

We Need to Be More Enthusiastic About Our Faith

Half-Truth #8

Pastor Dan Erickson

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A woman who had recently become a believer in Jesus was attending church for the 1st time. She enjoyed the singing and shouted “amen” at the conclusion of the last song, hardly noticing the glances she received from a few of the people sitting near her. The pastor began his sermon and mentioned how all people have experienced God’s blessings. At that point the woman cried out, “P.T.P.,” this time getting the “look” from many on the congregation. A minute later, the pastor noted that Christians have been especially blessed by God, and the woman shouted “hallelujah.” An usher then tapped her on the shoulder and said, “ma’am, we have to ask you to keep quiet. You are disturbing the service.” The woman replied, “oh, I am sorry, I did not mean to offend anyone. It is just that since I have found the Lord it’s difficult to contain my enthusiasm.” The usher responded, “well, lady, you may have found the Lord, but I am pretty sure you didn’t find Him in this church.”

Friends, as we continue our summer series on harmful half-truths we will consider this statement: we need to be more “enthusiastic” about our faith. Well, I believe a right kind of God honoring enthusiasm can be a good thing, yet a wrong kind of enthusiasm can harm our souls. Let’s pause and pray that the lord will help us to discern and embrace the truth today.

In general, we should be enthusiastic as we love, obey, worship and serve the Lord. Here are a few of the verses that tell us this. In **Romans 12:11** the apostle Paul gives these instructions. ***Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*** In **Ephesians 6:7** he tells Christians slaves ***serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people.*** Describing a meeting with the other apostles in Jerus, Paul says, ***Galatians 2:10 they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.*** He writes this in ***Titus 2:14 (Jesus) gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and o purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*** And just so you do

not think this is just a Paul thing, this is what the apostle Peter says to church leaders: ***1 Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly.***

You may be noticed that the term enthusiasm is not used in any of those verses. We should be eager, fervent, and zealous in our Christian life, we usually use the word “enthusiasm” to mean the same thing, and it is seen as a good thing. Original term, however, meant a lack of self-control, which is not a good thing. The Greek word is en-theos, meaning in God. The ancient Greeks, E.G. used the word to describe the religious frenzies of people who were supposedly possessed by one of their gods. The term “en-theos” is not, however, used in the Greek New Testament. The bible writers viewed the Christian experience as one of the big lead, guided, enabled, and empowered by God, not possessed by him. To trust and follow Jesus is an act of the will. Now, to be clear, the human will, apart from God’s grace, is incapable of pleasing God. Paul uses phrases such as “spiritually dead” and “children of wrath” to describe our condition before we have been regranted or given life, by God’s spirit. He is the one who enables us to trust and follow the Lord Jesus. Yet, this always involves choices we make.

And an uncontrolled enthusiasm is not appropriate even when it comes to experience like speaking in tongues or prophecy. The apostle Paul says, ***1 Corinthians 14:27,28 If anyone speaks in tongues, two or more at the most three-should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church.*** I think Paul is pretty clear. No one can speak in tongues unless he/she has been given the gift by God. Yet anyone who has that gift still is in control, and chooses whether to use it or not.

Now, there are modern examples of “enthusiasm” where people do seem to lose control. A few years ago folks in some churches experienced what they called “holy laughter,” where they broke out in fits of uncontrollable laughing. Now, one time when I was in high school, my friend and I couldn’t stop laughing in chemistry class. Until we were sent out in the hall way. But that is not the same thing. Another example of uncontrolled “enthusiasm” would be “hair whipping.” This was apparently a somewhat common phenomena during the Cane Ridge Revival in KY at the beginning of the 1800’s. claiming to be filled with the holy spirit, teen age and young adult women would turn their heads back and forth so rapidly that their long hair would fly would and supposedly “crack like a whip.” I tried to find someone to give a demo this morning, but... no, this is not the type of enthusiasm we want. Often the testimony of these women was that they could not control their movements, it was as if something possessed them.

Now, some of you are thinking, “P.D., these are examples of someone being possessed not by the holy spirit but by demonic forces.” That is certainly possible, but there is also plenty of evidence that emotional frenzies are psychological phenomena that require no outside influence, either from God or demons. During the Great Awakening, which took place in New England in the 1740’s, numerous folks claimed the holy spirit had put them in some type of emotional frenzy, including some “hair whipping.” John Edwards, who was both a brilliant and wise pastor, noted that such experiences are neither signs for nor against a genuine work of God’s spirit. He said the key to determining whether the Lord was truly working in someone’s life was the fruit of the spirit. **Galatians 5:22b, 23a love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.** Those were signs that God was truly working in a person’s life. Now, an uncontrolled,

emotional frenzy is not only the wrong kind of enthusiasm. As I said, we often use the word to mean the same things as fervor, passion or the word the bible writers like to use, zeal. Yet, zeal is not always used to describe something positive.

