

# Zeal Without Knowledge

Romans 10:1-4

## Introduction

It was January of 1967 – NASA experienced its’ biggest disaster in the Apollo space program. The Apollo 1 mission was in its final preparation stages on January 27<sup>th</sup> – when Gus Grissom, Robert Chaffee and Ed White boarded their ship for a full dress rehearsal of launch procedures on the launch pad site at Cape Kennedy – FL.

But – the day was plagued with radio transmission flaws - - - late in the day – Gus Grissom was heard over the radio airing his frustration uttering the name of Jesus Christ in exasperation - - - about 15 seconds later - - - one of the astronauts reported there was a fire in the cabin.

Apparently, a spark ignited at Gus Grissom’s feet – and expanded to the rest of the cabin within seconds. The volatile pure oxygen environment – created a firestorm and the 3 men had little chance of escape. To further complicate matters - the hatch door was cumbersome and impractical for any kind of emergency exit - - - all 3 men died of asphyxiation – and suffered burns over their bodies

Of course – everyone wanted to know – ‘What happened? / What led to such a disastrous outcome?’

During the investigation – some pointed to the pure oxygen environment [which could’ve been changed but NASA refused due to cost] / shoddy wiring that was not well insulated could produce a spark [which is what happened] / too much flammable Velcro material / and the hatch door

But – above all - - - NASA managers and crew were in the grip of what some would later call, ‘Go fever’ – the desperate drive to push on toward a launch regardless of problems – with the belief that if they just kept going – they could fix the problems as they arose.

Senator Walter Mondale of MN accused NASA of criminal negligence

Program director Joe Shea was demoted and left NASA after four months

There was a zealous frenzy to get to the moon – but the Apollo 1 disaster put necessary brakes on the program - - - to elevate safety measures in the future

In this section of Romans – Paul says that the Jews of his day have plenty of zeal in their religious practices

They are zealous about the Law and the temple / and the sacrificial system / the Passover - - - but they lack in something fundamental and basic to religion

He says they had a zeal for God – but not according to knowledge

And this – was a fatal flaw

Bruce Coslet – was the offensive coordinator for the Dallas Cowboys [2002]

During the season he said of his team:

*Bruce Coslet: 'We can't run. We can't pass. We can't stop the run. We can't stop the pass. We can't kick. Other than that, we're just not a very good football team right now.'*

Those things are fundamental to football!

Do we want to know what is fundamental to religion? [truth]

If it's not true is worthless

*C.S. Lewis: "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance, the only thing it cannot be is moderately important."*

Jesus – in fact said to Pilate the Roman Governor at His trial

*John 18:37 - ' . . . I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'*

Jesus once rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees in their zeal – he told them the truth about their sham practice of religion

*Matthew 23:15 - 'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.'*

They had a zeal for God – but not according to knowledge

### **I. Paul's Prayers for the Jewish People - v. 1**

If we know our church history – we know that some of the Jews received Christ as Savior – but the vast majority did not - - - and many of those went on to carry out some of the earliest persecutions against Christians – in the first century

Paul himself - had clashed with the Jews in various cities - - - had been arrested / persecuted / jailed by his own countrymen / 5 times he had received from the Jews - 39 lashes!

At Lystra – after Paul had healed a lame man / things were going fine . . .

Acts 14:19 - 'But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.'

In Acts 22 – when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem – He was given an opportunity to give his defense before the Jews

Acts 22:1-3 - 'Brothers and fathers, hear my defense *which I now offer to you.*" And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became *even* more quiet; and he said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the Law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.'

Paul says – I was just like you guys! / doing what you are doing / putting men and women into prison

He went on to share how the Lord appeared to him on the Damascus Road – and he did a 180 - - - turned to follow Christ

He then shared how the Lord told him later to leave Jerusalem because of hostility from the Jews

Acts 22:19-22 - And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing nearby and approving, and watching over the cloaks of those who were killing him.' And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" They listened to him up to this statement, and *then* they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a man from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!"

Once Paul mentioned the Gentiles - - - "Away with such a fellow" – put him to death!

That was their attitude towards Paul the Apostle

What is Paul's attitude towards the Jews?

He prays for them – just as Jesus told the disciples to do

**Matthew 5:44 - 'love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.'**

What does Paul pray for them? / He prays that they would come to know Christ

\*\*\* One of the greatest things you can do for another person is to pray for their salvation

The Apostles devoted themselves to prayer

Remember in Acts 6 – the Hellenistic Jewish widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food - - a dissension arose – the Apostles decided to appoint 7 men to handle this ministry [Stephen was one of them]

**Acts 6:4 - 'But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'**

2 things were priorities to the Apostles that stood above all other good things they could be doing: Prayer / ministry of the Word

A professor once took his seminary class out to a cemetery - - - and told his students to begin preaching to the dead in the cemetery

Of course – they protested and said this is silly – these people are dead

He then stopped and said – here is the lesson I want you to remember

When you are preaching in your churches - - - you will be preaching to some people who are dead [in trespasses and sins] - - - and the only person who can breathe new life into them is God - - - so don't forget to pray!

