

Introduction (Rom 10:1-5)

One of the things that I keep before me all the time is to make my life count for the Lord. I want to be faithful and fruitful, and fulfill the ministry and calling that I have been given. I do not want to run in vain. I know that the apostle Paul felt the same way. In 1 Corinthians 9, he said that he disciplined his body and made it his slave so that after preaching to others he would not be disqualified. He did not want to be disqualified and all his labors to be in vain.

(1 Cor 9:27) “but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

In Psalms 127, Solomon wrote that if the Lord does not build the house, those that build it are laboring in vain. He said, “unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain.” He said it is vain to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for the Lord give to His beloved even in his sleep. I have always kept that in mind because I do not want to work hard, getting up early, retiring late and working hard, and it all be in vain. I want to build what the Lord is building, so that my labor is not in vain.

(Ps 127:1-2) “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. {2} It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved *even in his sleep.*”

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wrote about the resurrection of the dead. He said that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, our preaching is in vain, and our faith is in vain. What a terrible thing! For us to place our faith in Christ and to live our lives in service to him, and it all be in vain. But, praise God, Paul was only bringing out the importance of the resurrection, not saying it did not happen. The resurrection did take place, and our faith is not in vain.

(1 Cor 15:13-14) “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; {14} and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.”

Jesus talked about worshiping in vain. In Matthew 15:8-9, He said, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.” For me, what we teach is critically important. We need to teach the word of God, and teach it accurately, so that our worship is not in vain. Jesus was speaking about the Jews, who were holding on to the traditions of men, rather than the word of God. They were holding on to the form of religion and not a relationship with God.

(Matt 15:8-9) (Quote from Is 29:13) ““THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. {9} BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.””

Our message today is about vain religion. In our passage today, Paul mentions two reasons that the worship of the Jews was in vain. They had a zeal for God, but not in accordance to knowledge. Second, they tried to establish their own righteousness, but did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. Their worship was in vain. This grieved Paul. He loved his fellow kinsmen, and his desire and his prayer to God was to see them saved. Paul knew that their worship was in vain, that they were lost, and needed to be saved. I believe there are some valuable lessons that can be applied to all of us.

Vain Religion

1. Vain Zeal (Rom 10:1-2)
2. Vain Pursuit of Righteousness (Rom 10:3-5)

(Rom 10:1-5) “Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. {2} For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. {3} For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. {4} For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. {5} For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.”

1. Vain Zeal (Rom 10:1-2)

Paul's desire and prayer were for the salvation of the Jews. This implies that they were lost. In Romans 2, Paul wrote that a true Jew is one that has been circumcised in heart, not outwardly in the flesh. Even though the Jews had been circumcised outwardly, there had not been a circumcision of heart; they were lost.

(Rom 10:1) “Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation.”

(Rom 2:28-29) “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. {29} But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

In Romans 9, he wrote that not all descendants of Israel are Israel. Likewise, not all the descendants of Abraham are children of God. The Jews were lost, and Paul desired to see them saved, and he prayed accordingly.

(Rom 9:6-7) “But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; {7} nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."

Paul's first statement about the Jews is that they have a zeal for God. That is quite different than the church at Laodicea that was lukewarm. Some people don't care about God, religion, or anything; they are full of apathy. Not the Jews! They were passionate and zealous for God. The problem with their zeal is that it was not according to knowledge. A zeal for God is a great thing. However, a zeal not in accordance with knowledge is vain. The Jews were zealous about the Law and the traditions of the elders.

(Rom 10:2) “I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.”

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he said that he was advancing in Judaism beyond his contemporaries, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. Paul's zeal was more than average, but it represented the zeal that the Jews had for the Law and their traditions.

(Gal 1:14) “and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.”

Jesus was very zealous. In John 2:17, we see that Jesus had a zeal for the house of God; it consumed Him. This is a quote from Psalm 69:9, where David wrote that zeal for God's house consumed him. God's house is not a building, but it is where God dwells and resides. The Holy Spirit dwells in us. We are the temple of God. Together we are being built up into a spiritual house. Today, many people have lost their zeal for the church and for fellowship. Churches are reporting dramatic decreases in church attendance since the beginning of the COVID-19, which is understandable. God is shaking things up and those that can be shaken are being shaken. Zeal for the presence of God and fellowship with other believers is a great thing. We should all have a zeal for God's house.

