

ZEALOTS NO. 639

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 16, 1865,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Simon called Zelotes.”
Luke 6:15.*

SIMON, called Zelotes, has apparently two surnames in Scripture, but they mean the same thing. He is called Simon the Canaanite in Hebrew—not because he was an inhabitant of Cana or a Canaanite, but that word, when interpreted, means precisely the same as the Greek word Zelotes. He was called Simon the Zealot.

I suppose that he had this name before his conversion. It is thought by some that he was a member of that very fierce and fanatical political sect of the Jews, called Zealots, by whose means the siege of Jerusalem was rendered so much more bloody than it would have been. But this does not seem very probable, for the sect of the Zealots had scarcely arisen in the time of the Savior, and therefore we are inclined to think with Hackett in his exposition of the Acts, that he was so called because of his zealous attachment to his religion as a Jew, for there were some in the different classes of Jewish society who were so excessively full of zeal as to gain the name of Zealot.

But it strikes me that he must have been a zealot after conversion too, for within that sacred circle which surrounded our Lord, every word was truth, and the Master would not have allowed any of His disciples to have worn a surname which was not expressive or truthful. He was Simon the Zealot while in the darkness and blindness of his mind he knew not the Messiah. He surely could not have been less Simon the Zealot when, gifted with the Holy Spirit, he went forth to cast out devils, heal the sick, and to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

I should be glad if many among us would earn the same title by so living that men would call us zealots, or even “fanatics,” for this is so sleepy an age concerning religious things, that to be called fanatic, nowadays, is one of the highest honors a man can have conferred upon him. May we so act and live that we might truthfully wear the title of Christian Zealots.

We shall occupy your time, this morning, first of all, *by some like description of the unconverted Zealot.* And then, secondly, *by some few remarks upon the Christian Zealot.*

I. LET US PORTRAY THE UNCONVERTED ZEALOT.

Zeal frequently expends itself on other things than religion. You will find many zealots not religious in any sense of the word. We have seen lately a few political zealots. The one important matter of their lives is the defense of the Whig or the Tory interest. It appears as if they would sacrifice their business, nay, in their *furor*, they think everything a trifle as long as they can but vindicate some favorite opinion.

Such was Saul, the king of Israel. He was such a zealot for Israel and for Judah, that in his zeal he slew the Gibeonites. He was politically a zealot. He thought that the Gibeonites, being in the land, ate the bread which belonged to the sons of Israel, and occupied the cities which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, and therefore violating all covenants and solemn oaths, and bringing upon the nation a great judgment, he slew the Gibeonites.

Many are scientific zealots. They will sacrifice health in sitting over mixtures of harmful drugs to examine chemical combinations. Or they will pass through feverish countries among savage men to discover the source of a river, or measure the height of a mountain.

We can readily find business zealots. Their shop windows scarcely need shutters, for business is never over. The Sunday itself is not enclosed for worship. They steal that day for keeping their books. They make haste to be rich, and they are not innocent. They plunge into this speculation and the other. They often bring their bodies to sickness and their minds to madness in their zeal for riches.

You do not find that the world cries out against zeal in business, and in science, and in politics. Nay, men can admire it there, but the moment you bring it into the court of the Lord's house, then straightway they hold up their hands with astonishment, or open their mouths with blasphemy, for men cannot endure that we should make eternal things real and spend our strength for them. They would have us reserve our energies for the matters in which they take so deep an interest.

Brethren, we would not condemn the use of zeal in the common affairs of life, for zeal is essential to success. We only wish that Christians would take copy from worldly men and be half as earnest and half as ambitious to maintain and increase the kingdom of their Lord and Master, as some men are after petty trifles or selfish aggrandizements. Understand then that a man may be a zealot, and yet there may not be a trace of religion in him, for his zeal may run in quite a different channel.

The unconverted zealot, should his zeal expend itself upon religion, is generally *exceedingly boastful*. Look at Jehu, as he bids Jehonadab, the son of Rechab ride with him in his chariot, vain-gloriously exclaiming, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD." He cannot kill the worshippers of Baal without someone standing by to admire how he devotes himself entirely to JEHOVAH.

