



Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

5 For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. 6 But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

A few weeks ago I was one of teachers for the Lil' Squirts camp at Living Waters. The four teachers were given the assignment to teach first and second graders worship and the gospel using the Tabernacle. So how do you teach the Tabernacle to squirrely first and second graders? Very carefully! At one point I asked them to guess my age and one boy guessed I was 30 years old. I knew right then I was dealing with elementary kids who possessed superior intellect. However, the next day I asked them how much they thought I sinned. One boy said, "A lot." So they guessed I was thirty years old and sinned a lot. I'd rather they had guessed that I was fifty years old and sinned very little but you take what you can get. ;-)

I had an experience in that class that I will probably never forget. Obviously I was trying to get them to see Jesus and the gospel in the Tabernacle. As I was teaching on the second day, one little boy had this amazing aha moment. All of a sudden he said, "I just can't hold it in anymore. Jesus is the spotless lamb!" He kept saying, "I'm so excited. It all makes sense now." I have never seen someone that young have such a powerful aha moment of understanding. Had there not been three other volunteer staff in the room with me to verify this, I might have thought I was reading him incorrectly. But all of the staff said that his reaction seemed totally genuine. What made this even more dramatic is how he was acting five minutes before class started. While we

were all together singing, he was lumped back as far as he could go in his chair and looked up at me and said, "I hate teaching time."

Obviously, I take no credit for the theological breakthrough in this seven year old. It was the work of the Holy Spirit and some good teaching he had at his Christian school. But the part I really liked was his passion. What the apostle Paul calls zeal. *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God.* The "them," of course, were the Jews, his brothers according to the flesh. Paul had a zeal of his own for his brothers. *My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.*

Let me remind you of the first two points from last Sunday.

1. Proclaim on your knees.
2. Proclaim out of your heart's desire.

All proclamation begins on our knees and all proclamation begins in our hearts. Now of these two, which would you say is more important? Your mind might immediately fall on prayer as the right answer. After all, the answer to every question in Sunday School is either 'Jesus' or 'prayer.' Who could argue with prayer, right? At the risk of sounding blasphemous, I am suggesting that desire of the heart is more important, and here's why. If you don't have a desire to see people saved, then you probably won't pray for them very often. Or if you do, your prayers will be seldom and based on a sense of obligation. But if you do desire to see people saved, and particular people at that, then you will want to pray for them. More than that, the level of your desire will directly affect the level and intensity of your prayers. The more desire you have for their salvation, the more you will pray for them.

Speaking of which, how did you do last week on your seven days of prayer for lost person? Did you get all seven days? Did you pray at all? Now some will say, "Oh right, I forgot." But doesn't that alone say something about your level of desire to see them saved? Did you forget to brush your teeth last week? Did you forget to watch your favorite TV show last week or forget to call your favorite person? You didn't 'forget' to do these things because they are important-brushing your teeth-and you have a desire to do them--whatever your favorite activity, whomever your favorite person

So why did you forget to pray for a lost person for the past seven days? You forgot because you don't have the desire in the first place. Desire drives prayer. Both are important. You can't say that personal desires are more important than prayer but they are the driving force behind your prayers. Personal desires are not more important but they are primary in terms of the order of events.

3. Proclaim with clarity.

Another word for personal desire is zeal. Paul could have written, *Brothers, my zeal and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.* What you and I need is more zeal. The Jewish brothers and sisters of Paul had zeal: *they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.* This is such an important phrase for the way that Paul qualifies the statement. They have zeal but that zeal is not based on correct knowledge. Notice carefully that Paul did not criticize the presence of zeal. Zeal itself is a good thing.

The word zeal was applied to Jesus only one time in the gospels. After Jesus overturned the tables of the money-changers and drove the people and animals out of the temple with a whip of cords that he had just carefully braided, John alone adds this explanation. *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."* (John 2:17-which was a quote from Psalm 69:9)

Jesus had zeal. Jesus was zealous. Jesus had very strong desires. he was consumed with his Father's house which is another way of saying that he was consumed with zeal for his Father's glory. The money-changers and animal sellers were blaspheming the Father's glory and Jesus could not tolerate that. Zeal is good thing, but by itself, it is neutral. This is also true of desire.

