



Beware of Misguided Zeal

Proverbs 19:2 Zeal without knowledge is certainly not good, and a person who acts hastily sins. (EHV)

- My friends, what are you passionate about? What do you gladly throw your heart and energy into without giving it a second thought? Is it your faith, your family, your hobbies, your work? To be sure none of us wants to go through life just going through the motions. We all want passion for ourselves and look for it in others. Teachers want passionate students, and students want passionate teachers. Coaches want passionate players and players want impassioned coaches. We've all experienced how passion provides that intangible ingredient that puts a speech or a musical performance or a gourmet meal over the top. Indeed as Christians we are to put our heart into everything we do. In the book of Colossians Paul encourages us, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart"—literally the Greek says, "Work from soul" (3:23). But with these words of wisdom Solomon seeks to temper our passions so that we keep our zeal balanced with godly knowledge, otherwise our passions (even for something that's good) can mislead us to the point that we inadvertently rush into sin.
- One of the most prominent example of misguided zeal in Scripture is the early life of the Apostle Paul. As a young man Paul left home to study at Jerusalem under the leading rabbis of his day. He became an ardent Pharisee who was convinced that he could earn heaven for himself by obeying God's commands. But all of Paul's passion was misguided because he was blind to his need for God's grace freely given to all the world in Christ. In his pursuit of self-righteousness he didn't see Jesus as his Savior but instead as an imposter. Later he confessed that in his zeal for maintaining man-made traditions led him to go from town to town persecuting Christian men, women, and children, putting them in prison, and voting for their deaths (cf. Acts 26:9-11). No one could deny that Paul was zealous for God, but his zeal drove him to employ violent means to an ungodly end. Thankfully, Jesus intervened. He appeared to Paul on the way to Damascus and redirected all Paul's passions towards grace and truth (cf. Acts 9).
- Perhaps now more than ever the internet, our news outlets, and social media are adept at whipping up our zeal and playing on our passions. Whether you're passionate about politics or piano or going on family picnics, chances are you can find a website or a Facebook group or a chatroom that will allow you to explore your passion to your heart's content. But Solomon warns us to be careful lest our pursuit turns into a rabbit hole or a mad rush because otherwise sin and anger and obsession and hurt are not far away. Indeed, Solomon already tried all that—tried running after whatever he wanted. In the book of Ecclesiastes he reveals how he poured himself into going after money and pleasure and building projects and book learning, but in the end he discovered that without the LORD it was all in vain, a chasing after the wind (cf. Eccl. 2).
- So too before we get overly invested in any endeavor we need first get our bearings based on the knowledge and principles found in God's holy Word, so that we bring our faith in God with us into whatever we do. Guided by the Scriptures we ought to continually and prayerfully ask ourselves some important questions: 1.) Is this goal and the way I'm going about getting there in keeping with God's commandments? 2.) Is this pursuit moving me to act in faith and love toward God and for the good of my neighbor? If the answer any of these questions is, "No," it's evidence that our passions are leading us astray and need to be reoriented towards God.

Prayer: Lord God, fill me with zeal and passion, first and foremost for you and your kingdom, then for the good of my neighbor, and lastly for the enjoyment of life. Make me ever-zealous for your Word and thereby keep my passions guided on the way of faith and godliness. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.