

"Christian Zeal"  
*Parochial and Plain Sermons* vol. II sermon 31  
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September 15, 1834  
St. Mary's the Virgin Church, Oxford

"The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up." John ii. 17.

[Note 1] THE Apostles commemorated on this Festival direct our attention to the subject of Zeal, which I propose to consider, under the guidance of our Saviour's example, as suggested by the text. St. Simon is called Zelotes, which means the Zealous; a title given him (as is supposed) from his belonging before his conversion to the Jewish sect of Zealots, which professed extraordinary Zeal for the law. Anyhow, the appellation marks him as distinguished for this particular Christian grace. St. Jude's Epistle, which forms part of the service of the day, is almost wholly upon the duty of manifesting Zeal for Gospel Truth, and opens with a direct exhortation to "contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the Saints." The Collect also indirectly reminds us of the same duty, for it prays that all the members of the Church may be united in spirit by the Apostles' doctrine; and what are these but the words of Zeal, viz. of a love for the Truth and the Church so strong as not to allow that man should divide what God hath joined together?

However, it will be a more simple account of Zeal, to call it the earnest desire for God's honour, leading to strenuous and bold deeds in His behalf; and that in spite of all obstacles. Thus when Phinehas stood up and executed judgment in Israel, he was zealous for God. David also, in his punishment of the idolaters round about, and in preparing for the building of the Temple, showed his Zeal, which was one of his especial virtues. Elijah, when he assembled the Israelites upon Mount Carmel, and slew the prophets of Baal, was "very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts." Hezekiah besides, and Josiah, were led to their reformations in religious worship by an admirable Zeal; and Nehemiah too, after the captivity, who with the very fire and sweetness of Gospel Love set the repentant nation in order for the coming of Christ.

1. Now, Zeal is one of the elementary religious qualifications; that is, one of those which are essential in the very notion of a religious man. A man cannot be said to be in earnest in religion, till he magnifies his God and Saviour; till he so far consecrates and exalts the thought of Him in his heart, as an object of praise, and adoration, and rejoicing, as to be pained and grieved at dishonour shown to Him, and eager to avenge Him. In a word, a religious temper is one of loyalty towards God; and we all know what is meant by being loyal from the experience of civil matters. To be loyal is not merely to obey; but to obey with promptitude, energy, dutifulness, disinterested devotion, disregard of consequences. And such is Zeal, except that it is ever attended with that reverential feeling which is due from a creature and a sinner towards his Maker, and towards Him alone. It is the main principle in *all* religious service to love God above all things; now, Zeal is to love Him above all men, above our dearest and most intimate friends. This was the especial praise of the Levites, which gained for them the reward of the Priesthood, viz. their executing judgment on the people in the sin of the golden calf.

37 "Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy Holy One, whom Thou didst prove at  
38 Massah, and with whom Thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah. Who said unto his  
39 father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren,  
40 nor knew his own children; for they have observed Thy word, and kept Thy covenant.  
41 They shall teach Jacob Thy Judgments, and Israel Thy Law; they shall put incense  
42 before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine Altar. Bless, Lord, his substance,  
43 and accept the work of his hands; smite through the loins of them that rise against him,  
44 and of them that hate him, that they rise not again." Phinehas was rewarded in like  
45 manner, after executing judgment. "Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace. And  
46 he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting Priesthood,  
47 because he was zealous for his God." [Deut. xxxiii. 8-11. Numb. xxv. 12, 13.] Zeal is the  
48 very consecration of God's Ministers to their office. Accordingly our Blessed Saviour, the  
49 One Great High Priest, the Antitype of all Priests who went before Him and the Lord and  
50 Strength of all who come after, began His manifestation of Himself by two acts of Zeal.  
51 When twelve years old he deigned to put before us in representation the sacredness of  
52 this duty, when He remained in the Temple "while His father and mother sought Him  
53 sorrowing," and on their finding Him, returned answer, "Wist ye not that I must be about  
54 My Father's business?" And again, at the opening of His public Ministry, He went into  
55 the Temple, and "made a scourge of small cords, and drove out the sheep and oxen,  
56 and overthrew the changers' tables" [Luke ii. 48, 49. John ii. 15.] that profaned it: thus  
57 fulfilling the prophecy contained in the text, "The Zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me  
58 up."