**E.M. Bounds: 'The gospel moves with slow and timid pace when the saints are not at their prayers early, late, and long.'**

Prayer acknowledges God's power – and His ability to melt the heart of stone – of the most stubborn unbeliever

Pray for someone's salvation this week - a family member / maybe a student at L-S – co-worker / someone in Govt. / a neighbor

- Jesus told us to ask, seek, knock – and it will be given unto you
- The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much – says James

Prayer is not just about getting the answers we seek - - - Prayer is also relational – we grow in our relationship with God as we commune with Him in prayer

Prayer is our fellowship time with God

We are told that God delights in our prayers [Prov. 15:8] - - - He wants to hear from His children

Proverbs 15:8 - 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.'

Oswald Chambers: 'Prayer is the vital breath of the Christian; not the thing that makes him alive but the evidence that he is alive.'

Paul prayed for the Jews – for their salvation

## II. The Limitations of Zeal - vv. 2-3

Paul says – I can bear witness to their zeal – I know all about their zeal - - - that was me in my BC days

Philippians 3:4-6 - '[I was] circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.'

Paul says – I was just as zealous as anyone – but I turned from all that – to embraced Jesus as my Savior and to have His righteousness imputed to my account

Many of the Jews were very zealous and sincere in their approach to the Law

\*\*\* Zeal in and of itself is not an indication of truth

Our modern culture often teaches the exact opposite – 'It doesn't matter what you believe – as long as you are sincere - - - God sees the sincerity of your heart.'

Oprah Winfrey: 'There are many paths to what you call God. Does God care about your heart or whether you called his Son Jesus?'

Sincere Buddhist / sincere Muslim / sincere Christian - - - all roads lead to heaven

Paul says you can be sincere – but sincerely wrong

Suppose you are a teenaged boy - allergic to Peanuts and you begin dating a girl who makes you a batch of Peanut butter cookies - - - and you eat them and you die

She may have been sincere in her expressions of affection - - - but it was based in ignorance - - she just didn't know that you were allergic

Sincerity meant nothing where it counted

In religion – we heard about 9/11 hi-jackers thinking they were going to heaven - - - and be met with 72 virgins

And we scoff at that – that isn't going to happen

One thing we can't deny: They had great zeal in their faith [mingled with politics]

They moved over here on visas – went to flight school – learned how to fly a Boeing 757 – [although they apparently skipped the landing part of the instruction] – they carried out the hi-jacking of two 757's and two 767's - - - using box cutters as weapons – then piloted their planes into the twin towers – taking their own lives in the process

When you look at what they did – we acknowledge their zeal - - but it was not according to knowledge

Zeal without knowledge is *fanaticism*

They were religious fanatics

The cults traffic in fanaticism and ignorance

Jesus said many will come in His name and say they are He [the Messiah]

The Philosopher Maimonides described a man who made a claim to being the Messiah in the country of Yemen. In 1172 – a Jewish man proclaimed himself the messiah and caused enough trouble to get himself arrested. He then boldly told the authorities that if they were to cut off his head – he would return back to life.

Guess what they did? - - - they cut off his head - - - the end. [Longing for the End, p. 61]

A curious sect – in English / American history – was that of the Shakers [18<sup>th</sup> cent.]

Ann Lee of the Shakers claimed that Christ spoke to her in a vision and told her that since His first coming was as a man – at His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming – He would come as a woman – her followers decided that Ann Lee was the incarnate Christ – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ

Her followers called her the true mother of all living in the new creation

What happened to them?

To the Shakers – only the celibate could be saved – so that tended to keep their numbers low – and they eventually died off – the end

The cults – traffic in ignorance and zeal without knowledge

In 1997 – I was in my last year of seminary - - - The Heaven's Gate cult came into the news – Rancho Santa Fe CA – a small group waiting for the mother ship to take them up – 39 of them committed suicide to speed up the transport of their souls – leader was Marshall Applewhite

Princeton history prof - Sean Wilentz wrote up an article for the LA Times at the time: 'A Nation of Cults: The Great American Tradition.'

'The cult's charismatic leader called himself Matthias the Prophet and claimed he was the latest incarnation of the Holy Spirit – a descendant of the ancient Hebrew prophets and patriarchs – including Jesus Christ. He lived communally with about 20 of his disciples – men, women and children – in a fine suburban house adjoining a spacious well-manicured estate.'

