

# Holiness and Holy Zeal

Dr. Peter Wiseman

"Your zeal hath provoked very many"  
(2 Cor. 9:2).

Dr. Grother says, "A noun is known by the company it keeps." The word passion is said by some great writer to have gotten into bad company. The word itself is pure. It simply means a soul all aflame in an eager pursuit. "All high poetry," says a master of English literature, "has its source in passion."

Passion takes various forms, we must acknowledge, such as love, or jealousy, or hate, and such like. The Christian religion, however, has given the word its highest meaning, namely, "the passions of the human heart crowded into the yearnings of a life and the agonies of the cross." By a holy passion, we mean a holy zeal.

There is "the zeal for the Lord of Hosts," spoken of in prophecy, and wonderfully fulfilled in the life of the Master. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:17). The Psalmist had a zeal for the Word of God (119:139). Epaphras had a great zeal for the church of Christ (Col. 4:13). When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians they were "zealous of spiritual gifts" at the expense of the greatest gift of God (13; 14:12): but they evidently improved; for in his second epistle, he speaks of their zeal provoking very many.

On the other hand, there is a false zeal. Jehu professed zeal for the Lord (II Kings 10:16). King Saul's zeal caused him to do much harm, and David had to make atonement for it (II Sam. 21:1-4). Paul was exceedingly zealous of the traditions of the fathers. "Concerning zeal," he said, "persecuting the church." Yet he was without the grace of God. Israel had a zeal but not according to knowledge. "Heaven defend us from ignorance combined with zeal," wrote Bishop Wescott, to Archbishop Benson. A perilous combination, indeed. Some of the darkest chapters in church history are furnished by zeal that is not according to knowledge. Fanaticism is generally traceable here.

"Purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous" (Titus 2:14). Purity and zeal should go together, and they should never be separated. Professor Seely said, "No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic." The church that will have a holy passion must be a holy church, and a holy church has a holy passion.

To King Edward VII, General Booth said, "Your majesty, some men's passion is gold, and some men's passion is fame, but my passion is souls." "The Gospel of a broken heart," said Dr. Jowett, "demands the ministry of a bleeding heart." A holy heart is a broken heart. It is a bleeding heart. It is a heart of passion.

What was it that moved father Abraham to offer his son, his dearest one? What was it that moved Moses to offer that wonderful prayer, "Forgive this people or blot out my name?" Was it not holy passion?

Look at the prophet, in the darkest hour, he was enthusiastic. He was optimistic, the most optimistic person in the whole realm. When everything was as black as night, he believed that God would vindicate His cause. He bubbled over, and spake forth the message of another God. His life, his utterances, his prophecies, were the outcome of holy passion.

The King's Highway

It was the Spirit of Christ that created passion in the prophets. The victory of the Messiah was already won with them; a thousand years is a day; "Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given," cried Isaiah.

Through Jesus we understand the prophet; the passion of the prophet. Christ filled up the Old and brought in the New. He is the foundation and meaning of the prophetic office, "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto your brethren like unto me, Him shall ye hear."

We often speak of "the week of passion," which, of course, is correct; but we could just as correctly speak of "the life of passion." The prophet said of Him, "He made naked His passion" (Isa. 53:12). The condescension, "He emptied Himself"; the imperativeness of His life, "I must work the work of Him that sent me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work;" the eagerness of Christ to accomplish, "He went before them and they were amazed:" these illustrate the body passion of His heart.

