

FIRE IN OUR BONES

Christianity must be a religion filled with zeal and enthusiasm, directed of course by the word of God (Rom.10:1-3). Knowledge of the word of God, coupled with great fervor to put into practice what we learn from God's will is a religion that pleases God and will attract others to Christ. Unfortunately, some have great zeal for God, but they divorce their enthusiasm from the commands of God. Fervor apart from faithfulness to the holy commandments gives rise to emotionalism and sensationalism. Though individuals may be honest and sincere in their enthusiasm for religion, a Christianity void of fidelity to the word is nothing but zeal run amok. Many are under the guise that if one is truly sincere, heartfelt, and well-intentioned in their devotion to God, then whatever is undertaken in the name of God is acceptable. While the purpose may be noble, we must still remember the words of Scripture: "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam.15:22). It is altogether possible to be sincere in one's religious beliefs and practices, and yet be sincerely wrong (see Acts 23:1). Much of the religious world has a "zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." This must be overcome by a greater desire to know the will of the Lord (Psa.119:87). The fire of zealous enthusiasm must be contained within a heart directed by the word of God.

The other side of this extreme is a knowledge of God devoid of zeal and enthusiasm. There are many who pride themselves in their understanding of God's word, but who do little or nothing to promote and expand the work of the Lord. While zeal without knowledge is spiritually fatal, so, too, is knowledge without zeal. While the former is emotionalism, the latter is cold formalism. Those who know what God's word teaches but put no heart into their religion have truly failed to grasp what the Holy Scriptures teach. Christianity is a heart-felt, head-filled religion (Matt.22:29, 37). Knowing what the Bible teaches is important, but even atheists know what the Good Book says. The difference is in whole-heartedly implementing those truths that we find written in God's word. We must fiercely guard against cold formalism in the church of our Lord. We cannot allow ourselves to lose the fire of enthusiasm of living for Jesus. A heart that has lost its zeal for Christian living must be filled once again with the living, active word of God (Heb.4:12). Cold formalism must be set ablaze by a renewed commitment and ever-increasing desire to live for God.

The more of God's word we put into our hearts and minds, the greater the fire of devotion and dedication to the cause of Christ grows. "If I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer.20:9, ESV). The more we learn of the word of God and the more we truly understand its application to our lives, the greater the fire that burns

within us. As the fire grows, so, too, does the desire to learn more about the will of God and to live it out in our lives. Do you need to reign in your zeal within the boundaries of God's word? Do you need to rekindle the zeal for the cause you once had? Whether zeal run amok, or cold, calloused formalism, either extreme is detrimental to the soul. Zeal with knowledge, that is our aim!

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