



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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"For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9)

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LORD'S DAY 05 APRIL 2009

Never be Lacking in Zeal

By Rev Geoffrey Thomas, pastor of Baptist Church in Alfred Place, Aberystwyth

Adapted from Banner of Truth website

The apostle Paul exhorts the congregation in Rome in Romans 12:11 'Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.' This text is easily understood; there are no complicated words; the structure is obvious. First of all the exhortation is stated in a negative form telling us we're never to lack zeal. Then that is followed by the positive command which tells us what we're to do, 'keep your spiritual fervour.' Finally, we are told the context in which such exhortations are set, serving the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to do so fervently. That is what our text is saying, and I don't want to make it complicated.

This is the word of God that confronts us now, and it is not before us primarily that we might understand what it says. I hardly need to explain to you what it says; you can all grasp the meaning of these words. Most of you knew before you came here that you should serve the Lord zealously, long before you read these words; in fact you've known it for years. It is not here so that we tick another Christian virtue in the wonderful list of those graces arrayed before us in this chapter – 'O.K. Now we've done 'spiritual fervour' we can move on to the next virtue.' These words are not here to be taken home in a copy of the sermon which you've tucked into your Bible and put on the shelf with the others. These words are in our faces in order that that you and I might actually change, and become more spiritually fervent as Christians. That is why God has brought us here today.

All Scripture is profitable for correcting us and instructing us in righteousness. In the providence of God we are going to be instructed in not losing our zeal but keeping our spiritual fervour. God has caused us to come here to deliver us from a mere show of discipleship. You know that you have to accept your providence; so in God's mercy you are here in order that your spiritual zeal be recaptured, and if you leave as you came then I haven't succeeded in the task God has given me. If you can hear a message on 'never be lacking in zeal and keeping your spiritual fervour' and yet be unmoved, then my preparation was inadequate and my proclamation has come to nought, and whose fault is that? It's not God's in bringing you here, and so it will be partly mine for preaching too coldly and vaguely and boringly, but it will be also yours for being a hearer only and not a doer of the Word.

It was not enough that these Roman Christians were orthodox in believing all that Paul had laid out in these first eleven chapters. It was not enough that they had presented their bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord and that they were living righteous lives. They also needed to be fervent in spirit, not lacking in zeal. You remember that John Wesley was...

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a Trinitarian and a founder member of the Holy Club in Oxford, sound and righteous, but it was not for many more years after Oxford that he became the great evangelist he undoubtedly was. This was after his heart was 'strangely warmed' at a meeting in London.

How important that is. To possess a wise and zealous spirit should be the ambition of each one of us. It is one of the most important longings we could have. The great evangelistic preacher and founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, was once asked to address a large clerical conference of Anglican vicars. He moved them with his fervour as he recounted the thousands who had been converted and the halls he had planted in slums in every city in the British Isles. Some vicars came on to him afterwards and pleaded with him to receive Episcopal ordination into the Church of England. That is what he needed, they told him, the hands of a bishop on his head, and then he would be complete. Of course Booth rejected their request. They were blind to the fact that they were the ones who needed the zeal and fervour that he possessed, that the hands of no man upon their heads could give them - be they the hands of a bishop, an archbishop or a presbyter.

1. DEFINING SPIRITUAL FERVOUR

The word means movement, haste or speed. It conveys the idea of eagerness, intense and earnest effort, doing what needs to be done, making a real business of it, going for it, taking it up in earnest without slackness. It means no trifling with Christianity, not playing at religion, no slothfulness in following Christ, but rather a seriousness and a dedication to finishing what you have begun. You all know how important that is in any calling a person takes up. A woman is set to become a hairdresser, or a baker of special cakes, or a maker of children's clothes. If she is going to have any success at all in her career then she must give herself 100% to the enterprise. There must be industry, strenuous and unremitting, to get the enterprise going. She must be willing to forego ease as a luxury, and spend herself and be spent in her work.