Unconverted men, when full of zeal, are almost all Jehus. They must have some admiring eye. The clap of approbation is essential to the life and vigor of their earnestness. Not so the true Christian, he is as zealous for his Master when he stands alone or in the midst of derision as in the time when religion is honorable. Let us take care ever to avoid all boastfulness. Let us serve our Master as Jehu did, and better than he, but let us never say, "Come, see my zeal for the LORD."

As you travel over the mountains and are smitten with thirsty, you look for the cooling stream, but the traveler who has often passed the hills never stoops to drink of the little streamlets which run uncovered down the mountain side. He knows that their exposure to the heat of the sun has warmed the water, and taken away its grateful freshness and coolness, but he looks for the trickling stream which gushes fresh from the rock or bubbles up as a spring, or has found its way under the moss and great stones all hidden from the light, and he loves to satisfy himself thereat.

It is thus with our gifts and graces. If we expose them to public view, they lose their acceptability with the Most High God, but if we keep ourselves as much as possible from all ostentation, and seek to serve God humbly and quietly, JEHOVAH Himself finds delight in the gracious works of His own beloved people. May the Lord keep us then from being boastful zealots.

The unconverted zealot is generally *an ignorant zealot*. "I bear them witness," says Paul, "that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." The Pharisees were very fanatical. They were ignorant of God's righteousness, and they went about to establish their own righteousness. They had not learned the feebleness of the principle of the law, and therefore they struggled on and on to attain eternal life by it. They did not know the force and strength of the great principle of grace working through faith, and therefore they neglected it, and with all their strugglings they came short of the kingdom of heaven.

Let us beware of an ignorant zeal. How much there is of it nowadays. Probably there is more zeal to be found among the professors of false doctrine than among the followers of the truth. How they will garnish their churches as of old the Pharisees garnished their sepulchers! How diligently will they bedeck their altars and load them with ornaments and millinery! To what an extent of effort do they go! What self-denial will they practice! What infamy, what abuse are they not willing to endure in defending the cause of their idols, and bringing back again the old superstitions of Rome. If those who are orthodox had as much zeal as the Papist and the Puseyite, it would be well for England.

Oh, brethren, shun an ignorant zeal, but at the same time labor to blend zeal with your knowledge, lest your knowledge, lacking force, should cease to be operative in the land. Let it be forever remembered that if we are never so zealous in a wrong faith, neither does zeal make the false true nor

make us right in its prosecution. I may drink poison, devoutly believing it will do me good, but it will poison me, let me believe what I may. And so I may believe a lie never so earnestly, but it will be a lie nevertheless, and the poison of the lie will work my soul's ruin just as surely as if I had not been so fervent in its belief, and perhaps more surely.

Do not believe in the idea that every man who is sincere in his religion will be right at last. Not so. If a man is sincere and travels due north, he will not reach a town in the south, and if he spur his horse never so much towards the east, he will not arrive at his destination, if that destination is a city in the west. Seek to be right. Get an understanding of the truth as God has revealed it, or otherwise all your zeal will be but wildfire, which will do mischief rather than good.

The zeal of unconverted men is *generally partial*. It may be a zeal for something good, but not for everything that is good. How zealous the Pharisee was for frequent ceremonial washings—he would not eat bread, if never so hungry, till he had washed his hands. How excessively zealous he was to tithe the mint—it did not come to three farthings in a year—and the anise and the cumin—all these little matters must be attended to.

I think I see the man looking earnestly while he strains at the gnat. How he shudders lest by any means that horrid and monstrous insect should get into his wine. If it should possibly go down his throat, what pollution he would incur! But mark the hypocrite as he turns his head the other way, and he swallows a camel in the twinkling of an eye. While he can pay his mint and his anise and his cumin in full tithe, he can, at the same time devour a widow's house and cry out against the Lord of life and glory, and plot and plan against the Savior till he has dragged Him to the cross. This is the unconverted zealot.