(John 2:17) "His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME."

(Ps 69:9) "For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me."

After being saved, the apostle Paul's zeal changed; he began to have a zeal and passion to know God. It was no longer a Pharisaical zeal for the Law and traditions; he had a zeal to know God. Paul said that he counted all things as rubbish compared to knowing God. Paul was zealous about knowing God. Paul spent time praying and worshipping and seeking the Lord.

(Phil 3:8) "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,"

Paul was also zealous for God's house. Instead of persecuting the church, Paul was planting and establishing churches. If there was a church already established in an area that he traveled to, he would search out the believers and connect with them. In Acts 9, after Paul had fled from Damascus and gone back to Jerusalem, he tried to attach himself to the disciples, i.e. the church. The NASB says that he tried to associate with the disciples, and I don't think that is really what he tried to do. The Greek word is kollao (Strong's G2853), which means to glue together. The ESV and KJV say that he tried to join the disciples, which is better, but still does not give the full impact of being glued or fastened to them. When a person cleaves in a marriage covenant, the Greek word that is used is proskollao. I believe that Christians need to be in a covenant relationship with other believers in a local church. I am passionate and zealous for the local church, which is what the apostle Paul was also zealous about.

(Acts 9:26) "When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple."

The Jews were zealous, but not in accordance with knowledge. They sought to establish their own righteousness by keeping the Law. They were zealous about the Law. They were also zealous about their traditions and interpretations of the Law. Paul, before coming to Christ, was also zealous, but not in accordance to knowledge. He was zealous about the Law. He was also zealous in attacking anyone who had a different belief, and in particular, those that claimed to be disciples of Christ. In Philippians 3, he wrote that he was a persecutor of the church. He ravaged the church and put people in prison, and had them put to death. It was on a trip to Damascus to find Christians in order to imprison and put them to death that God blinded him, and revealed Himself to him.

(Phil 3:6) “as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

A lot of people are zealous today, but not according to knowledge. There are lots of cults, and their zealous followers go door to door with their false teachings. The Mormons go on missions, and frequently go out in the neighborhoods sharing their false message about Christ. They do not believe that Jesus is God, so they have rejected the trinity. The Jehovah’s Witnesses go around sharing their magazines and false doctrine. They also do not believe that Jesus is God. The Muslims are a zealous group, and like Paul, they are zealous to destroy anyone who is not a Muslim or will convert to Islam. There are almost 100,000 people martyred every year around the world, and the majority of these are put to death by Muslim fanatics. They are zealous, but not in accordance with knowledge.

Besides religious groups, there are lots of people that are zealous about worldly things. People are zealous about sports, hobbies, and other interests. I have met many golf enthusiasts that live, eat, drink, sleep, and talk golf all the time. They are zealous about golf. There are zealous fanatics about college football. I see people painting themselves with school colors and going shirtless in thirty-degree weather. That is a zealous fanatic, but it is not in accordance with knowledge.

God wants us to be zealous for Him. God wants us to be zealous for His house, the place where He dwells, and where His people gather to worship Him. God wants us to be zealous for spiritual gifts, especially the greater gifts, like prophecy and teaching. He wants us to be zealous about the gifts that edify the entire body, not just the individual believer. God wants us to be zealous, but zealous for the right things. We must be zealous for Him, zealous for the kingdom of God, zealous for the church and for the things that will build up the church. Any zealousness outside of the knowledge of God is vain religion.

(1 Cor 14:1) “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly (zeal, Strong’s G2206) spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.”

2. **Vain Pursuit of Righteousness** (Rom 10:3-5)

The second statement that Paul makes about the Jews is that they tried to establish their own righteousness by keeping the Law, rather than subjecting themselves to the righteousness of God.

(Rom 10:3) “For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”

It is only by placing our faith in Christ that we are justified and made righteous. They did not know about God’s righteousness, and so they tried to establish their own righteousness. Abraham was reckoned as righteous, but it came through faith in God. The Law had not even been given when Abraham believed God. The sign of the covenant, circumcision, had not been given when Abraham was reckoned as righteous. Abraham had believed God and was reckoned as righteous. The Jews missed this very important principle, and tried to establish their own righteousness. Even though they were physical descendants of Abraham, they were not all spiritual descendants of Abraham. They had an outward circumcision, but not an inward circumcision. They looked good, but their hearts were evil.