59 Being thus consumed by Zeal Himself, no wonder He should choose His followers from  
60 among the Zealous. James and John, whom He called Boanerges, the sons of Thunder,  
61 had warm hearts, when He called them, however wanting in knowledge; and felt as if an  
62 insult offered to their Lord should have called down fire from Heaven. Peter cut off the  
63 right ear of one of those who seized Him. Simon was of the sect of the Zealots. St.  
64 Paul's case is still more remarkable. He, in his attachment to the elder Covenant of God,  
65 had even fought against Christ; but he did so from earnestness, from being "zealous  
66 towards God," though blindly. He "verily thought with himself, that he *ought to do* many  
67 things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," and acted "in ignorance;" [Acts xxvi.  
68 9. 1 Tim. i. 13.] so he was spared. With a sort of heavenly compassion his persecuted  
69 Lord told him, that it was "hard for him to kick against the pricks;" and turned his  
70 ignorant zeal to better account. On the same ground rests the commendation which that  
71 Apostle bestows in turn upon his countrymen, while he sorrowfully condemns their  
72 unpardonable obstinacy. "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel," he says, "is,  
73 that they might be saved; for I bear them record, that they have a Zeal of God, but not  
74 according to knowledge." [Rom. x. 1.] They were guilty, because they might have known  
75 what they did not know; but so far as they were zealous, they claimed from him a  
76 respectful notice, and were far better surely than those haughty scorers, the Romans,  
77 who felt no concern whether there was a God or no, worshipped one idol as readily as  
78 another, and spared the Apostles from contemptuous pity. Of these was Gallio, who  
79 "cared for none of those things" which either Jews or Christians did. Such men are  
80 abominated by our Holy Lord, who "honours them that honour Him," while "they that  
81 despised Him are lightly esteemed." [1 Sam. ii. 30.] He signifies this judgment on the

lukewarm and disloyal, in His message to the Church of Laodicea: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will cast thee forth out of My mouth." [Rev. iii. 15, 16.] Thus positive misbelief is a less odious state of mind than the temper of those who are indifferent to religion, who say that one opinion is as good as the other, and condemn or ridicule those who are in earnest. Surely, if this world be a scene of contest between good and evil, as Scripture declares, "he that is not with Christ, is against Him;" and Angels who witness what is going on, and can estimate its seriousness, may well cry out, "Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." [Judges v. 23.]

I do not deny that this view of the subject is different from that which certain principles and theories now current in the world would lead us to adopt; but this surely is no reason that it should not be true, unless indeed, amid the alternate successes of good and evil, there be any infallible token given us to ascertain the superior illumination of the present century over all those which have preceded it. In fact we have no standard of Truth at all but the Bible, and to that I would appeal. "To the Law and to the Testimony;" if the opinions of the day are conformable to it, let them remain in honour, but if not, however popular they may be at the moment, they will surely come to nought. It is the present fashion to call Zeal by the name of intolerance, and to account intolerance the chief of sins; that is, any earnestness for one opinion above another concerning God's nature, will, and dealings with man,—or, in other words, any earnestness for the Faith once delivered to the Saints, any earnestness for Revelation as such. Surely, in this sense, the Apostles were the most intolerant of men: what is it but intolerance in this sense of the word to declare, that "he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life;" that "they that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord;" that "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor covetous, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God;" that we must not even "eat" with a brother who is one of such; that we may not "receive into our houses," or "bid God speed" to any one who comes to us without the "doctrine of Christ"? Has not St. Paul, whom many seem desirous of making an Apostle of less rigid principles than his brethren, said, even about an individual, "The Lord reward him according to his works!" [1 John v. 12. 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10; v. 11. 2 John 10, 11. 2 Tim. iv. 14.] and though we of this day have not the spiritual discernment which alone can warrant such a form of words about this man or that, have we not here given us a clear evidence, that there are cases in which God's glory is irreconcilable with the salvation of sinners, and when, in consequence, it is not unchristian to acquiesce in His judgments upon them? These words were deliberately written by St. Paul, in the closing days of his life, when his mind was most calm and heavenly, his hope most assured, his reward immediately in view: circumstances which render it impossible for any one who even reverences St. Paul as a man of especial holiness, to explain them away, not to insist on the argument from his inspiration.

125 Such is Zeal, a Christian grace to the last, while it is also an elementary virtue; equally  
126 belonging to the young convert and the matured believer; displayed by Moses at the  
127 first, when he slew the Egyptian, and by St. Paul in his last hours, while he was  
128 reaching forth his hand for his heavenly crown.