Now we are talking about the life of the Christian as he serves God, and it is a spiritual calling. We are not talking about the excitement of an expanding business to an inveterate businessman – he needs no encouragement from us. We are not talking about the joy of painting to an artist – creating works of art is his life. We are not having to enthuse a conductor with the thrill of leading an orchestra. We are not speaking of making money to a miser. Nothing diverts his eye from that task; nothing slackens his speed by day or night. I need not preach to such men of industry and effort. There is no danger that they will suffer through slovenliness marring their achievements. They will do their work with zeal, for their hearts identify with their work. Today, we are speaking to each Christian of this fascinating calling of loving God with all his heart, and loving his neighbour as himself. We are addressing the subject of how it is possible to fulfil zealously man's chief end of glorifying God and enjoying him for ever. This is not a work that comes out of the natural bent and bias of your mind. No one takes naturally to honouring God. You surely don't think that all you need do is let it alone and your spirit will flourish without any effort on your part. It needs every exhortation and encouragement that is at hand, and they will be scarcely enough. So Paul exhorts them, 'Keep your spiritual fervour!'

2. UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL FERVOUR

There are two ways in which you receive this, firstly a definitive and once for all gift of God, and then, secondly, a progressing and growing enabling from God.

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i] First, the definitive means of gaining spiritual fervour is by the new birth, by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Let's approach it this way, that the word 'fervour' means to boil or to be aglow — either interpretation, because both make the same point. If you put a saucepan of water on the oven, then at first it is motionless, but once the heat gets at it then it begins to boil. It comes alive, as it were. So it is with being aglow — it is the figurative language of a fire. The fire gives off heat; there is life in it. So every Christian is to be fervent in spirit. But in order to be fervent in spirit, you must be alive, and that means a fire needs to be lit within you. You need the Holy Spirit working in you. You need him in your heart and life so that you won't be lacking in zeal, but you'll remain fervent. It is that Spirit that lights the fire and makes things glow. That is what you've been designed for. God has made you; Jesus Christ has died to save you; the Holy Spirit has filled you. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are your enablement.

What can you achieve without the fire of the Holy Spirit? It is the Holy Spirit that radiates his holy glow. What good are your prayers without the warmth of the Holy Spirit? What good is your Bible reading without the illumination of the Holy Spirit? What good is your testimony to someone without the co-testimony of the Holy Spirit? What good is your singing and all your worship today unless it is through the Holy Spirit in you? If you are not fervent in spirit, you may belong to some religious system which from the outside looks active and strong and ancient. That may initially impress you and other people, but without the Holy Spirit who warms you and from whom praise and service flow, you're nothing but a cold, empty stove. You need the Holy Spirit to stir you to holiness, to godliness and to righteousness.

I think you all know enough about life and death to understand that you can't warm to life a dead body by external heat. No matter how much heat you carefully apply by wrapping the corpse in an electric blanket until the corpse is 98.7 degrees, that process can't put any living heat into the body. You switch off the blanket and the body grows cold again. As soon as the spirit leaves the body, the corpse becomes cold and moribund. Heat is needed from the inside to warm the body and to be its life. You know that, don't you? The only way in which our bodies get warm and remain warm is when the Spirit of God is there within our lives. The only possible way that you can become spiritually warm, and live eternally, is when you have the Holy Spirit within you. Those who have the Holy Spirit of God are alive unto God. That is what will make them glow. That's the beginning of spiritual fervour, in a birth from God.

ii] Secondly, there is the progressive work. You attain spiritual fervour by going on being filled with the Spirit, and by stirring up the gift of the Spirit within you. The Lord is saying in our text that we must remain fervent all our lives; the glow must continue. Don't quench the Holy Spirit who is at work in you. If you begin to live according to the flesh, then decomposition takes place. We decay from within. The battle for fervour is won or lost in our hearts. Joseph won the battle in Potiphar's household. He gained the victory over the temptations of Potiphar's wife by an inward triumph. When you start giving in to the desires of the flesh decomposition takes place; you lose some of the fire. Your faith life becomes dull. Doubt, uncertainty and all sorts of distractions crowd in, because the work of the Spirit is being quenched and it's getting smaller and smaller. Our only hope is the mercy of Christ sending forth the Spirit constantly into our lives. You remember the scene Bunyan pictures in Interpreter's House in Pilgrim's Progress:

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Then I saw in my dream, that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a Fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the Fire burn higher and hotter. Then said Christian, What means this? The Interpreter answered, This Fire is the Work of Grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the Devil: But in that thou seest the Fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that. So he had him about to the back side of the wall, where he saw a Man with a Vessel of Oil in his hand, of which he did also continually cast (but secretly) into the Fire. Then said Christian, What means this? The Interpreter answered, This is Christ, who continually with the Oil of his Grace maintains the work already begun in the heart: By the means of which, notwithstanding what the Devil can do, the souls of his people prove gracious still. And in that thou sawest, that the man stood behind the wall to maintain the Fire; this is to teach thee that it is hard for the Tempted to see how this Work of Grace is maintained in the soul.

