

THE BIBLE VIEW

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The Empty, Front-row Seats

Bill Brinkworth

“For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescents to Galatia, Titus unto Dalamatia. 11 Only Luke is with me...” II Timothy 4:10-11

After I was saved in 1979, I was excited about going to church, especially after finding the church I felt God wanted me to join. I was very shy; so like many, I sat towards the back of the church. I listened very intently and learned very much. Attending church was like sitting at a table and eating a steak dinner. I was fed spiritually, and I did not want to miss a meal.

However, something happened to change where I sat. One Sunday, as the preacher began to preach, the woman sitting next to me reached down under the pew and pulled out a good-sized paper bag. She opened the distracting, noisy bag and proceeded to pull out her lunch. She even opened a Thermos and

poured herself a hot cup of coffee. Between the eating of her sandwich, loudly slurping her java, and crunching on a crispy apple, I was very distracted and got little from the much-wanted message from God. I was determined that I would not be robbed from hearing the message God had for me again; so after that service, I changed where I sat. Whenever the seat was available, I sat on the first row. I did not want to miss a word God had given the preacher to deliver to me.

While sitting on the first row, I observed something very encouraging. Many others, mostly new converts, would also get serious about wanting to hear God's message, and they soon sat on the front row. Many sat next to me. I got friendly with many of them, and even went on Thursday night, church-wide visitation with some of them. They also fervently wanted to obey and do something for the Lord.

However, their love for the service and hearing God's Word changed. They no longer commented on how it was a great service and how God spoke to their heart about a matter in their life. Soon they had all kinds of excuses for not wanting to join me in the visitation ministry. It was not long before they started missing services, and soon they stopped coming to church completely. I would visit them at their houses

to encourage them to come back again, but ultimately their seat next to me on the front row remained empty.

I miss those friends, but most of all I miss seeing others get excited about their salvation and being eager to serve the Lord. Paul, in II Tim. 4, experienced the same feelings when Demas, and possibly others, no longer “sat in the front row” with him, so to speak. I am sure he was grieved to see that the temporary things of this world had a greater meaning to Demas than obeying and serving the Lord. Although forsaken by Demas and others, Paul continued and was greatly used of God.

Have you been discouraged that another Christian is not serving the Lord as he used to? Do not be. Encourage them if you can. Pray for them, but continue to “sit in the front row”. I’m still there, and I saved you a seat.

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2

Impatient Zeal

John Bate

There are some Christians very earnest to do good, but their anxiety is to the point of impatience. They ask for results. They search for results. They make themselves unhappy and sometimes obtrusive in the matter to see the fruit from what they have done.

This reminds me of a boy who was anxious to have a little wheat field in one corner of his father's garden. The first morning came, but there was no appearance of growth. The second day came, and there still was no growth showing.

His patience was worn so thin that he took his knife, and later a rake, to scratch the earth to see if the seed was growing. If he had waited, he would have seen the result of his labors in due time. The effects of his impatience retarded, and even killed some germinating seeds, rather than help the growth of the seeds. If he was patiently waiting after sowing the kernels, he would have seen blades of wheat in the proper time.

So it is with many Christians. Let them be zealously affected to do good, and patiently wait for results. Their impatience will have a greater tendency to slow success than to help it.

“Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.”

Psalms 27:14

True Zeal

Cudworth

Let us take heed we do not call it zeal for God and His Gospel when it is nothing else but our own tempestuous and stormy passion. True zeal is a sweet heavenly, and gentle flame, which makes us active for God, but always within the sphere of love. It never calls for fire from Heaven to consume those that differ a little from us in their understandings. It is like that kind of lightning, which philosophers speak of, that melts the sword within, but burns not the scabbard. Righteous zeal strives to save the soul, but hurts not the body.

Why We Should be Zealous

John Bate

1. It is the desire of Christ for us.
“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Titus 2:14 Also: Rev. 3:19.
2. Because Christ was zealous.
3. It shows the love of Christ in our heart.
4. It was shown in the lives of the apostles and other Christians. Read also: Acts 22:3.
5. Personal advantages can be derived from it.

6. The good it may accomplish will help others and spread the truths of God's Word.

Zeal Without Knowledge

John Bate

Zeal without knowledge of God's Word is like a sword without a hilt to wield it by. It is also like a high bred horse without a bridle to guide it, and like an uncontained fire.

Zeal without knowledge speaks without thinking, acts without planning, seeks to accomplish a good end without thinking how to start it properly. It often does one thing when it should have done another. It is often boasting, vain, self-righteous, and stubborn. It goes about seeking to establish its own righteousness, not having submitted to the righteousness of God.

“You want to do something marvelous for the Lord? Wonderful! Pray about it, faithfully study and search the Scriptures, and let God guide you in the direction He desires for you.”

A False Zeal

Bonnar, 1871

A false zeal in religion is always, in one respect or other, a misdirected zeal, or a zeal not according to knowledge. It is a zeal seeking some false end, or, while proposing to itself a good end, seeking its promotion in some unauthorized way.

Jehu had a good zeal, which he called zeal for the Lord of Hosts. His fault was, not that he was too zealous, but that his zeal was really directed to his own advancement.

The Jews, in the days of Christ, had a zeal for God, but it was so misdirected as to fire them with a frenzy to destroy the Son of God and extinguish the Light of the world.

There are countless examples of false zeal now at work; but in all cases, they sin not by excess, but by misdirection. Some are flaming with a zeal to spread some of the corruptions of a weakened Christianity, and to carry men away from Christianity's great truths. Some are equally zealous to build up a sect or a party on other foundations than those which God has laid in Zion; and that which taints their zeal is the purpose to which they employ it, and not any excessive fervor of their zeal itself.

“Blind zeal can only do harm.” — *Lichtwer*