

- ***READ Romans 12:11*** Chapter 12 begins Paul's practical section of his letter to the Romans, and within this chapter he hits just about every part of the Christian's character that ought to be considered when we think of what is demanded of those whom God has graciously saved through His mercy. Nestled in this great list of admonitions is **v.11**, and this verse speaks of what we are going to focus on this morning...zeal. The Christian Standard Bible renders this verse as, *"Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord."*
- It seems to me that this verse, like the rest of the verses in this context, has individual parts that fit really nicely together. Paul admonishes that those who are saved by God ought to be a people who are fervent in their efforts to allow the Spirit of God to have great influence over them. They are to be a people who are serving the Lord with everything that is within them, but notice that both of these endeavors can be greatly aided and enhanced if we will be a people who are diligent in our zeal. If we will be a people who give great effort to make sure that we are truly zealous for our God then we will be a people who see the necessity of being fervent in our pursuit of God's Spirit and our service to Him in all things. But the question might be...how does this help us?
- To understand our need to be diligent in zeal, we must first begin by defining what zeal is. Phillip Shumake gives an excellent definition for zeal in his book, *"Lifelong Zeal."* **In this book, he defines Biblical zeal as, "a burning desire to please God."** I really love this definition, and I think that it really help us to make even more sense of this verse here in **Romans 12:11**. If we are a people who have this ever glowing burning passion to please God then we most certainly are going to be people who are fervent in the Spirit by allowing it to have great influence over us in our lives, and this will only aid us in our efforts to be people who serve God faithfully.
- As we continue in our studies on ways that we can Excel Still More in our faiths, it would serve us well to take time this morning in considering how we can be Christians who are excelling in our zeal for the Lord. Again, this verse tell us that if we will do so then we will be aided in our fervency for the Spirit and our service to God, but why else should we be a people who are striving to grow in our zeal before God? After looking at three answers to this question, we will then finish up by looking at how we can increase excel in our zeal for God.

I. Why should we be zealous?

A. Zeal is a common quality found within God's most faithful people.

1. When I think about those Biblical characters that might be considered the most faithful among the faithful, I can't help but think of those that are listed in **Hebrews 11**. When I think about those people and the things that they did according to the will of God, I can't but think of them as being anything other than zealous for God. Consider the following examples of zealous individuals that can be found in **Hebrews 11**:
 - a) Firstly, Noah was willing to build a massive boat which was to house his family along with many animals without ever seeing the first drop of rain or inch of flood water. Why would a man be willing to undergo such a massive endeavor without seeing that which he was being warned about? Sure it was because he had faith in the unseen, but let me also suggest that Noah was a man of tremendous zeal. He had a burning passion to please his God, and if his God said to build a giant boat, then that was precisely what Noah was going to do. **(11:7)**
 - b) Secondly, Abraham is obviously a man of tremendous faith (he is alluded to as our father of faith in **Romans 4**), but I believe that his faith was supplemented by a zealous heart that he had for his God. I have to believe this based upon the incredible examples of obedience that we have in his life. He was willing to uproot his family at the command of God to go to a place which he had never been. Then, after finally receiving his son of promise, he was

commanded to take that son of promise up onto a mountain to offer up as a sacrifice to God. He followed his God's commands and was just about to lower the knife into his son when the Lord stopped his hand. How could a man be willing to do such things? Surely it was because he was zealous for his God and wanted to please Him above all else. **(11:8-19)**

c) Thirdly, Moses was a man who showed glimpses of great zeal as he stood before the most powerful man in the world and told him to let the people of Yahweh go. He brought curses and plagues upon the people of Egypt. He lifted his arms to part the sea so that his people may pass on dry ground. These incredible acts of faith were most certainly accompanied by a spirit of zeal for he desired to serve and obey the God of his forefathers. **(11:23-29)**

2. These examples are of those people that we are most familiar with because they are prominent figures within the Bible narrative, but I really want to focus on those that are listed at the latter end of the chapter in **vv.32-40**. The Hebrew writer rightly acknowledges that he simply can't go into depth about all of those who were the most faithful among the followers of God, but he still wanted to highlight all of the incredible feats of faith that these unnamed individuals were willing to carry out and endure in the name of their God. I don't know about you, but I can't imagine anyone being willing to endure what is mentioned in **vv.36-38** without having a heart that is overflowing with zeal towards their God. If we want to be counted amongst the faithful of God then we too must be a people who are overflowing in zeal towards Him and His will.