E.G. we have **Proverbs 19:2 Even zeal is not good without knowledge, and the one who acts hastily sins.** Wow, there is a lot of wisdom there. Indeed, people who are very enthusiastic about something tend to not only want to do something, but they want to do it right now. Yet, if in their zeal they act in haste, a mistake is often made that they eventually regret. In the new testament there are two texts about zeal without knowledge that comes to mind. One is the apostle Paul’s description of his life before he became a Christian. I was, he says **Philippians 3:5b, 6 a Hebrew of Hebrews; as the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.** How enthusiastic was Paul about his religion, which was phrasal Judaism? He was so zealous that he persecuted the church, Christians, because he believed they were leading people away from the true faith, Judaism. He wanted Christians arrested and even killed. Yet, as he goes on to explain, all this zeal was misdirected. He thought he was zealous for God, but he was really zealous against God. His zeal was without knowledge. He did not know that Jesus was the eternal son of God and Messiah God had promised, so his enthusiasm was directed in the wrong direction.

Paul says that was once true for him, was true for many of the Jews in his day. **Romans 10:2,3 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.** These folks zealously following a religious path, but they are on a dead end. Not knowing who Jesus truly is and what it means to receive the righteousness of

God through faith in Jesus, though their enthusiasm is directed in the wrong direction.

Folks, these are reminders that zeal without knowledge, enthusiasm separated truth is not a good thing. According to an English professor, “zeal without knowledge is fire without lite,” while one author said, “zeal is fit only for wise men, but is found mostly in fools.” Today some of the most enthusiastic folks I know are zealous about grossly distorted forms of Christianity. These tend to be ne people, many are genuine believers in Jesus, but they are enthusiastic supporters of Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland and other ministry’s that distort the bible’s gospel and embrace instead “prosperity” theology. Other folks, again nice people who sincerely love Jesus, are rightly disturbed by both past and present racism in our society and even in the church. However, in their zeal they are embracing secular ideologies like C.R.T., that are not compatible with the bible’s Christianity. Zeal without knowledge.

It also seems there are numerous folks who are enthusiastic about enthusiasm, they get excited about being excited. It is zeal without knowledge, because there is no objection for their enthusiasm, they just like the feeling of being excited, even though they are not really excited about anything in particular. What are you talking about P.D.? well, when I was a bit younger I saw it happen sometimes at Christian rally’s. a leader would shout, “Give me a ‘J,’ ‘J!’” “give me an “E” “E!” “give me a “S” “S!” “give me a “U” “U!” “Give me a “S” “S!” “What does that spell?” “Jesus!” “I cannot hear you!” “Jesus!” “one more time!” “Jesus!” Now I am confident that some individuals were expressing genuine praise and adoration for the Lord Jesus at the time. Yet, I know others would have had the same thoughts and feelings if they were spelling “horse.” But P.D., noting is more wonderful and worthy of praise than the name of Jesus.” That is true, when one understands what the name means. No, I do not suggest you need a theology degree, nor do I

believe anyone has to have exhaustive understanding of the Lord Jesus. Yet, for the name of Jesus to evoke genuine God honoring praise, there needs to be a basic understanding of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. If that understanding is not there, what might be called heartfelt worship, is really zeal without knowledge.

So, do we need to be more enthusiastic about our faith? It depends on what type of enthusiasm we are talking about. Is it zeal without knowledge? Or is it zeal rooted in and built upon truth. The verses we looked at earlier are talking about that type of zeal. **Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.** That is written to people who have at least some grasp of what Paul has talked about in the 1st 11 chapters in his letter to the Roman Christians. In fact, I would argue that the zeal and fervor the Lord wants us to have flows out of gratitude. We are to be zealous for the Lord because of how grateful we are for all he has done for us.