I like how Paul Tripp puts it. "The problem isn't *that* we desire, it's *what* we desire, and why."¹ Desires and zealousness are good and necessary. The terrorist who cut off the head of journalist James Foley last week had zeal. To do something as horrific as this requires a great deal of desire and zeal. Is there anything wrong with the zeal of this terrorist? Now be careful how you hear this. The zeal of this terrorist and the zeal of Jesus are both good and necessary things. Does that comparison bother you?

The problem with the terrorists is not their zeal. The problem is like what Paul describes here. Their zeal was not according to knowledge. Terrorists have a pitifully wrong knowledge base from which they are working.

What one thing did the pre-conversion Saul of Tarsus and the post-conversion Paul the apostle have in common? Zeal. Before his conversion, Saul the Pharisee had great zeal. Did you realize that Saul was a terrorist? In his zeal to persecute the church, he rounded up Christians, threw them in prison and even put some to death, such as Stephen. If Paul were put on trial today for what he did, he would be charged with kidnapping, racketeering and murder, all which fit under the category of terrorism. Saul was a Jewish terrorist. He had zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

This is why he said he could bear witness to the zeal of the Jews, because he himself had the same kind of zeal. In fact, His zeal surpassed them all.

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless (Phil. 3:4-6).

Paul had been just like the Jews he wrote about--zeal without knowledge. Post-conversion Paul the apostle still had the same zeal. I am not sure you could get much more zealous than he had been before, but after his conversion, his zeal was laser focused on Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the gospel.

Last Sunday we heard about the world religions camp. One of the things that most impressed the participants was the utter devotion of the people in different religions. Muslims, Jews and Hindus

all had a different basis of knowledge but they were each totally devoted to their religious systems.

We do need to understand the neutrality of zeal and desires. Desires are not good or bad and the very last thing you want is a lack of desire. But people get confused about this when they are battling sin. Let's say you have an issue with lustful desires. The natural thing to conclude is that you must have fewer desires. You've got to reign in your desires so you won't have those sinful desires. But your problem is not desire per se, is it? Your problem is that you desire the wrong thing.

Paul did not get rid of his zeal. he merely redirected his zeal. Obviously it was more than that, wasn't it? The Jewish terrorist was radically converted on his way to engage in more terrorist activity. Through this, the Lord changed the direction of his zeal. What if you could take those sinful desires and channel the energy into Godly desires?

I was shocked to learn how much money is spent on the porn industry every year. According to 2006 figures, which are obviously outdated now, the U.S. consumers spent \$13 billion on pornography. This is more than all of the combined revenue of ABC, NBC and CBS. Worldwide the number is \$100 billion per year², and it obviously more than that now.

All of that revenue is generated due to the desires of hundreds of millions of people. I know this sounds strange, but I'll say it again. Even a problem this huge is not due to desires per se, but to the direction of the desires. These are sinful desires. What if we could take all of that energy and all of that income and direct it to the proclamation of the gospel? What could the world do with an additional \$100 billion dollars poured into world missions? Obviously what I am suggesting is impossible, but my point is that we don't need to eliminate desire and zeal. We need to redirect it.

Your heart and my heart want to be filled with something significant. And what I am saying is that God has created us to be this way. He created us to seek after him. to desire him, to be zealous for him, but it's so easy to have zeal without knowledge. You have probably heard the well known quote from the math genius Blaise Pascal. "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus."³ That is so simple and so brilliant. The "God shaped vacuum" is not an accident. Pascal is saying that the Creator put that in every person.

It turns out that Pascal never did utter that famous phrase. But what he did write was very close to this and better, I think.

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.

I think this is part of what Paul is also saying.

2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

The Jews had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. We have already established that Paul lived this out better than anyone in his Pharisaical, unconverted self. But in these verses, Paul gives more explanation of what that zeal looked like. *For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*

The word 'seeking' is a key word here. It is the exact same word that Jesus used in his parable of the lost coin. What did the woman do when she lost her coin? "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? (Luke 15:8) The woman sought diligently. She expended all of her efforts and laid aside every other duty until the lost coin was found. This is what the Jews did. They were seeking diligently. Is seeking good thing? Of course it is. Seeking is the result of desire. Seeking is the overflow of zeal. If you are zealous for something, you will diligently seek after it. But the problem is that they sought to establish "their own righteousness." To use Pascal's modified language, they filled the God shaped vacuum with something other than God.

