

Zeal With Knowledge

Romans 10: 2 – 4

- Romans 9 was rough on two levels.
 - It is deep theology. It is a glimpse into the inner workings of the mind of God.
 - But Romans 9 is not only deep and a struggle to wrap our minds around, but it is also something that our minds, just don't want to have to think about, even though it is true. God being in control, God having to act to save us, our inability to save ourselves just completely rubs us the wrong way. Why?
 - Because in our flesh, in our thinking, we want to be God. We want to be in control. That was the root of Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, and it is the root of all of our sin.
 - Until you see that, and understand that in your own life, you really won't understand what is really wrong with you.
 - Your sin isn't just a bad habit, or a bad personality, or just character flaws that you need to work on fixing.
 - When you lie, gossip, or when you use your words to tear down others, it is not just that you need to try harder to control what you say. Your unbridled temper and anger aren't just things you need to try to keep a lid on. They are the warning signs that deep down inside of you there is something very wrong—an unhealthy desire to be in control and be your own god.
 - All those things that I just named, the bad habits, the character flaws, a failure to control our tongue and our anger are just the very surface of our sin. The real sin behind all of those is pride—a desire to be king or queen over our own lives.
 - Just think about it, behind all of those sins and a hundred more is nothing but the desire to be in control.
 - ◆ We engage in what we call bad habits because our flesh wants to be in control. Our flesh wants what our flesh wants. If our flesh didn't want it, we wouldn't do it. It wouldn't be a habit.
 - ◆ We lie because we want to be in control. We use our tongue to tear down others because we want control over them. We get angry because we see we are not in control, and we want to be.
 - ◆ We refuse to forgive, because refusing to forgive keeps others under our control, locked in a dungeon of condemnation that we have made for them.
 - We sin because we are rejecting God's control over our lives.
 - Even when we realize that we have a sin problem, we try to fix ourselves, rather than submitting to God. Why? For the exact same reason, we sin because we don't want God to be in control over our life.
 - We think by trying to fix ourselves, trying to save ourselves, we are doing something that is pleasing to God, but, according to the Bible, exactly the opposite is true. Because rather than letting God be in control and be

the one saving us, we once again are seeking to be our own god by seeking to find a righteousness of our own to save ourselves.

- It sounds completely foreign, not just because it goes against the grain of our human nature, but also because unfortunately, it is not something you will hear in most of Christian culture. Instead, what we often hear is try to be better people. But simply trying to be better people doesn't fix anything. In fact, it makes things worse, and we can see that in the passage that we are looking at today in:

Romans 10: 2 – 4 For I bear them (the Israelites) witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

- Zeal is not a word that we use too often, is it? So, what is zeal?
 - Zeal: eagerness and ardent interest in pursuit of something
 - Ardent: a feeling of warmth, a heartfelt desire.
- So what Paul is saying in verse 2 is that the Jews had an eager, heartfelt desire for God and to be in a right standing with God. But their eager, heartfelt desire was misguided because it was not driven by knowledge.

1. Understanding the problem of zeal without knowledge

- So, what was the result? They were running hard in the wrong direction.
 - Think about this in terms of a cross country race. In a cross-country race, what happens if you run hard but go in the wrong direction? Rather than crossing the finish line, you end up lost in the woods.
 - That's what Paul says was happening with the Jews. They were running with zeal, but they were running in the wrong direction, so rather than getting to God, they were getting more and more lost.
 - How lost? Think how Paul described them in Romans 9: 3. They were going so far in the wrong direction, that they ended up cursed and cutoff from Christ. Do you know what that means? To be cursed and cutoff from Christ only means one thing. It means that you are headed to hell—to eternal separation from God.
- Now, in a general way that makes sense, doesn't it? In life, we are either running to or away from God—there is no in between. If we are running away from God, then where are we going? To hell.
 - The Jews were cut off and cursed because they were running with zeal in the completely wrong direction.
- Now what was it that was causing the Jews to end up in the wrong place, cursed and cutoff? It was zeal without knowledge.
 - No matter what you are talking about, zeal and knowledge have to go hand in hand if you are going to succeed at what you are trying to do.
 - Take body building for example. If you know all the right lifts to do, but never go to the gym because you are lacking in zeal, there is not going to be much body building happening.

