**Zeal Without Knowledge**

*by Jeremiah Cox*

While few will make it to heaven, the world is full of those who are zealous for God. This was so even in Jesus’ time. He said in His sermon on the mount, *“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”* (Matthew 7:22-23). How is it that those who possess such zeal will fail God?

The apostle Paul answers this question for us. Concerning the Jew’s he said, *“they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge”* (10:2). This is the common way of the world. It is not our place to question whether or not they have zeal, but is it according to knowledge?

The world wants to belittle knowledge with a false view of God’s grace. Instead of digging deep in scripture, extracting all truth on every subject, they merely skim the surface (perhaps not even the surface). They cry, “Relationship over religion!” In other words, they are able to be pleasing to God without a full knowledge of His word. They seek to liberate themselves from His standard, and establish their own. Paul marked this as folly by saying, *“they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, [seek] to establish their own righteousness”* (10:3). These Jews were not ignorant of the fact that God is righteous. This is a fundamental understanding. God is perfect, and so He is not able to do anything wrong. Rather, they were ignorant of what was included in His righteousness. God most certainly is righteous, and for that reason He establishes the requirements of righteousness! Anything contradictory proves to be unrighteous! Ergo, if we fail to attain knowledge of God’s righteousness we cannot become righteous!

Our zeal must be according to knowledge in order for it to be pleasing to God. Otherwise, it is destructive! I believe Paul was in part speaking from experience when he wrote to the Romans about the Jew’s zeal without knowledge. Paul said to Agrippa, *“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth”* (Acts 26:9). Paul once had zeal without knowledge. His perception was that God was pleased with the persecution of Christians. Of course he was terribly mistaken.

It is incumbent upon the individual to attain the knowledge of God’s righteousness. How is this possible? Paul wrote, *“No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God…For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 2:11, 16). It is not expected of God for man to know within himself God’s righteousness. God had to reveal it to us!

The Psalmist writes, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Psalm 119:105). As a servant of God we must give ourselves entirely to His instruction (cf. 1 Timothy 4:15). We cannot expect to know the pathway of righteousness without being led by it, and we cannot expect to be led by it if we have a willful ignorance.

Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him”* (John 14:6-7). We can only know of the Father’s righteousness through knowing Jesus. We can only know Jesus through study of His word (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 John 1:1-4). Is your zeal with knowledge, or without knowledge?

**Forgiving from the Heart**
*by Jerry Fite*

Jesus concluded his parable highlighting forgiveness by saying, *“So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not everyone his brother from your hearts”* (Matthew 18:35). Forgiving from the heart denotes a sincere and genuine forgiveness. But here our heart is made aware of a sobering thought. What will my heavenly Father do unto me, if I do not forgive from the heart?

We are to forgive from a heart knowing God will not forgive us if we do not genuinely forgive others. This is the point of the parable (Matthew 18:23-35). A servant owes the king 10,000 talents and cannot immediately pay the debt. Pleading for patience, the servant receives compassion from the king who forgives him of the debt. When released of his debt, he finds a fellow servant who owes him 100 shillings. He rigorously demands payment. He does not forgive with compassion, even though he was forgiven by the king far more than what his fellow servant owed him. His king, when learning of his servant’s unwillingness to forgive, demands what was owed him. This is where Jesus’ summary statement is made. We must forgive others knowing God will not forgive us when we need forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15).

Forgiving from the heart is a heart that is not calculating the wrongs done, but is a heart always ready to forgive. Peter asked, *“How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him…”* No doubt thinking magnanimously, Peter immediately adds, *“until seven times?”*Jesus follows the line of thinking, but takes it to a different meaning. Jesus says not seven but the complete number 7 multiplied by 10 times 7. Jesus is not saying that one must forgive 490 times, but the limit is reached at this point and one does not have to forgive the 491st time. He is saying the heart is ready always to forgive.

What is the limit of your forgiveness? If one wrongs you once and you forgive; and then wrongs you a second time, and you forgive; you are probably at your limit. Does it not make you look foolish to keep on being wronged and you respond with forgiveness? After all, does not the world think in terms, *“fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me”*. But forgiving from the heart involves being always ready to forgive, not having a certain limit to forgiveness.
Forgiving from the heart, is a heart knowledgeable of how God forgives. While always ready to forgive, God does not forgive until we repent (Acts 8:22). As God has forgiven us, we are to forgive others with a *“tender”*and *“kind”* heart (Ephesians 4:32). While we should always be ready to forgive, *“if he repent, forgive him”* is the godlike way we should forgive from the heart (Luke 17:3).

We must forgive as God forgives, being ready to forgive the penitent with compassion. We will forgive with a heart never to apply the wrong again. When your heart says “I just cannot forgive anymore,” tell yourself, “Do I want God to quit forgiving me?” He will, if we quit forgiving from the heart those who sin against us!