And it is such a powerful vacuum, isn't it? Think about your own sins and temptations. There are times when you feel completely free of temptation. You've had such a long string of victory over sin that you are beginning to think that you have licked that temptation; that it no longer has power and pull over you. But then, out of the blue, when you least expect it, it starts pulling on you. Do you remember the old movie, *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids!* If you saw it, you will remember the lawnmower scene. Here is this group of kids, small enough to ride on the back of ant, about to get sucked up into a vortex of chopping blades on the lawnmower.

That's what the pull of temptation can be like. The power of its pull can be overwhelming. The level of desire and zeal seems like a cruel master. We are all seeking something but usually, we are seeking something other than Christ. We have desires and we have zeal, but our appetite is not directed at Jesus.

Paul explained where the Jews went wrong and where we go astray as well. *Christ is the end/completion/telos (τέλος) of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes.* The Jews sought to establish their own righteousness but ironically, they thought they were seeking after God. They thought they were following the law but refused to see that it is Christ who completes and fulfills the law.

On Thursday of this past week I had one of the longest conversations about the gospel with an unbeliever. I have had longish talks with this one guy before but this time we talked for over an hour and a half. This happened to be at the fitness center where I tend to have most of my evangelistic opportunities. This young man graduated about a year ago with a bachelor's degree in biology from an Ivy League school, so we concentrated our conversation on the holes in evolution. I lost track of the number of times that he said, "I don't have the answer to that question, but I'll get back to you." I was totally fine with that and the whole conversation was

very respectful. But no matter how many gaping hole I pointed out in the evolutionary theory, he refused to let go of it one iota.

He was absolutely committed to it precisely because he had rejected any possibility of anything supernatural. There is no God. Jesus may have been a real person but it is not possible to rise from the dead. One and on it went. A very kind but flat out rejection of the truth. I even presented him with Pascal's Wager.⁴ Pascal's Wager, also formulated by Blaise Pascal, essentially asks the question, "What if you are wrong." If I am wrong in my beliefs in Christ alone as Savior, then the worst consequences for me is that I may have missed out on certain temporal pleasures that other people chase after. But if he was wrong, the consequences will result in an eternity in hell. But he was unfazed by Pascal's Wager saying that he didn't think that was a very likely possibility. It wasn't that he thought that he was too good for hell, but that hell did not exist.

The end of verse four aptly describes my conversation. *they did not submit to God's righteousness*. It's possible that in his Ivy League education that he never had anyone point out the problems with Darwinian Evolution. It may be that no one had ever explained the historical reliability of the Bible to him before. This may have been the first time that anyone had shared the full gospel with him. He may have been living in ignorance but after our conversation he could no longer say he never knew any of this. He just refused to submit to God's righteousness.

Now compare this to what happened in Papua New Guinea in the 1980's. [Here is a clip](#) from the amazing missionary story called EE-Taow, which many of you have seen.

This video ends with nearly the entire village being converted at once. After 28 years, the ministry among the Mouk people continues to multiply.

Those exuberant moments were the beginning of a church that has now evolved into 23 churches throughout the tribe and into neighboring tribes. Bilingual Mouk believers have taught God's Word and planted churches beyond their own borders in the Aria, Ivanga, Edi and Lusi tribes.

The foundation for all of this has been the way the Mouk people received the Word of God. During the initial evangelism 23 years ago, Scripture was established as the ultimate source of authority. Village leaders openly confessed this and accepted the Bible as the new standard of authority within the tribe.

These leaders have also recognized their responsibility to ensure that the new generation is taught the Word of God and disciplined in their walk with Him. They follow the pattern of teaching and discipleship that brought them to salvation.

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Rich Maurer

August 24, 2014

¹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/college-doesn-t-change-your-heart-it-reveals-it>

² http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html

³ http://thinkexist.com/quotation/there_is_a_god_shaped_vacuum_in_the_heart_of/166425.html

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascal's_Wager