

# ZEAL WITH AND WITHOUT

By Bill Irby

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Paul loved his people, but he also knew them. He knew that they could be very enthusiastic about their religion. The sad truth is that their zeal was without knowledge (Romans 10:1-2).

There was nothing new about their problem. Indeed, Moses had warned God's people about much the same thing in Deuteronomy 30 (from which Paul quotes here). Folks then and now like to look in all sorts of places for the Will of God. People become quite zealous in this pursuit. But the answer for Israel, for the early church and for us is the same: *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17).

Zeal is a good thing, if and only if, it is guided and directed by the knowledge of the Word of God. Old Israel zealously departed from the Law of Moses to follow the gods of the people in whose lands they lived. The church in the post-apostolic period zealously adopted whatever elements of the Roman and Jewish cultures they saw fit. Indeed each point of departure from the Biblical pattern has been accompanied by great and lasting zeal. This includes the Christianity of today with its shopping mall and showbiz mentality.

Lots of folks these days are much excited about the "new" way of doing things. Inquire and you find that this newness is just another packaging of the old "give the people what they want" idea. Our relationship with God is not about what we want...it is about what He wants.

Again, enthusiasm alone has no merit and is consistently counter-productive. If enthusiasm is combined with error or faulty reasoning the result is great tragedy. The Nazis were enthusiastic and wrong. Look what happened. Radical violent Islam is both wrong and very zealous. The world is paying the price.

Finally we must remember that the great combination of zeal and knowledge is what we are after. We may know the truth but if we do not allow that knowledge to motivate us we lose the blessing of knowing. Remember James 4:17: To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin. Given the grace and mercy of God we can do no less than to live before Him with zeal according to knowledge.