129 2. On the other hand, Zeal is an imperfect virtue; that is, in our fallen state, it will ever be  
130 attended by unchristian feelings, if it is cherished by itself. This is the case with many  
131 other tempers of mind which yet are absolutely required of us. Who denies that it is a  
132 duty in the returning sinner to feel abhorrence of his past offences, and a dread of God's  
133 anger? yet such feelings, unless faith accompany them, lead to an unfruitful remorse, to  
134 despair, to hardened pride; or again, to perverse superstitions. Not that humiliation is  
135 wrong in any sense or degree, but it induces collateral weaknesses or sins, from unduly  
136 exciting one side of our imperfect nature. Mercy becomes weakness, when unattended  
137 by a sense of justice and firmness: the wisdom of the serpent becomes craft, unless it  
138 be received into the harmlessness of the dove. And Zeal, in like manner, though an  
139 essential part of a Christian temper, is but a part; and is in itself imperfect, even for the  
140 very reason that it is elementary. Hence it appropriately fills so prominent a place in the  
141 Jewish Dispensation, which was intended to lay the foundations, as of Christian Faith,  
142 so of the Christian character. Whether we read the injunctions delivered by Moses  
143 against idolatry and idolaters, or trace the actual history of God's chosen servants, such  
144 as Phinehas, Samuel, Elijah, and especially David, we find that the Law was peculiarly  
145 a Covenant of Zeal. On the other hand, the Gospel brings out into its full proportions,  
146 that perfect temper of mind, which the Law enjoined indeed, but was deficient both in  
147 enforcing and creating,—Love; that is, Love or Charity, as described by St. Paul in his  
148 first Epistle to the Corinthians, which is not merely brotherly-love (a virtue ever included  
149 in the notion of Zeal itself), but a general temper of gentleness, meekness, sympathy,  
150 tender consideration, open-heartedness towards all men, brother or stranger, who come  
151 in our way. In this sense, Zeal is of the Law, and Love of the Gospel: and Love perfects  
152 Zeal, purifying and regulating it. Thus the Saints of God go on unto perfection. Moses  
153 ended his life as "the meekest of men," though he began it with undisciplined Zeal,  
154 which led him to a deed of violence. St. John, who would call down fire from heaven,  
155 became the Apostle of Love; St. Paul, who persecuted Christ's servants, "was made all  
156 things to all men;" yet neither of them lost their Zeal, though they trained it to be  
157 spiritual.

158 Love, however, is not the only grace which is necessary to the perfection of Zeal; Faith  
159 is another. This, at first sight, may sound strange; for what is Zeal, it may be asked, but  
160 a result of Faith? who is zealous for that in which he does not trust and delight? Yet, it  
161 must be kept in mind, that we have need of Faith not only that we may direct our actions  
162 to a right object, but that we may perform them rightly; it guides us in choosing the  
163 means, as well as the end. Now, Zeal is very apt to be self-willed; it takes upon itself to  
164 serve God in its own way. This is evident from the very nature of it; for, in its ruder form,  
165 it manifests itself in sudden and strong emotions at the sight of presumption or  
166 irreverence, proceeding to action almost as a matter of feeling, without having time to  
167 inquire which way is best. Thus, when our Lord was seized by the officers, Peter  
168 forthwith "drew his sword, and struck a servant of the High Priest's, and smote off his

ear." [Matt. xxvi. 51.] Patience, then, and resignation to God's will, are tempers of mind of which Zeal especially stands in need,—that dutiful Faith, which will take nothing for granted on the mere suggestion of nature, looks up to God with the eyes of a servant towards his master, and, as far as may be, ascertains His will before it acts. If this heavenly corrective be wanting, Zeal, as I have said, is self-willed in its temper: while, by using sanctions, and expecting results of this world, it becomes (what is commonly called) political. Here, again, we see the contrast between the Jewish and the Christian Dispensations. The Jewish Law being a visible system, sanctioned by temporal rewards and punishments, necessarily involved the duty of a political temper on the part of those who were under it. They were bound to aim at securing the triumph of Religion here; realizing its promises, enjoying its successes, enforcing its precepts, with the sword. This, I say, was their duty; and, as fulfilling it, among other reasons, David is called "a man after God's own heart." But the Gospel teaches us to "walk by Faith, not by sight;" and Faith teaches us so to be zealous, as still to forbear anticipating the next world, but to wait till the Judge shall come. St. Peter drew his sword, in order (as he thought) to realize at once that good work on which his heart was set, our Lord's deliverance; and, on this very account, he met with that Saviour's rebuke, who presently declared to Pilate, that His Kingdom was not of this world, else would His servants fight. Christian Zeal, therefore, ever bears in mind that the Mystery of Iniquity is to continue on till the Avenger solves it once for all; it renounces all hope of hastening His coming, all desire of intruding upon His work. It has no vain imaginings about the world's real conversion to Him, however men may acknowledge Him outwardly, knowing that "the world lies in wickedness." It has recourse to no officious modes of propagating or strengthening His truth. It does not flatter and ally itself with Samaria, in order to repress Syria. It does not exalt an Idumæan as its king, though he be willing to beautify the Temple, or has influence with the Emperors of the World. It plans no intrigues; it recognises no parties; it relies on no arm of flesh. It looks for no essential improvements or permanent reformation, in the dispensation of those precious gifts, which are ever pure in their origin, ever corrupted in man's use of them. It acts according to God's will, this time or that, as it comes, boldly and promptly; yet letting each act stand by itself, as a sufficient service to him, not connecting them in one, or working them into system, further than He commands. In a word, Christian Zeal is not political.