This is the progression: our experience and understanding of God’s grace through Jesus Christ, causes us as redeemed sinners to be very grateful. That grated, both naturally and fueled by the holy spirit, grows into love for the Lord. **1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.** That love then leads us to obedience to the Lord. Because we love him we want to obey him. **John 14:15, If you love me you will keep my commandments.** And that love leads us to obey not out of merely a sense of duty, but to obey eagerly or zealously. **1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.** When we truly love God, it is a pleasure, a delight to obey and please him. We find joy in doing his will. Thus, out of this love comes a zeal, a fervor, or if you want to use the word, enthusiasm about the Lord and serving him. So folks, remember this chain: grace leads to gratitude, which leads

to love, which leads to obedience, which leads to joy. Grace, gratitude, love, obedience, joy.

Ok, let me mention just a couple practical notes. #1 we should make growing in our experience, understanding and appreciation of God's grace a top priority. Simply trying to be more zealous for the Lord is a dead end... instead, the best way to fuel that zeal is to start that chain by focusing on God's grace. That begins by making sure we are truly trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Many folks, maybe even some in this room, attend church occasionally or even regularly, but have never really experienced God's saving grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. If you are not sure you are trusting in the Lord Jesus as your savior, please make sure you talk to me or Pastor Mark today or this week. Noting is more important than experiencing God's saving grace through faith in Jesus. And until you do that you will never have any genuine zeal for the Lord.

Then as believers in Jesus Christ, we need to contemplate, think about, what God's grace means for our lives. I sometimes have this conversation: "P.D., you do not have to tell me about the gospel, I am already saved." Wonderful, what does that mean, to be saved? "well, I do not have to go to Hell when I die." "yes, that is true. What else?" "I don't know. Is there more to it?" oh friends, there is so much more to it. Because of what Jesus accomplished through his life, death and resurrection, everyone who turns to him, trusts in him, no matter how blatant, gross, subtle or perverse their sin, is forgiven, is considered right before God, is made a new creature, a new person, in Christ, is indwelt by God's spirit, becomes part of God's forever family and yes, has the promises, the guarantee, of eternal life. And there is much more we receive. We need to take time to prayerfully ponder the meaning of God's grace, what it involves, and how it impacts our lives. Reading the bible and reading good, solid Christian books, can be very helpful in growing in our understanding and appreciation of the

grace. And again it is that understanding and appreciation of grace that leads to gratitude, love, obedience and joy. Friends, that is the type of zeal we want in our lives and in the church, a zeal flowing out of love, and rooted in God's amazing, saving grace.

#2 We should seek to be zealous worshippers of the Lord. This should be true in both our private and corporate worship, but I want to focus on the time we have together on Sunday mornings. I sometimes hear worship leaders (not Kraig) say, "sing it like you mean it." But, what if you don't mean it? What if you do not understand what the words of the songs are saying. What if the words are not saying anything worthy of zealous worship? Friends, our worship should come from the same place as our obedience to the Lord. It should be rooted in our experience, understanding and appreciation of God's saving grace. Yes, we should express praise to God as our great, glorious, creator. That is important to do. But the heart of our worship should be God's amazing saving grace. That is new worship, gospel worship, the worship modeled in ***Revelation 5:12b, 13b "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"***

Folks, here at CBC we make an intentional effort to lead you as congregation in God-centered, gospel focused worship. Siri, with a little help from me, chooses the songs and arranges the service with the intention of helping you express praise and joy because of who God is and what he has done for us in Jesus. We do not want to just be singing songs about how happy and excited we are. We want to sing songs that to just remind us why we are happy and excited. We want to sing songs that remind us of who God is and of his saving grace in Jesus Christ, just like the angels do. We want these songs to fill your minds and hearts, so you zealously express praise, adoration

and love for the Lord. We do not want you to just feel excited. We want you to specifically feel excited about who God is and what he has done, is doing, and will do for you through the life, death, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ. Our goal is God centered, gospel focused worship, worship that flows from gratitude to love for the Lord. That is what worship is about when we should be zealous, fervent and even enthusiastic.

Now, how you express that “enthusiasm” is something I will leave between you in the Lord. Usually it means singing loudly, rather than softly. But sometimes it can involve being silent, and listening to others sing the words. A smile is often the best facial expression as we worship, but sometimes the holy spirit may use the words of a song to lead to more somber reflection. Some people raise or clap their hands while they worship, while others sit on their hands. It is all ok, as long as the worship is coming from a heart full of gratitude to the Lord and love for him.

Friends, let’s close our time together by singing a song that reminds us of who God is and what he has done for us in Jesus. And may the truth be speaking, fuel our love, our worship and enthusiasm for the Lord.