B. Christ sacrificed Himself in order to produce zeal within us.

1. In a minute we will consider the zealous heart of Jesus, but for the moment I want to focus on the fact that He was willing to come to earth not just to save us, but to create a people who would imitate Him in their zeal towards God. Paul reminds Timothy as he is giving him instructions which he is supposed to pass along to other disciples that they were given grace so that they might live a certain way. **(Titus 2:11-14)**

2. The grace of God in the form of Jesus has appeared to all men, and He brings salvation with Him. Yet, He also brings instructions that we are to now deny ungodliness and worldly desires. We are to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly manner in this present age. We are to be looking forward to the glorious appearing of Jesus, but in the meantime we are to be a people who are zealous (NASB) or eager (CSB) to be doing the good deeds that He expects of us. He didn't purchase us with His blood so that we might continue on sinning **(I Corinthians 6:20 & Romans 6:1,2)**, so we must now be zealous to do those good things in which we were redeemed by His blood to do. Those things must be our greatest passion and desire.

C. Our failure to be zealous will negatively affect our ability to faithfully serve our God.

1. Being zealous to do the good deeds we were redeemed to do is important because our failure to have that passion burning within our hearts will only hinder us from being what we were created in Christ to be. While we have many examples of people who were zealous to fulfill the wishes of God and Christ, we also have a pretty drastic example of the opposite being true about a group of God's people.

2. In **Revelation 3:14-22**, we read of Jesus's message to the church that was in Laodicea. This church had previously been mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians concerning his desired for them both to be encouraged and knit together in love so that they might find true wealth in Christ Jesus. **(Colossians 2:1-3)** Unfortunately, Paul's desires don't seem to have come to fruition for Jesus strongly rebukes these brethren for being lukewarm. They had become complacent within their hearts. They saw themselves as rich and in need of nothing. They were anything but on fire in their hearts for God, and this lack of fiery passion caused them to be nothing in the eyes of Jesus because they were doing nothing. Therefore, Jesus calls then to repentance and growth in their zeal.

3. I want us to recognize that this group of God's people was failing because they were not stoking the fire to passionately pursue the will of God in their lives. They had become complacent and apathetic. They did not have their strong desire in their hearts to please God and it only led to their inaction and unfaithfulness to God. If they could be strongly rebuked for failing to be zealous...then what about us? Hopefully we recognize our strong need to be zealous for God from our very hearts and souls so the Lord isn't forced to spit us out, as well.

However...what if we do find ourselves in the same shoes as the Laodiceans? What if that fire that we once had for the Lord has died out? Shumake's book on zeal is predicated upon that very question. In the foreword under the heading "*Mark's Question*" he writes, "*Mark said, 'I was baptized a few years ago, but I already feel less on fire. What can I do to get my zeal back?'*" This is a very important question because we all must recognize that unless we are constantly feeding our passion for God...it will die out. It takes great effort to constantly have that zealous passion burning within us, but it is something that is of the utmost importance if we want to be everything in Christ that we were created in Him to be. With this in mind, let's finish by answering the question of how we can increase and excel in our zeal.

II. How do we increase and excel in our zeal?

A. Often remind ourselves of Christ's desire for our zeal.

1. It could be said that Jesus Himself was zealous for our zeal. That might sound a bit strange, but I mean by this that Christ Himself had a great zeal to do the will of His Father, and that will of His Father was for us to be created in Him to be zealous. Consider that Jesus Himself acknowledged that He strongly desired to obey His Father's desires. In fact, in **John 4:34** Jesus described His obedience to the will of the Father as His food. The idea being that He lived on the efforts to fulfill His Father's desires. He thrived on doing that which was pleasing to His Father. How can that be described as anything but zeal?
2. Further, His zeal to obey God led Him to offer up the ultimate sacrifice of His life. "*Being found in the appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" (**Philippians 2:8NASB**) Nothing but a burning passion in the heart to obey His Father of Jesus would lead to endure what He did for us on the cross, and it was that sacrifice on the cross that has allowed for us to have the forgiveness of our sins and salvation.
3. Again, consider Paul's words in **Titus 2:14NASB** concerning Jesus's zealous sacrifice, "*who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*" The implication from this text is that Jesus did what we did in order to produce something from us. He graciously redeemed us so that we might reciprocate that grace by being a people who had a burning passion to do the good deeds that Christ would have us to do. If we are struggling to make the proper decisions or do live in a godly manner then we must focus our minds on the example of Jesus and the death He endured in order to allow us to be in a place where we could even stand purified before God and able to do those works in a manner than pleases Him. Without that grace and purification through sacrifice of Jesus, we would be nothing. Therefore, just as His zeal led Him to death according to the will of God...we, too, must die to self so that we might fulfill God's will in our lives...being zealous for good deeds.