- But on the other hand, if you go to the gym every day but you are doing the wrong lifts with the wrong form, not only will you not be building up your body, but you will also probably be hurting yourself instead.
- No matter how much knowledge you have, without zeal, nothing will change because you will never put the knowledge to work.
- But, if you have zeal without knowledge, nothing will change because all your effort will be toward the wrong things. Paul knew this from his own life.

Philippians 3: 4 – 8 If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh (That is the ability to save themselves), I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

- Why was Paul doing all of those things? Why did they seem important to him?
 - Because all of those things (circumcised on the 8th day, a Hebrew of Hebrews {that is one way of saying that Paul considered himself the best of the best}, being a law-abiding Pharisee) were all the ways that Paul was trying to gain a righteousness of his own. And by his own words, he was doing it all with great zeal, including persecuting the church.
- Before Paul met Christ, Paul had zeal, but it was a zeal for a righteousness of his own. Now look how Paul describes the Jews in:

Romans 10: 2-3 They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

- Paul knew this well, because those exact words describe him before Jesus changed everything in his life.
 - Paul had zeal, and Paul knew a lot of things, but until Jesus knocked Paul to his knees, while he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, Paul didn't have true knowledge to give his zeal direction.
 - He was like a person who wants to build their body going to the gym and furiously pumping iron, but he was doing it all wrong, so instead of helping himself, he was destroying himself.
- But look what happened when Jesus knocked Paul to his knees and Paul saw the truth about Jesus. Everything he had so zealously worked for, became as garbage to him, worthless compared to knowing Jesus.
 - Coming to a correct knowledge of Jesus changed Paul's life, because it redirected his zeal. Now in a moment, we'll talk about why that correct knowledge of Jesus changed everything, but for now let me just ask you, is the zeal in your life based on true knowledge, or is it just based on what you think is right?
- All of us have a deep driven desire to build an identity for ourselves that tells us, that tells the world, and that tells whatever God we believe in, that we are ok-- that we are righteous.

“Nobody’s ever gone the distance with Creed, and if I can go that distance, you see, and that bell rings and I’m still standin’, I’m gonna know for the first time in my life, see, that I weren’t just another bum from the neighborhood.” Rocky Balboa

- According to what Rocky thought to be true, going the distance would give a certain kind of righteousness—a validation that his life mattered.
- Now on one hand that is kind of silly, isn’t it? Getting the living stew beat out of you for 15 rounds gives you an identity, gives you righteousness? I’m just glad that isn’t how I feel like I have to earn my righteousness. But on the other hand, isn’t that what all of us are looking for, that validation that we are not a bum?
 - We desperately long to be able to say to ourselves, or better yet, to have someone declare over us that we are not just another bum from the neighborhood. Do you see that drive in yourself?
 - We may think it is silly for Rocky to think that getting beat up for 15 rounds would solve his righteousness problem, but don’t we do the same thing just in a different way?
 - For years, all I cared about was success. Why did I want success? Because then I wouldn’t be a bum. So, I worked 70 – 80 hours per week. I was a soccer parent, a band parent, a youth group leader, a Sunday School teacher. Why? Basically, for all the same reasons as Rocky, so myself, other people, and God would look at me and say, “He’s not a bum. He’s a somebody.” I had zeal, but it wasn’t based on knowledge.
 - ◆ I knew I was a bum, that was correct knowledge, but I didn’t know the right way to fix it. So, my zeal was all misspent. Furiously running a race in the wrong direction. The harder I went at it, the deeper in the woods I was lost.
- Now you might think that I am being awfully hard on myself, calling myself a bum. But we all are, and we are all trying to prove we are not. God created mankind for greatness.

Genesis 1: 26 – 27 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 So God created man in his own image.

- We were created for greatness, and deep down we know it, because God imprinted it on our hearts. But we also know that we are not living up to our potential—to what God created us to be. We have this innate longing for greatness, but a deep-seated feeling of wretchedness, because we know we have fallen short of the glory God created us to have. So deep down we have this drive to stop feeling like a bum and to instead be a somebody.
 - So, we busy ourselves with great zeal trying to recover the righteous glory that once was ours.
- What about you? Take a hard look at yourself. What do you have zeal for? What are you expending the energy of your life in pursuit of?



