

## **Christian Zeal: Love's Pure Flame**

Galatians 4:17-20

23/03/2025

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### TRANSCRIPT:

Galatians Chapter 4:17-20 reads, "They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you."

Father, we come to You now, remembering that Your word is truth. And as our Lord Jesus prayed, so we pray also: sanctify them through Your truth. Your word is truth. Lord, we would be more like Jesus. We would have Christ formed in us. And so, Lord, as I seek to labor among Your people by the proclamation of Your word and through prayer, may Christ be formed in them. And may we know more fully what it means to be conformed into the image of Your dear Son. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Last week, we considered Paul's personal appeals that he used to stir up the Galatians, back from the path of destruction to the pathway of the truth of the gospel. They were being taken by the deception of the Judaizers and being taught another gospel, which they did not at first believe but were now beginning to consider. And Paul reminds them of the fact that to turn back to that pathway is to turn back to that which is nothing less than weak and beggarly and will rob you of the joy of salvation, which is ours in Christ Jesus.

Paul reminds them of the fact that they had a close relationship together, and they received him as if he was an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus Himself when he first proclaimed the message to them. But now, things have changed. Now they're looking at Paul as though he is their enemy. And Paul says, "Why? Because I tell you the truth."

Now, in this portion of scripture, Paul starts to show and expose one of the key reasons why the Galatians were being affected by the Judaizers. This wasn't just a matter of doctrine, as if to say that the doctrine of the

Judaizers was so appealing in and of itself that it outshone the gospel, and therefore they thought, "This is something better that we haven't yet heard of." No, there was something more to this. There was something happening at another level that was causing them to go astray. Yes, it was a doctrinal deviation, but they were fundamentally affected by the zeal of the Judaizers.

The word "zeal" appears here three times just in the space of two verses. Verse 17 and 18 has the word "zeal" there. If your translation is the ESV, you won't find the word "zeal" there because they decided to translate it as "to make much of you," but the word is "zealous," "zeal." And it may be translated as "eagerly desire" or whatever other way it may be translated. But the idea here that Paul is trying to bring out is that the Judaizers were shifting the Galatians away from the truth, not just by what they were teaching but also in the manner and with the zeal and passion by which they dedicated themselves to change the minds of the Galatians.

And so, I want us to consider the effects of zeal today in the lives of God's people and how it is that we are to understand zeal. What is zeal? Well, the word literally can refer to that which burns or a fire. It's the warmth, it's desire. It is that concept of fire, but not a physical fire. Obviously, this burning of desire, this fervor, this spirit of fervor. We're told in Scripture to be fervent in spirit. It is a fervor and fire within the hearts of an individual that causes them to lead a life of dedication, a life that may be summed up in the words of the apostle Paul as this: "One thing I do." He says it in Philippians Chapter 3, "This one thing I do." It's the concept of this all-consuming fire that burns with passion and stirs up a certain pursuit within our lives. "This one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and pressing on toward the things that are before, I press toward the mark." That zeal, a determination, a pressing, a fire that burns and burns in such a way to show dedication and pursuit so that everything else in life seems to pale in significance with this one thing.

When Paul was threatened concerning the fact that he was, the prophets were telling him that he was going to suffer in Jerusalem at the hands of the chief priests and the scribes and all that, what Paul said is, "None of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my race with joy and the ministry which I received from the Lord, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God." That zeal. He's a man that's facing all these kinds of things which will ordinarily move anyone else, and normal human beings, yet he is so filled with fervor, endowed with grace from God, impassioned by this one thing which is the fulfillment of the ministry which God has called me to, that in the face of even that, he would not stumble. He would press on and continue on.

Now, zeal as a fire can be well illustrated as both serving the best ends and the worst ends. If you think of a fire that is lit for backburning, that can serve the best ends of a community, which is to protect them from a future fire, or if not directed well, can actually destroy that community because the fire will become ablaze. You can think of a fire that is used to keep the house warm, a fireplace, and cozy. The fire is directed towards certain good ends, yet if that is not taken care of, yes, if that is not projected in the right way and used to the right ends, it can actually end up in the burning of the house. And so it is with zeal. Evil is like a fire that may be used for good and may be used for evil.

