

Zealotism And Fanaticism

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1986, (Rev. 99)

Timeless Truths (Why should I control zealousness and legalism?)

1. The English word "zeal" comes from a Greek word ("dzelloo") which means "strong desire."
This "strong desire" can be: (1.) "good," usually translated "zeal;" or (2.) "bad" sometimes is translated "zeal" and sometimes translated "envy or jealousy," (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Ja. 3:14-16). We must guard against calling someone "over zealous" or a "fanatic" who practices, promotes, or defends the things of God's Word, such as opposing evil, (1 Pt. 3:10; 1 Thess. 5:22; Eph 5:11) or separating from sinful people and sinful activities, (1 Cor. 5:9-11).
2. Good "zeal" (Gr. "dzelloo") is motivated: (1.) by a life dedicated toward God; (Acts 22:3); (2.) by a desire to live godly, (2 Cor. 7:11; 11:2 "jealousy;") (3.) by a concern for the spiritual welfare of others, (Col. 4:13); (4.) by stirring up other Christians unto service for the Lord, (2 Cor. 9:2); and (5.) by getting things right with the Lord, (Rev. 3:19).
3. Christians are instructed to practice "good" zeal, (Gal. 4:18; Tit. 2:14).
4. Good "zeal" can become "fanatical" in its commitment and pursuit: (1.) by following tradition instead of God's Word, (Gal. 1:14); (2.) by buckling under peer pressure to conform to false doctrine, (Gal. 4:17); (3.) by an improper emphasis on certain teachings with no regard for one's spiritual state, (1 Cor.14:12); and (4.) by wrongly persecuting God's people thinking you are doing it for the Lord, (Phil. 3:6).
5. Good "zeal" can become "bad zeal" or "fanaticism:" (1.) if it is motivated by things other than "truth or knowledge," (Rom. 10:1-2); (2.) if good things are done to you in order for you to do bad things, (Gal. 4:17); and (3.) if you think you are doing things for the Lord, however, they are really hindering the Lord's plan, (Phil. 3:6).
6. Christians are instructed not to walk in "bad zeal" or "envy," (Rom. 13:13).

Practical Prescriptions (How can I control zealousness and legalism?)

1. Find ways of being zealous to good works!

"Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works," (Titus 2:14).

"But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always..." (Gal. 4:18).

2. Form personal convictions however don't force these on others!

"Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ," (Col. 2:16-17).

3. Focus on overcoming the flesh rather than on religious appearance!

"Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why... do you subject yourselves to regulations... according to the commandments and doctrines of men... these things have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion... but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh," (Col. 2:20-23).

4. Forfeit or restrict some of your personal rights so others will grow!

"...I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble," (1 Cor. 8:13; i.e. 9:19-21)