Two reflections arise from considering this last characteristic of the virtue in question; and with a brief notice of these I will conclude.

1. First, it is too evident how grievously the Roman Schools have erred in this part of Christian duty. Let their doctrines be as pure as they would represent, still they have indisputably made their Church an instrument of worldly politics by a "zeal not according to knowledge," and failed in this essential duty of a Christian Witness, viz. in preserving the spiritual character of Christ's kingdom [Note 2]. In saying this, I would not willingly deny the great debt we owe to that Church for her faithful custody of the Faith itself through so many centuries; nor seem unmindful of the circumstances of other times, the gradual growth of religious error, and the external dangers which appeared to place the cause of Christianity itself in jeopardy, and to call for extraordinary measures of defence. Much less would I speak disrespectfully of the great men, who were the agents

213 under Providence in various stages of that mysterious Dispensation, and whom,  
214 however our Zeal may burn, we must in very Charity believe to be, what their works and  
215 sufferings betoken, single-minded, self-denying servants of their God and Saviour.

216 2. The Roman Church then has become political; but let us of the present day beware of  
217 running into the other extreme, and of supposing that, because Christ's Kingdom is not  
218 based upon this world, that it is not connected with it. Surely it was established here for  
219 the sake of this world, and must ever act in it, as if a part of it, though its origin is from  
220 above. Like the Angels which appeared to the Patriarchs, it is a heavenly Messenger in  
221 human form. In its Polity, its Public Assemblies, its Rules and Ordinances, its Censures,  
222 and its Possessions, it is a visible body, and, to appearance, an institution of this world.  
223 It is no faulty zeal to labour to preserve it in the form in which Christ gave it.

224 And further, it should ever be recollected, that, though the Church is not of this world,  
225 yet we have assurance from God's infallible word, that there *are* in the world temporal  
226 and present Dispensers of His Eternal Justice. We are expressly told, that "the powers  
227 that be are ordained of God;" that they "bear not the sword in vain, but are ministers of  
228 God, revengers to execute wrath upon the evil-doer," and bestow "praise" on those who  
229 do well. Hence, as being gifted with a portion of God's power, they hold an office of a  
230 priestly nature [Note 3], and are armed with the fearful sanction, that "they that resist  
231 them, shall receive to themselves Judgment." On this ground, religious Rulers have  
232 always felt it to be their duty to act as in God's place for the promulgation of the Truth;  
233 and the Church, on the other hand, has seen her obligation not only to submit to them,  
234 in things temporal, but zealously to co-operate with them in her own line, towards those  
235 sacred objects which they have both in common. And thus has been happily fulfilled {for  
236 fifteen hundred years, Isaiah's prophecy, that "kings should be nursing fathers to the  
237 Church, and queens her nursing mothers." Yet, clearly, there is nothing here, either of a  
238 self-willed zeal, or political craft, in the conduct of the Church; inasmuch as she has but  
239 submitted herself thereby to the guidance of the revealed Word.

240 May Almighty God, for His dear Son's sake, lead us safely through these dangerous  
241 times; so that, while we never lay aside our Zeal for His honour, we may sanctify it by  
242 Faith and Charity, neither staining our garments by wrath or violence, nor soiling them  
243 with the dust of a turbulent world!

#### Notes

1. The Feast of St. Simon and St. Jude the Apostles.

2. Among the principles referred to are the following, which occur among the Dictatus  
Hildebrandi: "Quod liceat illi [Papæ] imperatores deponere;" "Quod à fidelitate iniquorum  
subditos potest absolvere." *Vide* Laud against Fisher, p. 181.

3. [*leitourgoi theou*]. Rom. xiii. 1-6.