It was the fire that was kindled in the breast of Peter when they came to arrest the Lord Jesus, and he pulled out his sword and cut off Malchus' ear, the servant of the high priest. It was the fire that possessed James and John when Jesus was rejected by the Samaritans, and they said to the Lord, "Should we not call down fire from heaven like Elijah and devour these people?" And Jesus said to them, "You do not know what spirit you are of, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." It's the fire that possessed the Pharisees and the scribes and the Sadducees, of whom Jesus said that they would travel both land and sea just to make one proselyte. What zeal! But when they made him a proselyte and converted him, he becomes nothing less than a double child of hell. And such was the zeal of the Judaizers. It was nothing but a destructive zeal.

And in verse number 17 of this chapter, he says, "They zealously court you, but for no good. Yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them." It was a destructive zeal. A zeal that was for no good and a zeal that was ultimately for them. He says, "They zealously court you." The concept of courting is the idea of winning, wooing, drawing over to their side. This was a battle for the allegiance of the Galatians. Paul had won them, not to himself, but had won them to the Lord Jesus Christ. But here, the Judaizers, by reason of zeal, are seeking their allegiance, the allegiance of the Galatians, courting them to win them so that they might have them as their own. And they were doing so in a manner and for a cause that was not according to that which is good.

The manner in which they did it is that they ultimately were desiring to exclude them. That's what he says in this same verse. "They want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them." They wanted to basically shut them out. They would come in and say, "Oh, what Paul's teaching you here regarding the truth of Jesus is not everything you need to know in order to be saved. There is this other thing, yeah, this one thing called circumcision, or this one thing called the law, that you actually must pursue alongside Jesus in order that you might really be justified before God."

And they were winning them over by zeal, pointing their attention to this other thing that was emphasized in their preaching and in their teaching, which was other than Jesus Christ Himself. And they were doing that in a manner that would segregate them from the rest of the body of Christ.

Here, Paul is saying that the Gentiles, which were once outside of the people of God, are now brought into the people of God. And what they're doing is basically excluding the other Gentiles by saying, "Unless the Gentiles live as Jews," which is the word Judaizer, what it actually means, "to live as a Jew, you're not going to be right before God." And this was done for the reason that they might be zealous for them, basically that they might end up being their disciples, that their zeal, the zeal of the Judaizers, will impact the zeal of the Galatians, so that the zeal of the Galatians would be like the zeal of the Judaizers, and they will be zealous for the cause of the Judaizers. It was man-centered, isn't it? A man-centered zeal, "that you may be zealous for them." It was about them and their kingdom. They wanted the candle of the Galatians to burn for the glory of the Judaizers.

So sad that it actually shows us, in the end of the book, that they wanted to circumcise them, that was basically what they were promoting, so that they might glory in your flesh. That's the idea. That they might gain praise by you submitting to them, and that they might have you as their own disciples. Interestingly enough, though, Paul doesn't respond as many of us perhaps would respond to negative zeal. Look how Paul responds in verse number 18. He says, "But it is good to be zealous." But it is good to be zealous. Most often, when we come across examples of negative zeal seen in the lives of false teachers, seen in the effects of it in the lives of God's people, been affected by someone who is full of fire and passion, leading them astray, causing them to end up with broken relationships, fractured churches, you know, the whole thing, led astray into sin and all that because they've been courted by a zealous individual, the natural tendency of the human heart is to put up a wall against zeal and to interpret zeal as something that is inherently negative or inherently sinful, something that should be avoided. To have eyes of suspicion upon those who contain any kind of fervor within their heart or any kind of mentality that presents itself as this one thing, or any kind of attitude that shows that they are pursuing a pathway. But Paul doesn't respond that way. In fact, he doesn't want the Judaizers to lose their zeal, so he doesn't want the Galatians to lose their zeal, and neither does he want them to stop being affected by zeal. Paul is not saying the first thing we need to do is get a bucket of cold water and douse all the fires. Anyone with a sense of fervor, put them out. No. Ultimately, what Paul is showing us here is that it's good to be zealous in a good thing. He says it's good to be zealous in a good thing. I don't want you to not be zealous. I don't want you to be affected, neither even by the zeal of others, because no doubt the zeal of Paul for the truth of the gospel, evidence

