

“Zeal in Service”  
Romans 12:11  
(Preached at Trinity, January 23, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we’ve seen, after **Verses 1-2** Paul turned his attention to the local church. He describes the great diversity in the church. God has filled His church with many different and unique people. In addition He has gifted each member distinctly for their particular ministry within the body of Christ so that the entire church might benefit.  
**Romans 12:6** – “And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let each exercise them accordingly.*”
2. After describing several of the diverse gifts Paul then gives us the only motive for their use. **Romans 12:9** – “Let love be without hypocrisy.”  
Without love your greatest labors in the Kingdom of Christ are futile. Every Christian act must be motivated first by our love for Christ and then by our love for one another.  
Your gifts mean nothing unless they are mingled with love.
3. Love is our chief duty. It is the sum of the Law. Love is the anchor that keeps us firmly planted in the faith.  
Our love for Christ, His people, and His church must serve as our motivation for using our gifts.
4. In **Verse 9** Paul says our love for one another must be without “hypocrisy.” The word means our love must be genuine, sincere.  
Then Paul tells us our love must be discriminating. In other words, true, genuine, non-hypocritical love hates what is evil and loves what is good.  
“Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.”
5. In **Verses 10-13** Paul sets forth several virtues that flow forth from love. This is one of the reasons love is so essential in our lives. Everything else depends on it!  
Paul considers in these verses our love for Christ and our love for our brethren.  
Then in **Verses 14** to the end of the chapter Paul summarizes the charge of our Lord in **Matthew 5** – “Love your enemies.”
6. As Paul considers these virtues he begins first with our duty to our brothers and sisters in Christ. “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love”  
We looked at this important aspect of our love last week.
7. Now as we continue with **Verse 11** Paul will begin to describe other virtues that flow forth from our love. We see in this verse that love will drive us to diligence in service.  
**Romans 12:11** – “not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;”
8. Notice this is still flowing from **Verse 9**. Paul tells us, “Let love be without hypocrisy, hating what is evil and clinging to what is good.”  
Notice **Verses 10-13** are one sentence punctuated by either comma’s or semi-colons. This is consistent with the Greek text. The ESV and NIV use a series of periods.  
The semi-colons do a better job of connecting this theme of love.

- 9 This morning I want to examine the great importance of zeal in our service to Christ. Let's begin by looking at the text.
- A. The word for “lagging behind” is from a word meaning hesitation.
1. As a noun, especially in classical Greek, it points to a timid hesitation. It pictures lagging behind due to uncertainty and fear.
  2. As an adjective, which we find here, it points to laziness or sloth.  
NAS **Matthew 25:26** - "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no seed.'  
KJV – “Thou wicked and slothful servant”
- B. The word for “diligence” refers to earnestness or enthusiasm or zeal in our work.
- a. The KJV translates it “not slothful in business.” That is, the Christian business—the business of serving Christ.
  - b. So this first phrase in the verse exhorts us not to be guilty of falling behind in the zeal of serving Christ. The implication is we are to march forth with boldness; with dead earnestness; with energetic zeal!
- C. The second phrase is translated: “fervent in spirit”  
The word for “fervent” is from a word that literally means, “to boil”  
Paul is exhorting us to have a heart that boils over in our zeal for Christ.
- D. Finally, the word for “serving” is from a word that literally means “to be a slave”
- 10 So we find Paul admonishing us as the slaves of Christ to give ourselves to His service with burning zeal without hesitation, without laziness, and without fear.
11. This morning I want to examine this type of zeal.

#### I. Zeal is of the essence of Christian Conversion

- A. Salvation demands coming with passion and zeal
1. Christianity is not cold and passionless. It isn't simply holding to certain doctrines. It isn't embracing a certain religion.
  2. The one coming to Christ is stirred to the depth of his soul  
**Psalm 63:1** – “God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water.”
  3. Jesus described the nature of those entering His Kingdom  
**Matthew 11:12** – “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.”  
Those entering the kingdom come forcefully  
“the violent take it by force”  
“violent” - βιάζω - forceful, violent  
“take it by force” - ἀρπάζω - to seize, carry off by force
  4. Again He describes it in the Gospel of Luke  
**Luke 16:16** – “The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.”