B. Surround ourselves with other zealous disciples.

1. We have been using language that should bring to mind the image of a fire that is burning within us for our God. We are to be zealous towards our God and strongly desiring to please Him in all that we do, but we need to recognize that this becomes much easier when we surround ourselves with people who are endeavoring to do the same thing. Think this through with me by allowing me to use this illustration of coals. How long does a single coal stay really hot? The answer of course is not very long. However, how long can a large number of coals that are lumped together stay hot? The answer is much longer and the same is true for disciples.

2. I know that **Hebrews 10:24,25** has historically (or at least in my lifetime) been used as a verse to pound the need for attendance when the church comes together. I certainly won't argue against the need for us to be present when the local church that we belong to gets together, but I think we miss a great opportunity to stress why it is that we should get together when we only focus on pounding the table to stir up attendance. Notice that there is a strong motivation as to why we ought to gather together, and it focuses around how we are stimulated (NASB) or provoked (CSB) to love and good deeds when we are together.
 3. This is certainly true when it comes to our assemblies, but friends we must recognize our need to spend as much time together as is possible! For the vast majority of us, the vast majority of our time is spent around those who are not of the body of Christ. If we can be stimulate or provoked to love and good deeds when we are around other disciples, then we must understand that the opposite can be true when we are around those who don't have that same passion for God. It is very possible that we are stimulated or provoked to do that which is not good in the eyes of God. There's a reason the Apostle Paul acknowledged the truth of what is said in **I Corinthians 15:33!** Bad company can corrupt us! They can douse our fiery passion for God! Therefore, we must make sure that we are surrounding ourselves as often as we can with other disciples who are burning coals for the Lord because only surrounding ourselves with dead coals will quickly lead to our own fire fizzling out.
- C. Remember that zeal is more than just a positive and helpful attitude...it demands proper action!**
1. Finally, we must always remember that being zealous for God involves more than simply having desires to please Him...we must actually please Him in our actions! I'm sure many of us can think of individuals in our lives or even think back to our own pasts and remember a person or persons who were zealous for God within their hearts but that zeal never materialized to behavior or actions that actually accomplished the goal of pleasing God. It is very possible to say that we desire above all else to please God, but it is an entirely other thing to actually show that through our actions.
 2. Paul had a very strong desire for the salvation of his countrymen, the Jews. He writes in **Romans 10:1 (CSB)**, *"Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation."* Paul had a passionate desire in his heart for the rest of his Jewish brothers and sisters to be saved. He acknowledges that they actually had a zeal for God, but unfortunately, that zeal wasn't leading them to obedience before God. *"I can testify about them that they have **zeal** for God, but **not according to knowledge**. Since they are ignorant of righteousness of God and **attempted to establish their own righteousness**, they have not submitted to God's righteousness."* (**Romans 10:2,3 CSB**)
 3. Paul's point is extremely clear, and it needs to resonate with us. A simple passion to please God is only going to be beneficial to us if we allow for it to lead us to the place where we submit to God's desires for our righteousness. This is the essence of discipleship! We cannot desire to please God and then turn around and do that which doesn't please Him in order to do as we would desire to do. That is only offering up lip-service, and the Creator of the universe will not be pleased with anything less than full devotion and obedience that is a result of hearts that are zealous and on fire for Him.

The question I would like for us all to consider as we contemplate this lesson this morning is this, *"What temperature is my passion for God running at at the moment?"* Am I burning up on fire for the Lord and His will in my life? Or am I barely even warm because I have neglected to stoke the fire of my zeal? If we are barely hanging on then I hope that the considerations this morning will motivate us all to put more effort into our passion for our God. His passion for us has always overflowed, and He is worthy of nothing less from us. May He strengthen us to excel still more in our zeal for Him and His will in our lives.