Everyday the disciples listened intently to his furious, meandering sermons about the rapidly approaching doomsday; and they obeyed his every command, including his rearrangements of the group's sexual pairings. Not surprisingly, the bearded prophet took the prettiest of the women, the wife of a wealthy disciple as his personal "match spirit".

Outsiders suspected that awful things were happening at 'Mount Zion', the name Matthias gave to the commune. But only after a sickly member of the cult died under mysterious circumstances did local authorities apprehend the prophet and confirm some of the worst rumors.

The affair quickly became a media circus. Tabloid newspapers reported sensational details about the cult's sexual depravity and religious brainwashing . . . the public eagerly awaited the prophet's trial.'

*Sean Wilentz: 'It could have all happened yesterday, in Waco or Santa Fe. Yet the kingdom of Matthias did not rise and fall in some new age sun-belt outpost but in the town of Sing Sing New York just north of NYC in the mid 1830's.'*

[pretty close to the time of Joseph Smith and the beginnings of Mormonism]

Ignorance and zeal combine and lead to some of the great religious scams in history

Jesus said these words to the Pharisees and Scribes

**Matt. 23:23-24 - 'Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!'**

The fundamental hurdle or problem facing the Jews is that they sought to establish their own righteousness based upon their performance in keeping the law – [as they saw it]

They took the law and instead of saying, 'I am in need of mercy – God be merciful to me the sinner.' - - - they took the law and said – 'I'm good – I am righteous'

Romans 3:20 - 'by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for thru the Law comes the knowledge of sin.'

The Jews were ignorant about the true intent and purpose of the law – and they were ignorant about their own sinful condition

MLJ: 'The whole trouble with the Jews was that they thought that they knew what the Law of God demanded. But they did not. Their knowledge was so imperfect that it had become a lie and it was standing between them and the knowledge of salvation in and through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.'

### III. The End of the Law - v. 4

Τελος = end, goal, fulfillment

The coming of Jesus brought to an end the period of the Law of Moses and all the shadows and types associated with that law

You didn't bring a lamb with you to church this morning – because we believe that Christ is the One final Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world

When Jesus died – at His death – the temple veil was torn in two

God later destroyed the temple in 70 AD – just as Jesus predicted

The Law was a shadow of the good things to come – Heb. 10:1

The whole focus of the NT is that Christ is the fulfillment of the OT promises and prophecies

Paul is saying – 'stop looking to the law to save you – and turn to Jesus!'

'Quit saying that you have kept the law – b/c you haven't'

John Calvin: 'The first step to obtaining the righteousness of God is to renounce our own righteousness.'

Of course that does not mean that we become lawless – and ignore the moral standards of God – [some do believe that – but they have more in common with the cults]

We do obey the moral Law as it reflects the NT ethic of right behavior for the Christian

Romans 13:8-10 - 'Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "you shall love your neighbor

as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.'

As Christians - - - We don't obey the moral law because we are seeking to produce a righteousness before God which will make us acceptable to Him – but rather because we have been bought with a price and want to glorify God with our lives [and will at times fall short]

We recognize that the righteousness by which we are accepted before God is not our own – but the righteousness of Christ imputed to our account

### Conclusion

Rob Bell – used to be a mega pastor at Mars Hill Church in Grandville, MI - - - he reflected much zeal but without knowledge – his church eventually dismissed him for his unorthodox views – in 2011 – after he published a book titled: 'Love Wins'

The thesis of his book, 'Love Wins'

Rob Bell: "At the center of the Christian tradition since the first church have been a number who insist that history is not tragic, hell is not forever, and love, in the end, wins and all will be reconciled to God.'

i.e. – He denied the biblical doctrine of hell

Bell tells us the motivation for his book: 'Several years ago I heard a woman tell about the funeral of her daughter's friend, a high school student who was killed in a car accident. Her daughter was asked by a Christian if the young man who died was a Christian. She said that he claimed to be an atheist. This person said to her: 'So there's no hope then.'

Bell says: 'No hope?' - - - is that the Christian message? 'No hope?' [Love Wins, p. 3]

Bell – took it upon himself to offer hope to those who may have rejected Christ as Savior in this life

The problem: The message of Scripture is that – if someone dies in unbelief – there is no hope

When God closed the doors on Noah's Ark – for those outside – there was no hope

What we do with Jesus now determines our eternal destiny

Hebrews 9:27-28 - 'And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the

sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.'

In 100 years from now – you and I will be somewhere

Either in the joy of the kingdom of God or under His condemnation in hell

Jesus offers Himself as the one and only Savior to sinners – the One who perfectly satisfied the just demands of the Law on behalf of all who put their trust in Him