We go through a tough time, with many falls and heartaches. 'How am I still trusting in Christ?' you ask yourself. The answer is that Jesus Christ remains faithful, and he keeps your faith alive; he pours into you the Holy Spirit day by day. So don't you extinguish the fires of faith in your own heart through defiant sins. Let's be assured of this, that it is the Spirit who sustains our light and warmth. The Spirit at work in us is the powerhouse, generating the glow in both body and soul, that we can be zealous to do the work of the Lord in the world – 'among whom you shine as lights in the world.'

Are you fervent in spirit? If not, in what are you fervent? What are the things that really set you on fire? Surely not drink and drugs and sex – not sins like that. Is it cars, money, your job? Is it material things that pass away? Or does your soul really long for the living God? Do you get warm and thankful when you see someone walking in the ways of the Lord? Are you zealous about mission and evangelism?

You are called by the Lord to be a glowing fire for the Lord. You are the light of the world. There are fireplaces and stoves to be seen in certain shops in our town, all nicely polished, and they seem to have a fire burning away in them, but on examination the fire is merely a red bulb with red plastic flames and artificial coals with no warmth because there is no true fire in those stoves. What sort of fire is in you today before the Lord? Real or counterfeit? Where are you going in your life? What direction are you taking? Is it to the Lord Jesus Christ? How do you hope to create heat and light in your life bringing honour to the Lord? What sort of a holy zeal is burning inside of you? Is it ultimately for yourself or is the Holy Spirit leading you? Is your life ruled by chance, by circumstances, by yourself or are you being led by the Spirit of God? Is it by whatever happens to come first or is it determined by every word that is written in the Scriptures by the Lord? What sort of fire is burning in your heart? Is it a fire from the Lord, by the Lord, for the Lord? Is there a warm glow from heaven inside of you, with that quiet assurance that the Lord is leading you and directing you in your life?

If I can put it this way: what's cooking in your life that will be a blessing to others, and honouring to the Lord? Now God is not demanding from every one of us that we be loud, crackling log fires. The hottest fire is one where there is just a very nice glow from within, sometimes very quietly, but warming all who come into its range. They can all benefit...

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from the pleasant heat. Eliza Doolittle sings of, 'Lotsa coal giving lotsa 'eat. Warm 'ands, warm face, warm feet, Ah, wouldn't it be lovely?' That lovely work is what the Holy Spirit goes on producing in every Christian, so you can tell that the Spirit is at work in a person's life, not by the noise that they make but by the warmth that comes from them. To be fervent in spirit is to be sustained by a glow that comes from God himself. Then you know, and then you are prepared to serve the Lord in time. Go on being filled with the Spirit.

3. INCREASING IN SPIRITUAL FERVOUR

I will tell you. There is no mystery at all to this. There is not one way to true fervour. There is no master key that opens every life to being fervent in Spirit. Let me give you many directives that are truly important, and some not so important (you must decide which is which for we are all different members of the body). How may this grace of true zeal be yours in greater abundance than it is at present? Thirty guidelines:

1. Don't neglect asking God to make you more fervent in spirit every single day.
2. Go to bed on time and get up on time each morning so that you start unrushed.
3. Sit under the best ministry you can get each Sunday. If you can get better preaching elsewhere why stay here? Life is too short.
4. Hitch your wagon to a star. Our lives are creaking old wagons; our congregation is a groaning wagon, but there are stars to which we can be hitched. I am talking of Martin Luther, John Bunyan, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, J. Gresham Machen, Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Read what they say; if they have recordings then listen to them. Learn of their lives and their battles. Makes them your role models – a number of men not one. Let their example and teaching help draw you through life. Hitch your wagon to them.
5. Unclutter your life. Our lives are all a pruning away what is inessential and a search for the simple things of the gospel.
6. Allow extra time to do things and to get to people and places.
7. Pace yourself. Spread out big changes and difficult projects over a period; don't lump the hard things all together.
8. Take one day at a time.
9. Separate your worries from your concerns. If a situation is a concern, think about it, and ask God what he would have you do and let go of the anxiety, and put your trust in him. Why worry about situations concerning which you can do nothing? Commit it to the Lord and get on with life.
10. Live within your budget; don't use credit cards for ordinary purchases.
11. Have backups; an extra car key in a friend's house, an extra house key buried in the garden. A rickety old laptop, even a typewriter for emergencies.
12. K.M.S. (Keep Mouth Shut). This can prevent an enormous amount of trouble.
13. Carry a Bible with you to read while waiting in line.
14. When we are ill we are never quite as ill as we imagine we are. We always add on a proportion. Remember you are never as bad as you think you are.
15. Get enough rest, and eat sensible enjoyable food. One morning you don't feel like reading the Scriptures. You don't feel like working or praying. So you tend to say to yourself, 'Well I'm not feeling well today and I can't do this.' No. You mustn't say that, you must rouse yourself. Shake off dull sloth and joyful rise.
16. We all feel better if our minds are being exercised. Read more than the daily paper and novels. Do more than watch the TV. Think. Read non-fiction. The more you use your mind the better.