Zealous he is for sect and party when the whole that the sect may hold is not of more value than the gnat, and yet great fundamental doctrinal truths are forgotten, as though they were of no value whatever. Brethren, may we be earnest men of God, but I pray that we may be zealous for all truth. We must count no truth to be despicable, but take the whole Word of God as far as the Spirit of God shall reveal it unto us, and stand up for it in its entirety and completeness, and not be willing that the very least of Christ's commandments should be neglected or despised.

The zealot, again, while unconverted, is generally, (if it is in his power), *a persecutor*. "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church." Paul verily thought that he was doing God a service when he drove men and women to prison and to death. And I doubt not there are many in this age most sincere zealots, who, if they would not quite delight in the sweet sacrifices of Smithfield, would, at any rate, like to pass a few repressive laws to put down "those wicked dissenters" and ordain one or two salutary penalties by which "those quarrelsome Baptists" might have their tongues clipped a little shorter, that they might not speak out quite so plainly concerning the infamies of the state church.

Doubtless there is a tendency with us all to wish to impose our own opinions upon others by all available means. The exaggeration of anxiety for our fellow-men would lead us to adopt wrong means to make them of a right opinion. We forget that men's consciences and judgments are never touched by such rude or vulgar means as threats or penalties. We should always feel that consciences and hearts are under the jurisdiction of the Most High, and in no sense whatever are they to be brought under the jurisdiction of Pope or potentate, or of any of us, no matter how orthodox we may conceive ourselves to be. Strive earnestly for your faith, but strive lawfully. Contend zealously for the truth, but let the only fire you use be love, and the only sword the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. But zealots without grace are generally persecutors.

Without grace zealots are very bitter towards their professed brethren. We read in the epistle of the apostle James, of some who were full of strifes and envyings, and were yet members of the church. From such zeal may the Lord of hosts deliver us! Our brethren in the fellowship with us are not to be convinced of their errors by being knocked on the head, but by having the candle held to their eyes. If we can teach them the truth as it is in Jesus, it shall be well. But as for carnal contention and persecution—let it be far from us.

This ungraceful picture of the zealot without Christ is not complete unless we remark that often *his aims are sinister*. We read of some in the epistle to the Corinthians who did zealously affect the Corinthians, but not well, for they slandered the apostle Paul. They denied his apostleship, they said that his bodily presence was weak, and his speech was contemptible. And yet they appeared very zealous, indeed, far more zealous than Paul, because they wanted to alienate the mind of the Corinthian church from the apostle, and get themselves to be made masters in God's heritage. Let us beware of a zeal for lifting up ourselves.

Brothers, if we preach Christ with a view to get ourselves honored by it, we prostitute the sacred things of God, and are guilty of that very sin which was accursed in Belshazzar, when he took the golden cups of the sanctuary to drink therefrom to his own delight. Zeal must be pure. It may be fire, but it must be fire from off the altar, or else if we minister with any other fire, like Nadab and Abihu, we may be slain before the Lord. O that we would search our heart so as to be quite sure that we have no aim in all the world but Christ, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." You may shoot well, you brave archers, but if you aim at the wrong target you will not win the prize. If you aim at anything but your Lord's honor, you shall never hear it said, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

To close this very sorry account of the unconverted zealot, he is generally but *temporary in his zeal*. If the zeal be good, it dies out ere long. The apostle Paul says, "It is good to be zealously affected *always* in a good thing." Some of you are mightily zealous at a prayer meeting and grow intensely warm-hearted after a season of revival. You are consecrated to God most marvelously for a month or two. You live consistently for a few weeks. You are diligent in the use of the means of grace for a short time. And then—well, you have had enough of it, I suppose, and you think enough to be as good as a feast, and so you would have done with heavenly things. The wind blows from another quarter, and therefore like the weathercock you are turned by it in another way.

Some of you would go to heaven, but you get plucked by the sleeve hell-wards and cannot bear a hard pull—and so you turn away from Christ. One would think when you are sick that you were ripe for glory, but when you get well, ah! how different! "When he was sick," says an old legend, "the devil a monk would be," but when he got well you know how he gave up his fine intentions.