(Gen 15:6) “Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

In Matthew 23, Jesus addressed this outward appearance of righteousness. He said that the scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. He said to do all that they said, but do not do according to their deeds because they were hypocrites. He said they do all things to be noticed by men, and love places of honor at banquets. It was all outward.

(Matt 23:1-7) "Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, {2} saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; {3} therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*. {4} "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger. {5} "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels *of their garments*. {6} "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, {7} and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men."

Then, He proceeded to give eight woes to these religious leaders who were trying to establish their own righteousness. In verse 13, He said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites..." He said they shut off the kingdom of heaven from people. We enter the kingdom of heaven by faith in God, not by outward works.

(Matt 23:13) "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."

In verse fourteen, He called them hypocrites again, telling them that they devoured widows' houses and for a pretense made long prayers. Again, it was an evil lifestyle, but an outward appearance of righteousness.

(Matt 23:14) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation."

In verses twenty-five through thirty-three, He said they cleaned the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they were full of robbery and self-indulgence. The righteousness of God starts with a clean heart. God cleanses us from the inside out. The Jews were seeking to establish their own righteousness, but it was all outward. They were full of evil on the inside. So, Jesus told them to first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, and then the outside would become clean also. Jesus said they were like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appeared beautiful, but inside they were full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. They appeared righteous to men, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Jesus concluded, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escaped the sentence of hell?"

(Matt 23:25-33) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. {26} "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. {27} "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. {28} "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness... {33} "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?"

The Jews did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God, which comes by faith. The Jews were seeking to establish their own righteousness by outward works. Many people think that they are righteous when they compare their works and lives to others. However, the righteousness of God requires us to compare our lives with God's righteousness. By that standard, we are all sinners and need God's forgiveness and cleansing. The reason that Jesus, the Lamb of God, came was to take away the sins of the world. Notice what Paul says in verse four, "for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Our righteousness comes by placing our faith in Christ. Like Abraham, we must believe God, and it will be reckoned to us as righteousness.

(Rom 10:4) "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The law of righteousness that Moses wrote that the law of righteousness required us to live by that righteousness. The problem is that none of us could attain to that righteousness. Through the Law came the knowledge of sin; it did not make us righteous. The only way that we could become righteous is by believing God for our righteousness. In Romans 3, Paul wrote that by the Law every mouth was closed and became accountable to God because by the works of the Law no flesh would be justified in His sight. "For through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." The Jews had tried to establish their own righteousness, but had not subjected themselves to the righteousness of God which comes by faith.

(Rom 10:5) "For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness."

(Rom 3:19-20) "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; {20} because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin."

Conclusion and Applications

Our passage today is about vain religion. The Jews had zeal, but not according to righteousness. The Jews sought righteousness, but they tried to establish their own righteousness instead of believing and trusting God. Their zealotness and self-righteousness were in vain; they were lost. Paul's desire and his prayer were for their salvation.

How is your zeal this morning? Are you zealous for God? It is easy to know when you are zealous about something; you pursue it. When I was a professional golfer, I worked hard at my golf. Nobody had to make me run, lift weights, or practice long hours; I was zealous. What are the things that you are zealous about? What are the things that consume you and your time? Are you zealous about God? Do you long to spend time in worship? Do you long to spend time praying and fellowshiping with Him? Do you long to spend time in God's word? Do you look forward to gathering together with other believers and fellowshiping with them? Are you zealous about using your gifts to serve others? What are you zealous about? If your zeal has not been towards God and His kingdom, I encourage you to repent and do the deeds you did at first. God wants to be our first love. He wants us to love Him with our whole heart. Put God at the top of your priority list this coming year, and start right now.

Introduction (Rom 10:1-5, 1 Cor 9:27, Ps 127:1-2, 1 Cor 15:13-14, Matt 15:8-9)

1. **Vain Zeal** (Rom 10:1-2, Rom 2:28-29, 9:6-7, Gal 1:14, John 2:17, Ps 69:9, Phil 3:8, Acts 9:26, Phil 3:6, 1 Cor 14:1)

2. **Vain Pursuit of Righteousness** (Rom 10:3-5, Matt 23:1-7, 23:13, 23:25-33, Rom 3:19-20)

Conclusion and Applications