What was it that moved the apostles to brave death for Jesus' sake, and for one of the company, at least, to desire a more ignominious death than his Master, feeling his unworthiness to die even as his Master, hence Peter's request to die with his head downward? What a holy passion is seen in apostolic history! What was it that moved Huss to stand forth for God and the Word? What was it that moved Luther to take the stand he took? What was it that constrained Calvin to give his best, and what caused Knox to cry, "Give me Scotland or I die?" What was it that sent Paton to the South Sea Islands? Morrison to China? Livingstone to Africa? Chalmers to the Fly Island to be eaten by cannibals? What was it that constrained his mother to kneel on the deck of a ship in Calcutta and say, "O Jesus, I do this for Thee?" What was it that moved Wesley to say, "The world is my parish?" Why the words on Dr. A. Clarke's tombstone in London, "While giving light to others, I myself have been consumed?" What was it that sent Whitfield across the ocean so often, and that caused him to stand the last night of his life and preach to the hungry multitude? What was it that sent the early Methodists over the country like flames of fire? Holy passion! They were all heralds of a Passion!

"It is good to be zealously affected" (Gal. 4:18). "Be zealous, therefore" (Jesus). "If we must have religion," said Lord Melbourne, "let us at least have one that is cool and respectable." Christ said, "I am come to bring fire on the earth." That is not much like cool religion! Would an artist instruct his pupil to pursue the art without passion? The General gives like advice to his soldiers? The teacher to the pupil? Is there any accomplishment worthwhile in life without passion? Without a passion a creed, orthodox though it may be, is only the skin of truth stuffed. When the culture of the mind exceeds the culture of the soul, a man is educated beyond his capacity. Soul passion to the individual or the church is like the main spring to a watch.

Henry Drummond said, "An enthusiastic religion is the perfection of common sense. And to be beside oneself for Christ's sake is to be beside Christ, which is man's chief end for time and eternity."

Parker declared that when a church was recognized by the world to have gone clean mad, she was on the right road to conquer the planet for Jesus.

William James, in his "Varieties of Religious experiences" says, "I believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulae are secondary products."

Dr. John Watson says, "Every great movement which has stirred the depth of life and changed the face of history has sprung from some profound sentiment and powerful emotion."

Aristotle, "No great genius was ever without some admixture of madness."

Martin Luther had an allegory. Satan once held a conference with his workers. In this convention various reports were presented. One said, "I let loose wild beasts on a caravan of Christians in the desert and their bones are now bleaching the sands." "What of that?" returned their leader, "the wild beasts did not rend their souls." "I drove the east wind against a ship freighted with Christians," said another, "and they were all drowned." "What of that?" said Satan, "their souls were unharmed." A third said, "For ten years I have attempted to destroy the zeal of a disciple and at last I have succeeded." "Then all hell rang with a triumphant shouting of the sons of might led by their chief."

The great secret of holy passion is found in four things:

First, a three-fold vision: a vision of God high and lifted up and His train filling the temple; a vision of self, the unclean self and the need of cleansing: a vision of service, "Who will go for me?" "Here am I, send me" (Isa. 6). No vision, no passion: no passion, no accomplishment.

Second, enter sincerely into fellowship with Christ's suffering. "The fellowship of His suffering." "No man can win for God unless he is willing to pay the price in blood and tears." That is the price Jesus paid. One painter said that he secured the brilliant effect of his colours for which he was famous by mixing the colours with his own blood.

"I sat where they sat," said Ezekiel. "Remember those in bonds as bound with them" (Paul).

Third, hard and conscientious work. If one will read carefully the lives of persons who have made good, he will be impressed with the way they poured all their powers into their work. They were hard workers. "He who lives not in the due performance of every Christian duty," says Dr. A. Clarke. "Whatever faith he may profess is either a vile hypocrite or a scandalous antinomian."

Fourth, Honor the Holy Ghost, live where He is in you and on you, the Mighty Terrible One.

Bishop Taylor Smith had his Master's passion for preaching the Gospel. Not long before his death he was taken ill in San Francisco and was ordered to the hospital. There two friends visited him. It was eleven o'clock at night when they reached the hospital. When they opened the door of his room they saw the bishop with his two hands on the head of the nurse, praying earnestly on her behalf. They felt it was too sacred a scene to intrude. Later the nurse came out in tears and said, "That dear old man! I am the third nurse he has led to Christ today."<sup>1</sup>

1. *The Evangelical Christian.*