There are many now of the same sort. For a time, they threaten to take the kingdom by storm. They censoriously rebuke the coldness of others. They vow to conquer hell and enter heaven, pushing the world before them and dragging the church after them. But in a short time, where are they? They have relapsed into their former lethargy, or perhaps they have taken their zeal with them into the camp of the adversary.

Such is the unconverted zealot. Allow two or three more words before we leave him. There is much about him to imitate. Unconverted as he is, mischievous as his zeal may be, if we could pluck that sword out of his hand, of how great a use might it be to us. If sinners are zealous in their sins, should not saints be zealous for their God? If the things of time can stir the human passions, should not the realities of eternity have a greater and more tremendously moving force? If these men will spend and be spent, and stretch every nerve and run the race merely for the crown of politics or of ambition, where are we? What idlers, what laggards are we, that we pursue the things of God with but half a heart!

*"Dear Lord, and shall we always live
At this poor dying rate?"*

Bear this other word, also, namely that we ought to look upon these zealots with hopefulness. When a man serves Baal thoroughly, it is a great pity and a thing to be deplored, but I think he is a man worth catching, and to be sought after. We know a sort of people who will never make much at anything. They are not very forward in sin. The devil himself cannot respect them much, they are such poor servants to him. If they ever become Christians, into the rear rank they must go. They need to be pressed forward

and receive from the strength of the church, for they can never impart to it. But when you get a man who is vigorous in the cause of Satan, when sovereign grace brings him down, what a trophy he becomes of its power, and how gloriously he contends for the Gospel of Christ.

Look at Saul of Tarsus. No man more zealous against the Gospel than he, and he is second to none when he becomes a preacher of the Word. Look at John Bunyan on the village green—never second, always the leader, whether it was the game of ball on Sunday, or ringing the church bells, or blasphemy—he was a prince in the devil’s camp, and when he became a Christian, none like John Bunyan in thundering out the law, or preaching—fearless of pains and penalties—the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Master Bunyan says in his, “*Grace Abounding*,” that he was very hopeful for England, because the young men of his age were so very bad, since if God would convert them, they would make such good Christians by-and-by. And I feel a little of his mind. When I see a man come in here who is known to be a down-right sinner, I hope he may make an upright saint. Some have come in here who have been ringleaders, and have exceeded others in their sin, but instead of saying, “Their case is hopeless,” I have thought—now let us pray with might and main that sovereign grace may overcome his sin—who knows what he may be able to accomplish for the church, if he be converted?

II. Now, for a more pleasing picture, namely, THE TRUE CHRISTIAN ZEALOT—*how his zeal manifests itself, how it is kept up, and what is to be said in commendation of it.*

The Christian zealot—*how his zeal manifests itself.* First, it manifests itself *in his private dealings with God.* The unconverted zealot is a hypocrite. He does not come to God in private. He may use a form of private prayer, but he has no true communion with God alone. The unconverted zealot has a religion on the surface, but there is no grace within.

How different is it with the Christian! That is a remarkable passage in the Revelation where zeal is coupled with repentance. “Be zealous, therefore, and repent.” I may take this as an indication that when a true Christian is zealous he is zealous in repentance—his tears come welling up from his heart. Sin is not a little distasteful, but is exceedingly disgusting to him. His faith, too, is not merely a trembling recognition of the truth, but it is a firm grasp of everlasting verities.

The Christian zealot, when he is alone with God, throws his whole heart into his service. Whatever may be the grace which is in exercise, he seeks to have it thoroughly and actively at work. If his heart be given to God, it is a heart full of holy fire, like a sacred censer. If he devote himself in private to any hallowed deed of fellowship or communion with God, his heart wanders not, or if it wanders, he contends with it until he has bound it with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar.

Brethren, I wish you and I were more zealous. Alas! I have to complain of myself that when I try to pray, full often I cannot. When I would do good in the closet, evil is present with me. I wish I had power to walk with God as Enoch did, but the cares of the church, let alone the vanities of life, will creep in, and the soul comes out of the closet unrefreshed, very much because it has had no zeal in its closet exercises. The true Christian zealot seeks above all things to make his private religion intensely energetic, knowing that it is the vital point of godliness.