- Is it to be a perfect mom, with perfect kids, and perfect home, because, if you have that, then you won't be another bum from the neighborhood."
- Is it to have a successful career, because if you can just have that, then you won't be another bum?
- Maybe it is to get in the right school because if you can do that, then everybody will know that you are not a bum.
- Maybe you simply have a zeal not to fail because in your mind failure will make you a bum.
 - Of course, if you have a zeal not to fail, you'll never accomplish much of anything, because you'll never risk anything, but at least you won't fail and be a bum.
- All of us long to have a declaration made over us that we are not a bum. That we are righteous, and we spend our lives zealously in pursuit of that declaration.
 - But it is zeal that is not based on knowledge, but simply on what we each think will give us a righteous standing.
 - That's what Paul said the problem with the Jews was. They were zealously pursuing a certain kind of righteousness, thinking that would somehow cause God to proclaim that they were not bums like the rest of the world was.
 - They thought that following God's law, following the religious rules would cause God to make that declaration of righteousness over them, but they thought wrong because their zeal wasn't based on a true knowledge of the righteousness that God requires.

2. The cause of the problem of zeal without knowledge

- The Jews were zealously pursuing a declaration of righteousness by being religious, but it was all wasted because they were:

Romans 10: 3 Ignorant of the righteousness of God

- So, what is the righteousness of God? It is perfect holiness.

Leviticus 19: 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

- God's standard of righteousness is to be holy. It is to be sinless. That is what true righteousness is, and the problem is, once we sin, true righteousness is gone. That's why God makes this declaration over all of us.

Romans 3: 10 – 12 "None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

- From the standpoint of making a declaration of righteousness over us, God doesn't care, if we go 15 rounds with Apollo Creed, or if we are successful in our career or business. He doesn't care if we are a better mother or father than others, or more moral than most. None of those things are real righteousness in God's eyes, because they are all corrupted by our sin.



- Let's say for a moment that you go crazy with your credit card and rack up a \$1,000,000 debt. It is a debt that you have no hope of ever being able to repay. But one day you sit down with some friends, and you play Monopoly. You clean up. You end up owning every property on the board with hotels. You literally clean out the bank. All the money is yours. \$2,000,000 of Monopoly money.
- In your eyes, you are no longer a bum, you have Monopoly righteousness. And then it hits you. I will take all of this Monopoly money down to 1st Interstate Bank and pay off my debt. What will 1st Interstate Bank think of your Monopoly righteousness? Will they, like you, think you are no longer a bum? Will they take the fake Monopoly money to pay the debt? No, they will laugh you out of the building.
- Don't you see this is how it is with God? Because we have sinned, we have a debt we can never repay. But instead of actually acknowledging our indebtedness, we try to pay it using the equivalent of Monopoly money. "Yes, I have sinned but...
 - I went 15 rounds with Apollo Creed."
 - I am a good mom, raising good kids, in a good home."
 - I am a success."
 - I am more moral."
 - I am more religious."
- And we present these things to God and, well, it's like taking Monopoly money to 1st Interstate to pay our debt.
- A lack of knowledge concerning what real righteousness is causes us to spend our lives zealously chasing after the wrong things.

3. The result of the problem of zeal without knowledge

Romans 10: 3 they did not submit to God's righteousness

- Our zealous pursuit of the wrong thing keeps us from ever having the right thing. It is trying to have a righteousness of our own that keeps us from being able to submit to God's righteousness—real righteousness.
 - Imagine you are on your way to 1st Interstate, with hands squeezing tightly to all that monopoly money, and I meet you there on Main Street. You tell me what you are doing, and in response I say, "Friend that's not real money. It can't satisfy the debt. Here, let me give you this sack full of gold that is more than enough to pay the debt. All you have to do is carry it into the bank."
 - But you can't and won't take me up on my offer, because to do that you would have to let go of all of your hard-earned Monopoly righteousness. To pick up the bag of gold you have to open your hand, and if you open your hand, all of that hard earned monopoly money will be gone, blowing in the wind down Main Street.
 - Don't you see that's how it is with us? The more we cling to our own righteousness, the more unable we are to take hold of the real righteousness that God offers us in Christ.