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17. Get organized so that you use your time to maximal efficiency. It is amazing what you can do if you plan well.
18. Listen to CD's while driving. That can redeem the time.
19. Write down thoughts and inspirations that have come to you or you'll forget them.
20. Every day, find time to be alone. Once again, every day, find time to be alone.
21. When you are bowed down then talk to God on the spot. Try to nip small problems in the bud. Don't wait until later.
22. Make friends with as many godly people as you can.
23. Keep some little cards; inscribe new scriptures on them; commit them to memory.
24. Remember that the shortest bridge between despair and hope is to say, 'The Lord Omnipotent is King.'
25. Keep smiling when you are tricked and criticised.
26. Take your work and studies seriously, but not yourself at all.
27. Develop a forgiving attitude (most Christians are doing the best they can).
28. Do everything for double usefulness. Bake two cakes or two quiches and take one to someone who is housebound. Write two letters to missionaries when you are in the rare writing mood.
29. Men and women, 'we must hurry.' That was the great word of William Chalmers Burns in Scotland as he thought of the shortness of the time. Buy up the opportunities of the week that lies ahead. It will never return.
30. Never resist an inclination to pray.

So Paul is urging you to ensure that the energy of the Spirit is at work in you constantly with no hindrances preventing it. Resist the hindrances, remove the obstacles, and maintain the glow. You cannot work up the fire but you can remove the ashes and be stirring up the gift of God within you. We must not quench the Spirit. We must resist the drift to becoming lukewarm. That is not an option. The Lord will spew us out of his mouth if we do not become fervent in spirit. We must recapture every day our first love.

4. SERVING THE LORD

How did the apostle Paul serve the Lord? Surely he did it with a fervent heart. What did that mean for him? I will say this, that we don't find the apostle Paul talking that much about how bad the Roman Empire was. We don't hear the apostle Paul complaining about all the things that had happened to him, all the persecutions he'd had to endure. We don't find any kind of focus on Paul himself. He is too busy serving the Lord. He used every day's opportunities to make known the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. He sees a statue of an unknown god, and what does he do? He climbs the steps and proclaims to the Greeks who that unknown God is. He appears before King Agrippa, whom he knows has some knowledge of the gospel since he is married to a Jewess. So he drives the claims of the gospel home to that person, to the point that the king cries out, 'You have almost persuaded me to become a Christian!' When he stands before the Sadducees and Pharisees, he knows there is a difference between how they look at the resurrection, so he uses the occasion to speak about the resurrection.

This world, like your body, is dying. It is dying very quickly. It needs help. That is why you must rush to your neighbour's needs with a compassionate heart. You may not be like that fancy front room fire, all polished up, sitting in the showroom shining but with no heat in it at all. You are to be a burning woodstove to provide heat and warmth in a freezing world.

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You must provide nourishment that is cooked and ready to be served. I know the apostle Paul and Jesus also spoke very sharply to those who were hypocritical office-bearers and teachers. They too must be addressed in the same way today. But primarily you must also use your time to help those who are prisoners in jail, those who are helpless.