5. Coming to Christ demands a great expenditure of energy  
*Thomas Watson* – “The right way to take heaven is by storm; or thus, none get into heaven but violent ones. Though heaven be given to us freely, yet we must contend for it. . . The Christian is resolved, come what will, he will have heaven.”
6. When a man has a desire to enter the kingdom it becomes his chief work
  - a. It will never be entered by those who desire to keep one foot in the world
  - b. It will never be entered by those who toy with God.  
It is not for weaklings and compromisers  
*Thomas Watson* – “Where there is half a resolution—a will to be saved and a will to follow sin—it is impossible to be violent for heaven.”
  - c. Those coming to Christ always make it their primary concern  
*Jonathan Edwards* – “Besides desires after salvation, there should be an earnest resolution in persons to pursue this good as much as lies in their power. Those who are pressing into the kingdom of God, have a disposition of heart to do everything that is required, and that lies in their power to do, and to continue in it. They have not only earnestness, but steadiness of resolution: they do not seek with a wavering, unsteady heart, by turns or fits, being off and on; but it is the constant bent of their soul, if possible to obtain the kingdom of God.”

B. Lukewarmness shall never be tolerated by our Master

**Revelation 3:15** – “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.”

1. Remember, we are our Lord’s servants, his slaves. We must serve Him with zeal. There is no place for indifference.
2. *Matthew Henry* – “Lukewarmness or indifference in religion is the worst temper in the world. If religion is a real thing, it is the most excellent thing, and therefore we should be in good earnest in it; if it is not a real thing, it is the vilest imposture, and we should be earnest against it. Christ expects that men should declare themselves in earnest either for him or against him.”
3. I’m so grateful that most of you are filled with zeal. You have a hunger for Christ. You serve Him with diligence.  
But I’m concerned for one or two of you  
We must be careful that we do not excuse our own lukewarmness. This is a most dangerous thing. Don’t look at dead religious people as your example. Look to those with a passion for Christ.
4. Could it be that God hasn’t given you more because you haven’t made good use of what He has given you?  
**Matthew 25:23** – “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’”

II. Since our zeal is the outward manifestation of the inward presence of the Holy Spirit our zeal must be based upon truth

A. Human beings have always been zealous about religion

1. We've read of the Prophets of Baal

**1 Kings 18:26** – “Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made.”

**1 Kings 18:28** – “So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them.”

2. In the days of Christ's ministry thousands flocked to Him.

**John 6:1** – “After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is *the sea of Tiberias*. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday hundreds lined the street shouting the praises of Christ. All would forsake Him less than a week later.

3. The Apostle Paul before his conversion had a religious zeal that led him to persecute Christians.

**Philippians 3:4** – “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

*Even on the very day of his conversion Paul was on his way to have Christians arrested.*

4. The same is true today. Many groups are passionate about their religion  
People flock to see Benny Hinn or hear Joel Osteen  
Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are zealous for new converts  
Muslims are filled with zeal in protecting their religion

B. Zeal is no substitute for Christian conversion

1. Hosea warned 2700 years ago of the danger of a lack of knowledge

**Hosea 4:6** – “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”

2. Zeal without Christ is a worthless zeal

Paul spoke of the worthlessness of religious zeal without a love for Christ and His people.

**1 Corinthians 13:3** – “And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”

3. Some people are sadly substituting religion for a relationship with Christ  
We can already hear the echo of their voices on the day of judgment

**Matthew 7:22-23** – “Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

III. Each of us has a responsibility to kindle the fires of zeal

A. A clear teaching of the New Testament

**Romans 12:11** – “fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;”

“Fervent” - to boil with heat, be hot

1. William Hendriksen – “Religion without enthusiasm can hardly be called religion.”
2. Matthew Henry – “If religion is worth anything it is worth everything.”
3. William Plumer – “He who has no zeal has no love for God”

4. Listen again to Paul:

**1 Corinthians 15:58** – “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.”

B. Christianity is a relationship

1. It is a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a love relationship
2. This love should kindle a passion within our heart.
3. Our passions are kindled further through prayer, reading the Word of God, and listening to preaching. Our passions are kindled by the encouragement we receive from the brethren – we fan the flames of each other’s passions.
4. Zealous people stir up the zeal in others  
**2 Corinthians 9:2** – “for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, *namely*, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.”
5. In like manner, cold dead people only serve to quench the flames of others.

Conclusion:

1. This is why we don’t need to become bogged down trying to discover what our particular gift is. Those who are zealous for God and who are diligently serving Him will find abundant ways to serve. It isn’t long before we discover our strengths and weaknesses.
2. Divine giftedness must be continually rekindled. We must keep the fires burning. The Christian life demands constant attention  
NAS **2 Timothy 1:6** – “And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”  
KJV – “stir up” ESV – “fan the flame”
3. Lukewarmness is abominable to God. It is inconsistent with Christianity.
4. With great zeal we must continue to keep on the course set before us. Not lagging behind we must kindle the fires of zeal in serving Christ.
5. Remember, your zeal will have a profound effect upon those around you.