26** And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.
        - ◆ Why do you think Aquila and Priscilla spent some time giving Apollo guidance? It was because there were some things about his preaching that was off-track...Apollo had a zeal of God, but there was a flaw in his knowledge of God's truths.

- Test by using Christ's example, our model for the child of God
  - Do we find anywhere in scripture that Christ ordered his new church members to do some kind of church practice (some so-called Christian denominations demand that members practice certain religious observances, say Ave Marias, count beads, recite memorized prayers, wear certain kinds of clothing, etc.) We do find the Lord instructing church members how to settle their differences, instructing the church how to handle conflicts, but we don't find Him demanding disciples to conform to some religious or social standard. Why was that? Because that can and will be done as the Holy Spirit impresses learning upon new believers as they study and hear the word of God...the faith of believers enables the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth.
  - Have we studied well the approach that Christ used with lost people and believers to bring them to the knowledge of God...to lead them to saving faith, or to lead them to greater faith as believers?
    - Let's look at scripture that describes Jesus' method for managing His people: **Isa. 40:11** He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, *and* shall gently lead those that are with young.
    - **Mat. 12:20** A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

IV. The outcome of proselytizing and gaining a following when it is not according to the Lord's knowledge

- ❖ **Mat. 23:15** *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*
- ❖ Now this is distinctively about what these Pharisees do when they get themselves a proselyte...a disciple...someone who follows them like they are the great power of God...the great authority on what God wants.
- ❖ However, this statement by Christ teaches a **principle** about making disciples that fits everybody...both those who exercise a zeal of God not according to knowledge, and those who carefully seek to understand the knowledge of God so that they can advise people correctly
- ❖ **The principle:** you will create a disciple who is like you, if that disciple continues to follow you.
  - If you are in error about some of the doctrines of faith, your disciple will learn and be persuaded that such an error is the right way
  - If you practice religion instead of exercising the faith of Christ, your disciple will do likewise

- If you make the mistake of interpreting your opinion for the real truth of God, your disciple will adopt your opinion
  
  - ❖ Closing with this: **Prov. 23:23** Buy the truth, and sell *it* not; *also* wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.
  - ❖ Examine what you believe is the truth, because human error in understanding God can lead to misinterpreting what you think God is teaching.
  - ❖ Lesson: above everything, make the attempt in your personal ministry to always teach truth that you have validated with scripture.
    - We should assume Paul's attitude about our personal knowledge: **1Cor. 4:4** For I know nothing by myself;
  - ❖ Make sure your guidance agrees with the spirit of Christ as faith directs
  - ❖ Wisdom is the product of clearly understanding the truth of the Lord
  - ❖ If you don't clearly understand some truth from the Lord's word, don't try to teach it even when you think you need to-get understanding before proceeding
- Again, scripture gives us a good rule of thumb from the pen of the Apostle: **1Cor. 8:2** And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.