The Christian zealot *may be recognized very manifestly by his prayers.* Hear his utterance in the prayer meeting. It is no repetition of a set of sacred phrases, no going over the metaphors which have become time-worn and tedious, but he prays like a man who means it. He comes up to heaven’s gate, grasps the knocker, and knocks, and knocks, and knocks again, waiting until the door is opened. He gets hold of the gates of heaven, and labors to shake them to and fro as though he would pull them up bolts and bars and all, as Samson did the gates of Gaza, rather than not prevail with God.

These men, like Elijah, have power to shut up heaven or to open the gates thereof. Oh, that we had more of such in our midst. We have a few who, as soon as they stand up to pray, fire our hearts by their earnestness—may they be multiplied. The like is true of course of the private prayers of the Christian as well as of his public ones. Oh, brothers and sisters, we need more resolve when we go before God that we will have the blessing, more determination that we are asking what is according to His mind we will

take no denial, but will say to the angel, “I will not let you go except you bless me.” Christians, seek to be zealots in prayer, pouring out your hearts like water before the Lord, and crying out with sighs and tears till like your Master you have been heard in that which you have feared.

But the zealot does not stay here. The Christian zealot is manifested *in his jealousy for God’s honor*. The word jealous in its sound and sense is akin to the word zealous. Hear how Elijah uses it. He says, “I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts.” He saw Baal worshipped everywhere throughout Israel, and his heart was ready to break, and so the stern old man said, “Let me die: I am no better than my fathers.” How sternly he slew Baal’s priests. What a spectacle was that when after having mocked them because no fire came on their sacrifice, he stretched out his hands and cried, “Let it be known who is God.” And when the flame had come and his own sacrifice had been consumed, he said with a rough voice, “Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.”

Here was zeal for the Lord of hosts springing from an awful overwhelming jealousy for God’s honor and a hatred of the idols which usurped His throne. See the like in Moses. With holy jealousy, he dashes the tablets of stone upon the ground, takes the golden calf, grinds it to powder, and makes a rebellious people drink of the bitter draught.

Look at Phineas again, when he saw the people committing adultery as a part of the unclean rites with which they worshipped the gods of Moab, he seized a javelin and ran them through, and so it is said the zeal of Phineas made an atonement before the Lord. We want something of that kind—a zeal for God which will smite all error with a ruthless hand, the iconoclastic zeal which will break to pieces images of silver and of gold, however prettily they may be cast or engraved. Which will tear down the toys of Popery, and tread the whole in the mire as things worse than worthless because they come in the way of the Lord God of hosts.

Out on the softness which will not let some of my brothers denounce an error lest they should violate charity. The velvet in their mouths prevents their dealing with antichrist as it ought to be dealt with. The day is come in which the Romish and Anglican antichrists are to have no tender words used towards them. It must be war to the knife for God and for His truth against the lie which in modern times has impudence enough to show its face again—I mean the lie that the sacrament can save, that baptism can regenerate, or that the Lord’s supper is a channel of salvation. Up with grace and down with Sacramentarianism. Up with the truth forever and down with falsehood. A man is no zealot and cannot be called Zelotes, unless he has a holy jealousy for the honor of Christ, and His crown, and His truth.

Nor is this all. True zeal will show itself *in the abundance of a man’s labors and gifts*. Paul commends the zeal of the Corinthians, because they were always ready to minister to his necessities. He says, “Concerning the ministering of the saints, you have no need that I speak unto you.” Zeal labors for Christ. My brethren, if you want a picture of zeal, take the apostle. How he compasses sea and land! Storms cannot stop him, mountains cannot impede his progress. He is beaten with rods, he is stoned, he is cast into prison, but the invincible hero of the cross presses on in the holy war, until he is taken up to receive a crown of glory.