that he's suffering for the cause of Christ and the things he was willing to do for the sake of the gospel, stirred up the Galatians in the first place so that they might consider the gospel and pursue that same pathway. And he's not saying to them, "I want the fire to stop burning." Ultimately, what he says is, "I want you to have a zeal that accords with knowledge, knowledge of the true knowledge of that which is good." "I want you to be zealous in a good thing." And therefore, what he tries to help them understand is that zeal is not the issue. The issue is the way in which it is directed and for the cause in which it is directed. Is it for that which is good? Does it accord with knowledge? Does it accord with the word of God, with the principles of God, for the glory of God? Or is it directed according to the same way and reasons for which the Judaizers' zeal was directed? Does it accord in knowledge, is the question. If it is for a good cause, if it is toward a good end, if it is done in a good manner, he basically says that this zeal is a commendable zeal. "It is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I'm present with you." He doesn't even want their zeal to be a zeal that is choppy and changing. So when Paul's there in Galatia, when he first preaches the gospel to them, they catch his zeal, but they go on, not because the glory of God is lighting that fire in their heart, and the truth of God is lighting that fire in their heart, or because the knowledge of God is lighting that fire in their heart, but because Paul is present with them. "I said it's good to be always zealous in a good thing, but not only when I'm present with you." Always be zealous in a good thing, but let not your zeal be built upon my presence. Let your zeal be deeper than just the fact that my eyes are watching you, or that I am around you there in Galatia, or that you're still in contact with me. He says, "I want your zeal for God and his gospel and for his truth to be a fire that burns in your heart because God lights the fire there, and you go to God, and the Spirit of God stirs the fire there, and that your whole relationship to God, where you have this one thing as the glory and honor of God, is there because not of my presence, but because God is in you, and you're in fellowship with God." A zeal rooted deeper than the presence of Paul, rather that it would be rooted in a true knowledge of God and of His word.

Now, Paul shows them in an example what true zeal looked like in his life, and at the very least, we can see that, and it's comparative to the Judaizers' zeal. Look at verse number 19. He says, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you." He begins by saying, "They court you." That's the manifestation of their zeal. They just want to win you. Their desire is to have you for themselves. But he says here in this passage of scripture, "My little children, they court you, I love you." He uses the language of a mother and even an analogy of giving birth to display the kind of love and affection that Paul had for these people that was motivating his work among them and also as an example to them that true zeal doesn't arise from just wanting to win people, but it arises out

of a love for people. You see, the fire that burned in Paul's heart was a love, a love for God, a love for his neighbor, a love for the church. In fact, he suffered all things, it says in 2 Corinthians, but he says this one thing essentially that troubles him constantly, and it's the anxiety that he has for the churches. Why do you have this anxiety for the churches, Paul? Because they're his little children. It's like a mother, a mother who loves their children and cherishes them. And she has a holy affection for her children, an affection and a fire for them that is not easily put out, a holy jealousy for their good, so that they might be benefited in the world and not be on a path of destruction, but that they might enjoy their lives and know God, for a godly mother who loves their children. And despite whether that mother is favored or not by the children, where the children go through seasons in which they say things like, "I hate you, mom," because you're not getting their way and all these kinds of things, the fire still burns in the heart of the mother because it is deep within her and built upon something more fundamental than the children's response or the children's presence. She's eager. She's desirously eager that they might be benefited. And this is what Paul's trying to say here. "You are my little children. I cherish you. I love you. I've poured out my life for you."

