

Misdirected Passion for the Lord

Through His Son Jesus Christ, God purifies for Himself people zealous for good works. He seeks true worshippers. He wants obedient children. Apathy, indifference and complacency are unacceptable. Christians in the church of Laodicea were rebuked and chastened for being lukewarm and then commanded to “be zealous and repent” (Revelation 2:19).

Zeal is defined as an intense enthusiasm for a cause, a fervent devotion to an endeavor. When it is properly used and applied to what is good, it is a commendable trait. For example, “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). Thus, Christians are commanded, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything giving thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) Christians ought to be passionate about prayer because of a burning desire to please God.

God calls His people to be zealous, but zeal or passion alone is not what pleases Him because fervor can be misdirected. People can be enthused about doing what is wrong in God’s eyes. They can be excited about doing good but with all the wrong motives. The apostle Paul addressed this serious, spiritual problem among believers. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” (Romans 10:1-3) These people definitely were showing religious zeal, but it was an unacceptable zeal. Their zeal would not save them because they were not submitting to God’s righteousness in Christ. And such righteousness must be according to a true knowledge of the doctrine of Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus described people who may be very busy doing works in the name of the Lord but whom the Lord will judge, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:23) They may fervently devote themselves to religious endeavors. Their passion for the Lord may be viewed by men as commendable. Yet, Jesus taught that the person “who does the will of My Father in heaven” will enter the kingdom of heaven (7:21). “He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Zeal that does not abide in Christ’s teaching does not have fellowship with God.

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves – that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified.” (2 Corinthians 13:5) And if needed, “be zealous and repent!”