We do little or nothing, the most of us. We fritter away our time. O that we could live while we live. But our existence—that is all we can call it—our existence, what a poor thing it is! We run like shallow streams—we have not force enough to turn the mill of industry, and have not depth enough to bear the vessel of progress, and we have not flood enough to cheer the refreshments of poverty. We are dry too often in the summer’s drought, and we are frozen in the winter’s cold. O that we might become broad and deep like the mighty stream that bears a navy and gladdens a nation. O that we may become inexhaustible and permanent rivers of usefulness through the abundant springs from whence our supply comes, even the Spirit of the living God.

The Christian zealot may be known *by the anguish which his soul feels when his labors for Christ are not successful*—the tears that channel his cheeks when sinners are not saved. Do not tell me of zeal that only moves the tongue, or the foot, or the hand. We must have a zeal which moves the whole heart. We cannot advance so far as the Savior’s bloody sweat, but to something like it the Christian ought to

attain when he sees the tremendous clouds of sin and the tempest of God's gathering wrath. How can I see souls damned, without emotion? How can I hear Christ's name blasphemed, without a shudder? How can I think of the multitudes who prefer ruin to salvation, without a pang?

Believe me, brethren, if you never have sleepless hours, if you never have weeping eyes, if your hearts never swell as if they would burst, you need not anticipate that you will be called zealous. You do not know the beginning of true zeal, for the foundation of Christian zeal lies in the heart. The heart must be heavy with grief and yet must beat high with holy ardor. The heart must be vehement in desire, panting continually for God's glory, or else we shall never attain to anything like the zeal which God would have us know.

And to close this point of how zeal manifests itself, let me say that it is always seen, where it is genuine, *in a vehement love and attachment to the person of the Savior*. This is why we have not more zeal—because often the Christ preached is not a personal Christ. Have not I frequently said in this pulpit that nothing can make a man zealous like attachment to a person?

When Napoleon's soldiers won so many victories, and especially in the earlier part of his career, when against such deadly odds they earned such splendid triumphs, what was the reason? The "little corporal" was there, and whenever it came to a desperate rush, he was the first to cross the bridge or charge the enemy, always exposing himself to danger. And their attachment to his person, and their love and admiration of his valor, made them follow at his heels, swift to victory. Have not we heard of those who threw themselves in the way of the cannon ball to save his life? There could not have been such triumphs if there had not been a man who knew how to govern men by attaching them to himself.

And oh, the person of the Savior! What attachment can there be equal to that which binds a Christian to his Lord? What person can there ever be out of whose lips come such golden chains to bind all hearts? When we see Him, our hearts glow with sacred fervor. When we think of Him, our soul is all on fire. What can we not do in His presence? What will we not suffer when He cheers us? There are no impossibilities—nay, even difficulties have ceased to be, when Jesus Christ shall come, and our hearts are full of love to Him. It is a constant and unfailing sign of a true zealot, that his attachment to his Master's person is deep and fervent, and he cannot forget Him who redeemed him by blood.

This brings us now, in the next place, to think awhile of *how this zeal is maintained and kept up*. To keep up a good fire of zeal, we must have much fuel, and the fire will partake of the quality of the fuel, so that it must be good firing to make holy zeal. If I understand aright, zeal is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and genuine zeal draws its life and vital force from the continued operations of the Holy Ghost in the soul.

Next to this, zeal feeds upon truths like these. It is stirred by the ruin of sinners. The very sight of sinners makes a right-hearted man zealous for their conversion. Ride mile after mile through our streets, turn down the narrower streets, enter the courts, go down the alleys—do not be disgusted with those tumbling houses—go in and go upstairs. See how many there are in one room, mark what poverty, what squalor, what filth. Just go into certain quarters and see what ignorance, what crime! I think the city missionary has constantly before him enough to keep his zeal at fever heat, and if we ourselves went more often into some of the lowest dens of this huge city, we would go back to our closets, feeling, "Gracious God! I have not thought of these people as I ought to do, for instead of being up and doing with all my might, I have been trifling and wasting my time."

Well, but what is London? This nation of London, what is it? It is only a drop in the bucket compared with the millions who are still in darkness. Let any man think upon India. Let him reflect, if he will, upon China. Let him take any one country and consider that there is not a missionary to a million in many of those places, and that the missionaries who are there might many of them as well have been at home, for they are missionaries who Christianize people by baptizing them, and know little about the Spirit's work upon the soul.