And so, Paul shows that true zeal fundamentally or ultimately has this love that he's stirred up within them. There was a man by the name of Richard Watson who said these words. He said, "Christian zeal is all love. It's nothing else. The love of God and man fills up its whole nature. It is fervent love." You think about that. When you talk about desire and passion and this one thing, for someone to have that kind of motivation and attitude and resolve arises ultimately and truly out of a heart of love. They love that thing so much that they will travel land and sea to obtain it. And for Paul, he loved them as his own children, and therefore he was suffering for their cause and for the cause of the gospel because he loved God and loved his neighbor. There is no true zeal without true love. It is a zeal that's destructive if it is a zeal without love. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians Chapter 13? He says, "Though I bestow all my gifts and my possessions upon the poor, though I give all that I have to them, and though I give my body to be burned, what zeal! Someone give their body to be burned? Someone bestowing all their gifts to the poor?" He says, "But if I have not love, I am nothing. It is nothing." And he understands that just because there is a kind of zeal that is motivated by other ends, other than the motivated by love unto God and to their neighbor, he's saying that it is not true zeal. And it might present itself in such a way that that shows that there is this wow, something is seriously serious about this person and what they want to do and love to do. But Paul says, "My zeal for you is not to win you like the Judaizers for me, but that I might, it's just the expression of my love to you as you are my children."

And then Paul shows in his own example also in this verse that true zeal is a laborious self-sacrifice. It's not about him winning them so that they might be zealous for Paul. Paul flips this around. You can see that this is not for him. This is not man-centered. This is not for his glory. Look what he says in verse number 19, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you." Paul is concerned for them as a mother is for her children, but more than this, Paul is willing and ready to labor in self-sacrifice so that they might enter into a more fuller knowledge of Christ and live a life unto the glory of Christ. As a woman in pain who delivers her child endures with such resilience, who makes such a great sacrifice, not for her own selfish gain, not for her own pleasure and comfort, and for her own enjoyment, as it were, she goes through what she goes through out of love and of sacrifice, and she labors for hours for the benefit of the child and for the family. This is so. Paul says, "I labor again until Christ is formed in you." "I labor again." I did it the first time when I came to Galatia, and I feel like because you're straying, I need to do that same kind of ground gospel work again to bring you back to that path that I originally brought you on because you're going astray, and I'm willing to go through the pains of laboring as a mother who labors for her children in childbirth so that Christ might be formed in you. So that by the end of my labors in prayer and the word and devotion and the giving of my time and dedication, Paul is saying, ultimately, that at the end of the day, that you might not be zealous for me, but that you might look more like Jesus Christ and be zealous for Him. "So that Christ may be formed in you," that He would invade every part of your life, that your thought life, your hearts, your hands, your feet, your eyes will be directed to Him, that this one thing that possesses your soul would be Christ.

You can see that his zeal was not only a laborious self-sacrifice, but it was evidenced in a God-centered goal that they would be like Jesus Christ the Lord. John Calvin said these words, he said, "If ministers wish to do any good, let them labor to form Christ, and not form themselves in their hearers." It's not about them being disciples of Paul; it is about them being disciples of Christ. Paul was not working and laboring so that at the end of the day, they might carry Paul's mannerisms and speak like Paul and talk like Paul and act like Paul and eat what Paul does and go to the places that Paul goes to, and so that Paul can say, "Look at these guys, they're just like me." No, he wanted them to, at the end of the day, that he could stand back and look at his labors and say, "Look at these guys, they're just like Christ." In fact, they're different to me, and that is good, but the one thing that concerns me is that they look like Christ. And Paul's zeal was directed in such a manner that they might be like Christ, look like Christ, and live to the glory of Christ.

Paul was not congratulating himself upon people looking like him and liv-

ing like him and doing like him, and he says, "If you follow me, you follow me as I follow Christ," and if that's the only reason why you follow me, that should be the only reason why, as an example of how to live to the glory of God and the application of God's truth. And Paul's zeal is contrasted to the zeal of the Judaizers, which was destructive and selfish, and he shows that it is a zeal directed to the glory and honor of God.

