

IS ZEAL ALONE ENOUGH?

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Many people measure religion solely on the basis of the zeal exhibited by its adherents. Even some of the Lord's people (who ought to know better) are wont to justify the actions or teachings of men by the virtue of the zeal manifested in their doings. Especially was this true of the zeal of the Crossroads/Boston Church fiasco, beginning in the 1970s. How often have we heard someone defend the practices and dogmas of the brethren advancing this movement by saying, "They can't be all bad, because their zeal for the Lord is just so great." But is zeal alone enough to move the God of heaven to take delight in the actions of those who bear such zeal? Is zeal to be our standard in discerning right and wrong? Is human feeling to become our guide in living?

First, if zeal alone were sufficient to commend to us the actions of the zealous, then radical Marxism would be acceptable as a worldview. History is replete with examples of very zealous Marxists who even laid down their lives to further their philosophy. Yet Communism denies the existence of God, and denounces religion en toto as "the opiate of the people." It is atheistic in foundation. Furthermore, Adolph Hitler and the Nazis would stand equally justified in their fanatical and zealous extermination of over six million Jews. In fact, there would exist no crime so heinous as to escape possible justification on the basis of the zeal used in carrying it out. "There would be no doctrine so absurd as to not warrant Divine sanction on the premise of the zeal of its advocates."

Second, if zeal alone were all-sufficient, then there would never have existed the need for supernatural revelation from God in the form of the Holy Scriptures. The zeal which one held for his views would be enough to justify them and their believer without any support from the Bible. The more zealous the individual might be, then the more right his doctrine and behavior would be! If not, why not? However, truth is objective, and not subject to my feelings or state of mind as to its rightness. The Scriptures affirm their own all-sufficiency (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**), and without them one cannot go to heaven (**Matthew 7:21; Revelation 22:14**).

Third, the great apostle Paul, prior to his conversion, was a zealous persecutor of the church. The havoc which he wrought was done in all good conscience. He felt that he was carrying out the will of God, but he says later that he was "A BLASPHEMER, AND A PERSECUTOR, AND INJURIOUS" (**1 Timothy 1:13**). Why wasn't his persecution of the early disciples justified by reason of his zeal? Why were his feelings in the matter unacceptable? Why then did some brethren seek to grant to the Crossroaders and Boston Church brethren that which was denied someone of the stature of Saul of Tarsus? Are they seeking to be more "loving" than the Lord? Does their mercy supersede His?

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Fourth, the zeal-only philosophy promotes circular reasoning. If truth be based on zeal (and zeal alone), then how could one ever be certain—ever know whether or not a thing were true or not true? Someone might say, “By the zeal one manifests toward it.” But how does one know that zeal is indeed all-sufficient to establish the truth of a thing? The only conclusion would be that zeal bears its own justification. This would mean that zeal only is sufficient to establish truth simply because it is! This is the equivalent to saying that the conclusion is true because the antecedent is true, and the antecedent is true because of the truth of the conclusion!

Let us return to a “Thus saith the Lord” and realize that we must have zeal, honesty, and sincerity in the performance of our religious and moral duties, but a zeal that is “not according to knowledge” is vain (**Romans 10:2**). Solomon warned: “THERE IS A WAY WHICH SEEMETH RIGHT UNTO A MAN, BUT THE END THEREOF ARE THE WAYS OF DEATH” (**Proverbs 14:12**).