What is said about many of the converts made by mere ritual preaching and by baptismal ceremonies? Why it is well known that in some parts of heathendom the worst scoundrels are the

nominal Christians, the reason being because they were not made Christians by being converted, but by being baptized, and so an indelible dishonor is put upon Christ by carrying on missionary operations on the principle of baptizing people who are not Christians, and labeling them the people of Christ, while in their hearts, they are more deceitful than the heathen themselves.

Only think of the need for a sound, honest preaching of the Gospel, the preaching of the doctrines which really change the soul, and the coming down of the Holy Spirit to deal personally with individuals. All wholesale conversion of tribes and nations by calling them Christians when they are merely civilized is an evil and an abomination. The wants of the age are enough, if a man has any sense of what eternal realities are, to make us zealous—zealous to the highest pitch.

And next, Christian zeal feeds itself upon *a sense of gratitude*—

***“Loved of my God, for Him again,
With love intense I burn,
Chosen of Him ere time began,
I choose Him in return.”***

Look to the hole of the pit from where you were dug, and you will see abundant reason why you should spend and be spent for God.

Zeal for God feeds itself upon *the thought of the eternal future*. It looks with tearful eyes down to the flames of hell and it cannot slumber—it looks up with anxious gaze to the glories of heaven, and it cannot but bestir itself. Zeal for God thinks of death, and hears the hoofs of the white horse with the skeleton rider close behind. Zeal for God feels that all it can do is little compared with what is wanting, and that time is short compared with the work to be done, and therefore it devotes all that it has to the cause of its Lord.

Above all, zeal for God feeds itself on *love to Christ*. Lady Powerscourt says somewhere, “If we want to be thoroughly hot with zeal, we must go near to the furnace of the Savior’s love.” Get to know how Christ loved you, and you cannot but love Him. Do but know how He was spit upon and despised, and how He bled and died for us, and we cannot but feel that we can do and bear all things for His name’s sake.

Above all, Christian zeal must be sustained by a *vigorous inner life*. If we let our inner life dwindle, if it begins to be dwarfish, if our heart beats slowly before God, we shall not know zeal. But if all be strong and vigorous within, then we cannot but feel a loving anxiety to see the kingdom of Christ come and His will done on earth, even as it is in heaven.

I have to close by *commending zeal*. Let my words be few, but let them be weighty here. In commending zeal, let me say, I think it should commend itself to every Christian man without a word of mine, but if you must have it, remember that *God Himself is zealous*. We read that when Christ comes as the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, then the government is to be upon His shoulders, and of His kingdom there is to be no end, but Scripture adds, “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

God has been zealous in judgment. Ezekiel tells us that God was zealous when He came forth to smite His foes, but oh, how zealous He is in grace! It is a wonderful thing that we should use such language, but the Scripture is our warrant, when God puts His hands to the work of saving the elect, He is filled with zeal. There is no slumber, no want of diligence with God in the work of conversion and saving. For Zion’s sake, He never rests, nor will He rest till Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. God is earnest. God is zealous. Children of God, be imitators of Him, as dear children

Christ was zealous. We read of Him that the zeal of God’s house had eaten Him up, and when He took the scourge of small cords and purged the temple, John tells us that it was written of Him, “The zeal of your house has eaten me up.” A prophet tells us that He was clothed with zeal as with a cloak. He had not zeal over a part of Him, but was clothed with it as with some great cloak covering Him from

head to foot. Christ was all zeal. “Wist you that I must be about my Father’s business?” is one of His utterances, while yet a child. And from the very first to the last, it was His meat and His drink to do His Father’s will. At what a rate He drove! How swift the chariot wheels of duty went with Him till the axles grew hot with speed. Brethren, you have Christ for an example. Does not this suffice you?