Paul learned this zeal from none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who appeared to him and gave him his gospel. And Paul could look at the life of Jesus, and what he saw was the most zealous man that ever walked the earth. He saw a man possessed with love toward God and toward his neighbor, whose entire attitude was this one thing. He says, "I have not come down into the world to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me." He said, "It is my food, it is my meat, it is my sustenance to do the will of Him that sent me." Jesus demonstrated in his life what it means to spend yourself and to be spent. He was both a living and a dying sacrifice. There was a fire that burned in the heart of our Lord, a fire of love that burnt steadily, that burnt perfectly, that burnt consistently, and it burnt to the glory of his Father. So much so that he walks into the temple, and they see that they've turned the house of God into the den of thieves because they're making merchandise out of selling in the temple of God. With anger and indignation, because he wanted to show his strength and to show his power, not because he wanted, as it were, his own glory, but he says, "You are turning my Father's house into a den of thieves. This is the temple of God." Pure love for God. Pure love for the people. And the disciples, when they heard that, they remembered what was written of him in the Old Testament. I love it. It says these words, "The zeal of thine house, of your house, O God, has eaten me up." It's a fire that consumes me. It's eating me up within. There's a burning. I cannot see the house of God being desecrated, and therefore, I will act, yes, in zeal, even though it meant turning over the tables and driving out the money changers. It was pure love for his Father, for his neighbor. It was that pure love that burned so brightly that it led him down that pathway into the garden of Gethsemane, where he pled with our Lord, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not my will, but Yours be done." It was that pure love that led him down to the courthouse, where he stood before his accusers, and he stood there silent as a lamb who's silent before his shearers. And so, he is there, dumb and silent, not speaking a word because he is willing and wanting to do the will of the Father, and it is burning in his heart so that he might do it. It was pure love and zeal that was leading him to the cross as he bore the cross on his back and went all the way to Calvary and hung there. It was pure love that caused him to stay on that cross and cry, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" And, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is pure love, pure zeal, burning in the heart of Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry all the way to



the end. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him, and He had this one thing: salvation of our souls and the glory of His Father.

This is the zeal that marks the faithful in all generations. The early Christians, they were committed, steadfastly they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine and Fellowship. Steadfastness, there was this dedication, there was this one thing about them, the glory of God, obedience to His word. So much so, even when they were scattered due to persecution, the Bible says that they went everywhere preaching the word. Why? Because the gospel meant more to them than just the fact that it was something that we shared in the community of believers. It was something personal to them. It was burning in them, and wherever they went, they gossiped the gospel, they spread it abroad because this one thing possessed them. This is the zeal that marked the martyrs of the Christian church that died and suffered for the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ. There was Polycarp, who said these words, "You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour at most. You must not know about the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. What? Are you wasting your time? Kill me in whatever way you see fit." There's no point trying to persuade me to deny my faith. There's a fire that burns within my heart that will not let me go. A love for God, and I rest my weary soul in that love, and I will burn as a torch for God even before my accusers. What about the words of a Perpetua, this dear lady in the early church who suffered also as a martyr of the faith, when her father came to her and begged her, "Please, please, we don't want you to die. Deny Jesus so that you can live." She didn't want his daughter to be fed to the beasts. She gave her child to the family, and she went and suffered for the name of Jesus Christ. This is what she said. She said, "I cannot call myself any other than who I am, a Christian. I'm a Christian." The burning desire for the honor of and the glory of God. This one thing for Perpetua is, "I must please my Lord, even if it costs me everything."

This was the zeal of the reformers, Wycliffe, and Luther, and Knox, and Calvin, a zeal, yes, not perfect, but powerfully used by God to overthrow religious empires of their day with the truth of the gospel, unashamed to make Christ known and to preach Him, though it cost them their lives, for many of them. They saw the corruption that filled the church. They saw the corruption that filled men's hearts, and they said, "We must do something about this. The truth of Jesus lies within us. We must proclaim Christ." What about those like Whitfield and Wesley and Spurgeon and even the reformers and others that have gone before them? And even today, as many other Christians are called, label today, "You guys are just fanatics," they told them, "fanatics." Whitfield, preaching, preaching his heart out, preaching the word of God. Wesley, ministering and laboring and serving and preaching and making Christ known on the streets, wherever they

went, they were like firebrands for the gospel. The church couldn't have those people because they were reflecting on their own coldness. And so they called them and criticized them, "fanatics" and "extremists." But what possessed these men? But the power of the Holy Spirit and the fire of God that led to a great revival that spread throughout the course of their countries in which they ministered, to which we are recipients and benefits of today. They revolutionized the era in which they lived, all because the fire burned within them, and they were not going to let that get quenched.