4. The solution to the problem of zeal without knowledge

Romans 10: 4 Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

- Some look at that verse and they say that it means that the law no longer matters. Jesus has come and law has gone poof—it has vanished into the wind.
 - That's almost true, but if something is almost true, then it's not true, if it is not true, then it's a lie—a lie that smells like smoke and comes straight from the pit of hell. How do I know that? Jesus' own words.

Matthew 5: 17 – 18 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

- Christ is the end of the law for righteousness cannot possibly mean that Jesus put an end to the law, because Jesus doesn't lie and Jesus said, “Don't think I have come to abolish the law.” By Jesus' own words the law still stands and will continue to stand till time is no more.
- But the words Jesus said there in Matthew 5, not only tell us what “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness” doesn't mean, they also point us to what it does mean. Look again at what Jesus said in verse 17, “I have come to fulfill the law.”
 - Jesus came and lived the life each of us were supposed to live. He lived a life of real righteousness, perfectly fulfilling the law of God.
 - Think of Jesus' last words on the cross. “It is finished.” Why did he say that? Because through his perfectly obedient life and perfectly obedient death, he did everything necessary to secure a record of perfect righteousness—the righteousness that God requires. A righteousness that none of us can ever have on our own because we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
- There is only one thing you have to do to have that righteousness as your own.

Romans 10: 4 Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

- God's righteousness doesn't come by what we have or haven't done. God's righteousness comes through faith in Christ, and nothing else.

Galatians 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

- God didn't give us the law as a means of securing our own righteousness. He didn't give us the law to be a personal scorecard for us to use to try to show we are more righteous than others because we play by the rules better than others do. He didn't give us the law so we could point to it and say, “I'm not a bum.”
- He gave us the law to point us to the righteousness of God that is ours through faith in Christ, and to lead us to the point where we are willing to give up our own efforts of righteousness and submit to God's.
- There is no question about how to be righteous is God's sight. The Bible is abundantly clear it that.

Galatians 2: 16 a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus

- The only question is will you submit to the righteousness of God?
- Some of you are here this morning, and you know you are a bum. You know you have fallen short of the glory of God and are just bitter and angry about it. Maybe you have completely given up, maybe you are self-medicating trying to numb the pain of failure. But here is hope—not wishful hope but real hope. No matter what you have or haven't done, real righteousness can be yours through faith in Jesus. Believe and receive.
 - Take it from one who knows, the good news in realizing you are a bum is that you can drop all of the pretense. You know you're a bum, you know you've got nothing in your hands—no righteousness that you can present to God. So that means your hands are open, ready to receive the real righteousness of Christ as your own. Just believe and receive. Take God at His word and ask God to take your sin and give you Christ's righteousness as your own.
 - You may not realize it, but you are in the best place you could possibly be. Your hands are open. You are ready to receive.
- But many of us here aren't in that place. Oh, we say we have faith in Jesus, but we are still clinging to a righteousness of our own. We are determined to prove we are not a bum, and maybe even insulted that the preacher is saying that we are. If that is what you are doing, if that is what you are feeling, then you are not really submitting to the righteousness of God, are you?

Philippians 3: 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

- My prayer for each of us is that these words would indeed be the attitude of our hearts. We not only need to repent of sin, but we also need to repent of trying to gain a righteousness of our own.
- The only way to submit to God's righteousness, the only way to receive the righteousness of Christ is by faith. And faith means letting go of everything, counting everything a loss compared to knowing Christ.
- The fuel for real zeal in your life is gratitude for the righteousness that comes to you by faith in Christ. The more you know the truth about yourself, that truth that you are just a bum who has been saved and declared righteous through faith in Christ, the more zeal you will have for the glory of Christ.

*Nothing either great or small—Nothing, sinner, no; Jesus did it, did it all, Long, long ago.
"It is finished!" yes, indeed, Finished every jot: Sinner, this is all you need—Tell me, is it not?*

Weary, working, burdened one, Wherefore toil you so?

Cease your doing; all was done Long, long ago.

Till to Jesus' work you cling By a simple faith,

"Doing" is a deadly thing— "Doing" ends in death.

Cast your deadly "doing" down—Down at Jesus' feet;

Stand in Him, in Him alone, Gloriously complete.