Surely I can only descend in argument, but not ascend—see the holy angels, who are to be your blessed companions, are they not flames of fire? Are they not called seraphs because they fly like flames upon their Master’s errands? Be not slow where angels are like flashes of lightning. If we would see any success come to the church, and I know that is dear to us; if we would see souls converted, and I know it is the object of our daily prayers; if we would hear the cry that, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ,” and I know that this is our passionate desire; if you would see crowns put upon the head of the Savior and His throne lifted high, and I know this is your great ambition; if you would see JEHOVAH, your Father, glorified even to the ends of the earth, then be filled with zeal.

Under God, the way of the world’s conversion must be by the zeal of the church. Simon Zelotes must lead the van. The rest may follow in their places—knowledge, patience, courage, prudence, every grace shall do exploits, but this shall be first, this shall bear the standard high. Zeal for God, zeal for His truth. This shall be in the procession, and may you stand side by side with the most zealous in the day of conflict, that you may be there in the hour of victory.

I cannot this morning address you as I would desire, for I cannot feel my own zeal to be what I would have it be. O for the zeal of Wesley and Whitefield, the zeal of men who were always preaching or praying, men who seemed as if they knew no weariness, or shook it off as dust from off their feet! Oh, to have the zeal of apostolic times again, when the very least among you would be ready to be martyrs for Christ, if need be. And when all of you should testify of Him, wherever you were called to go.

Oh, for more zeal in the household, that you might seek more anxiously the conversion of your children. More zeal in the workshop, that you might communicate to your fellow-workmen the spirit which actuates and moves you. Oh, for more zeal in the church, and church meetings, and prayer meetings, that everything might be done with spirit. Above all, oh, for more zeal in the pulpit. Holy fire, come down! We have the wood, we have the altar, we have the sacrifice, but we want the fire.

Have you not remarked, men and brethren, how much a man may do who is clothed with zeal? Some of our brethren in the ministry, to whom we have listened, have stirred our passions, have made our blood boil after a sacred fashion, and yet their talents have been very few, and we felt while they were speaking that they made better use of one talent than some have made of ten. Believe me, it is not the extent of your knowledge, though that is useful, it is not the extent of your talent or tact, though these have their place, it is your zeal—your zeal that shall perform God’s work.

May I entreat you, as members of this church, not to let your zeal die out. What prayer meetings we have had! Shall we ever forget Park Street—those prayer meetings when I felt compelled to let you go without a word from my lips, because the Spirit of God was so awfully present that we felt bowed to the dust, and any language of mine would have been a mere impertinence? What zeal you have had! Some of you have sought for the conversion of souls. When I look upon some of you, I know you are spiritual mothers and fathers in Israel—not to ones or twos, but scores.

Shall your zeal relax? We have by God’s grace lived to see many of our enemies clothed with shame, we have preached the Word till that Word begins to tell, and make the solid rocks of error shake. Will you draw back? Will you lose your force? Will you slacken in prayer? Will you refuse to receive the blessing which awaits you? Will you take your heads from the crown, when it is ready to descend? I pray you do not so. Let us be banded together as one man. Let us contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Let us pray with fervor, let us live in holiness, let us preach constantly, and preach with fire, and let us so live that we may impress our age, and leave our footprints on the sands of time.

As for some of you who never were zealous, who are the fathers of no spiritual children—as for some of you, whose religion gets into a very narrow compass and is good for very little when it gets there, I pray you bestir yourselves. If your religion is a lie, do not profess it. If it be a farce, do not enslave yourselves to it. But if there be anything in religion, it is worth everything. It cannot sit second at the table—it must have the first place. The Christian man is to be first of all a Christian, but next to that a tradesman or what you will—but first of all a Christian man.

The first thing with the believer is his Lord. Christ will be nowhere if He is not first and chief, and that religion is vain and void which does not fill the soul, and take up the throne of the heart. May God allow us, then, to wear the character, if not the name of Simon Zelotes, and then we will wait at His footstool, and serve Him after such sort as He shall help us to do and His shall be all the praise.

But ah! we must be converted first. So let the sinner remember that his first business is with this text, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved”—that is, trust Jesus, for it is written, “He that believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; he that believes not, shall be damned.” God give you to trust Christ, and then to be zealous for Him. Amen.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.