Dear brothers and sisters, there is a fire that we should not quench. We should fan it into flame, nurture it, feed it, direct it to its proper ends. We ought not to be threatened by enthusiasm. It is so often in many churches that there's a young person that will come in here with a gospel on their heart, fresh, they've tasted of the love of God. And all they want to talk is about Jesus, and all they want to do is open the Bible and talk about the Bible. And all of a sudden, people start to get uneasy, "Man, you're making us feel like we're sinners." Yes, well, repent. Maybe you could be more zealous too and catch some of his fire. But ordinarily, what happens is a lot of people say, "I've got to find out a way to douse this guy's flame. There's something wrong with him." We say things like, "You know, if he gets too excited, he's going to end up being discouraged. So just calm him down." I love what J.C. Ryle says about this. He said, "Let everyone who professes to be a Christian beware of suppressing zeal. Seek it. Cultivate it. You will enlarge the fire in your own heart and in the hearts of others, but never, never stop it. Beware of throwing cold water on zealous souls whenever you meet with them. Beware of nipping in the bud this precious gift when it first shoots up. If you are a parent, beware of suppressing it in your children. If you are a husband, beware of stopping it in your wife. If you are a brother, beware of restraining it in your sisters. And if you are a minister, beware of restraining it in the members of your congregation. It is a shoot of heaven's own planting. Beware of crushing it for Christ's sake." We should heed that.

It's important for us that although the light and fire that burns in another's heart might reflect upon our darkness and the coldness of our own hearts, we ought to have at least the honesty and the love and the truth that we understand before God and say, "I wish some of that fire burnt in me." And although it may not be directed perfectly, the answer is not to put it out; it's to redirect it. And I pray that it be redirected for the glory of God. And may that fire then burn in my heart and burn in your heart and burn in someone else's heart, so that we don't grow cold and indifferent, that we don't get to the point in our Christianity where we want to just be politically correct about everything.

But God, give us a heart of fervent love that burns after You. No matter how crazy we may look, you always look crazy to the world. You always

look crazy to cold Christians. It's been that way from the time of our Lord Jesus Christ to the present time. In fact, J.C. Ryle in the 18-19 hundreds, he says that they call those fanatics who street preach; they're still calling those fanatics today that street preach. Okay, we can talk about different methods and applying them and utilizing different methods for the glory of Christ and His gospel, but do not stop the fire. Let the fire burn.

The question we must ask ourselves is, do we have zeal for the Lord? Are we zealous always in a good thing? Do we have in our hearts this morning this attitude of this one thing? We do more than one thing. God has called us to do many things, but we have this one thing that turns all the other things that we do as a means to an end. This one thing that should possess the heart of the Christian is the glory of God. I burn for the glory of God. You burn for the glory of God. We have to be careful of those things that would cause us to burn for other things.

How many of God's people are cold in their Christianity but hot in their studies so they can make secular achievements and reach their dreams? How many of God's people are cold for the cause of Christ and His kingdom but hot in their businesses? They're out and thinking, and everything that they're doing, this one thing possesses them, this goal, this dream, this house, this car, this clothing, this is what I want in my life. Everything gets pulled in and channeled towards this. How many of God's people are so zealous for politics? They talk glibly and coldly and indifferently about Christianity, but you mention the name of Albanese or Trump or someone like that, and off they go, the fire burns like a mighty fire, so much so that they're willing to direct that fire sometimes with their brothers and sisters in such a way that destroys their faith.

How often it is that we are zealous for the things that God does not want us to have zeal for. We ought to be zealous for the glory of God. We manifest our zealousness in all the things that we do, but ultimately to this cause, to this end, that God's name may be glorified. It is this one thing that should possess us, the glory of God, the souls of sinners being won to our Savior, and us leading a life of holiness and purity before God, no matter what it may cost us. For Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If your heart burns with love to God, you will find that that's where they will be, the things that you treasure. They will be the things that you pour out your life, your time, your energy, your resources into.

Perhaps some of our coldness of heart this morning is due to the fact that we have lost sight of the eternal glories that Christ has set forth for us in His gospel. We have forgotten about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, which sets everything in perspective, that when He comes again, what will then matter but that we are called faithful and true servants of His? We get

cold because of dim sights of eternity, or we basically have wrong priorities where we stack one thing above the other, and we don't see that we should seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to us.

The problem of the church of the Laodiceans concerning their lukewarmness was met with these words from Jesus: "Be zealous, therefore, and repent." Be warm, be hot, be zealous, turn from the life that you are now living, and go after God. How often we harbor sin in our lives that we're unwilling to drag out of our souls and lay before the throne of God and say, "God, I have sinned, and against You and You only have I sinned, O God, and done this great wickedness." We wonder why we're cold. Cherishing sin, harboring sin that distances us in our love and affection for God, quenches the fire of our zeal.

So often, we are Christians that do have zeal. We do sense indignation. We do have a certain one thing attitude, but it's the wrong thing. We have, like the Judaizing zeal. We have a zeal for God, and I say God, not for the glory of God, but we use God for our own ends, selfish endeavors for the building up of our kingdom, not His. Very dangerous for ministers, isn't it? The church stops, ceases to be Christ's church, and becomes his church, and then he works and labors and puts in energy and effort and time and everything for the establishment of his own kingdom, and then becomes the king of the castle of his own kingdom, that when you cross him, kicks you out. Very common, very common. Pray for me that the only kingdom that will matter in my heart is the kingdom of God. That the desire for our church would only be that Christ's name would be honored here, and He will be enthroned. Pray for one another that we check our hearts and are concerned about God's glory, not our own.

Oh yes, zeal eats us up, but not for the house of God. Often, zeal eats us up because we don't get our own way. We become indignant, we become angry, we become frustrated, and we vent it. It's not the zeal of pure love. Oh yes, it is, sorry. It's the zeal of pure love for ourselves, for our glory, for our ends, and not the glory of God. Perhaps today, you are someone that's been ensnared by zeal. That kind of person that doesn't read zeal rightly, as according to knowledge. Perhaps you're like the Galatians, that this guy's on fire, I'm going to follow him. But you don't ask, you don't think, what causes this man to burn? Is it God's glory, God's name, God's honor? Or is it because he wants a million YouTube likes and subscribers? What causes this person to do what they do? Is there truth before I let that zeal affect me and impact me? Does that zeal accord with truth? Or is it because this great man dresses finely and speaks so confidently that I should just lap up and believe every word that he says? If you do that, you'll be in trouble.

There's many a charlatan in the professing church of Jesus Christ today that will rob you of your dollar by preaching to you a prosperity gospel and will play on your heartstrings until your bank account runs dry, and causing you to think that God promises you something which He has not yet promised. There's many a person that will rob your joy from God, and it's because they want you to be for them. They want more numbers, they want more praise, they want more glory, they want sidekicks, they want people at their feet that bow to them, and they do not want people that bow to Jesus Christ and His glory. And they come in the name of Christianity, proclaiming new fads, new messages, a little bit of this, something, a new edge on that, so as to grab your heart and draw you away from Christ. Gripping, zealous speakers. And therefore, I will say this in closing, that your knowledge of the word of God is paramount in protecting yourself from a fire in your own heart that might blaze and destroy others, but also from the fire in someone else's heart that might burn and destroy you. You must know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

It was their failure to continue in the knowledge of our Lord that was bringing these Judaizers, the Judaizers bringing the Galatians back into bondage. Paul says, "Hear the word of the Lord." So it is that we must be zealous to know God's word, that we might know His will, that we might be safeguarded against zeal which does not honor God, that would lead to our destruction. Let us pray.