Men and women, there are so many today who are not behind steel bars, but who are prisoners of wrong habits, wrong thinking, who are captivated and led astray by the evil one. They need to be set right. They need to hear the Word of the Lord. You, who are given the warmth of the Holy Spirit, must now use every opportunity so that you may bring the healing light of the Holy Spirit to those who are cold and lifeless around you. The Lord Jesus Christ did not purchase you, neither did the Holy Spirit come with power to live in you, so that you could retire very comfortably into an apartment on the Riviera, so that you could just close the door and have a nice time of fellowship with all the other holy old people who have retired there. By God's grace we may have fellowship, and we praise the Lord for it, but we may not withdraw into a corner, as if we are too holy for a sinful world, because then we are hiding the light under a bushel. Our last years must be our most important and useful years.

You must keep all things in life in perspective of the return of Jesus Christ. Keep that in mind, by all means. Look for it, hastening unto the coming of the day of God, when the heavens shall be dissolved and the elements will melt with fervent heat. The world is going to disappear. We know that, and we have to keep that in mind while we have time, men and women. For how long is it going to last? We see whole continents coming under the darkness of a false and evil philosophy of man, so that the gospel can no longer be brought. How long will we have to bring the warmth and the love of Jesus Christ?

Only those who have the Spirit of God can bring the gospel to a sin-sick world, cold, lifeless, dead. You may not sit back, self-satisfied and comfortable in your own little world, rejoicing with the few that are going to heaven. This is the time that you are to claim, and bring the warmth and love of Jesus Christ in every opportunity that you have. No matter where you live, what you do, or what your age is, it doesn't matter. It does not matter where you go because the fire is inside. That is the fire in you that gives warmth, and you can share that warmth and love. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. He gave his life as a ransom for many. That is your task also. Again, day after day, you are to deny yourself, offer up yourself, and give yourself. You don't have to worry. Don't think that by giving up yourself and denying yourself, you are going to run out of heat. The Holy Spirit is the one who provides the heat, and his heat is unlimited. He will supply you with everything that you need, provided you are giving out the heat.

The time is short. Very often you may have only one opportunity to speak to someone about the Lord. Often you may have one opportunity in your whole life to help one person. Don't miss it. Don't let it go by. If you are willing to be the least, you will be the greatest. Do not let your pride or your self-preoccupation stand in the way. Men and women, be diligent, not slothful. Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord in time, until the Lord returns. He's coming and how soon it will be in the light of eternity — hallelujah!

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME			
Morning	Today: 05/04/2009	Next Week: 12/04/2009	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day.			
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Joey Seow				
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Lim Chee Boon	Rev Lim Chee Boon				
<i>Message:</i>	The Name of God Almighty	Truths Relating to the Ressurection	NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS			
<i>Text:</i>	Exodus 6:1–8	1 Corinthians 15:1–20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We welcome back Rev Lim Chee Boon to London. He will be ministering to us for the month of April, including the church camp. 			
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Anthony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling of Resident Minister: Continue to pray for the Lord's calling for Rev Timothy Ki to serve as our resident minister. Pray for his visa application. 			
Evening			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church Easter Camp – 10 to 13 April: The theme is "Transformation through the teaching of the Beatitudes". Registration forms can be obtained from John. Also, please inform John if you would like to help out with the camp. 			
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Jonathan Kim				
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Lim Chee Boon	Rev Lim Chee Boon				
<i>Message:</i>	A New Creation	The Lord is Good				
<i>Text:</i>	2 Corinthians 5:1–17	Psalm 34:1–8				
<i>Pianist:</i>	Anthony	Hubert				
Other Duties						
	Today: 05/03/2009	Next Week: 12/04/2009				
<i>Ushers</i>	John / Evelyn	Daniel / Sharon				
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	No Sunday School	No Sunday School				
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance				
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers				
<i>PA Crew:</i>	Nicholas	Lee Wei				
Appointments of the Week						
Fri 10 Apr	Young Adults Fellowship: No Meeting (Easter weekend)					
Sat 11 Apr 4:00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Prayer Meeting					
<u>Last Week's Worship Service Collections</u>						
Offering: £219.61	Lunch: £24.00					
<u>As Thy Days</u>						
Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.						
<p>There is in the Bible no promise of grace in advance of the need. God does not say he will put strength into our arm for the battle while we are in quiet peace and the battle is yet far off. When the conflict is at hand the strength will be given. He does not open the gates for us, nor roll away the stones, until we have come up to them. He did not divide the Jordan's waters while the people were yet in their camps, nor even as they began to march toward the river. The wild stream continued to flow as the host moved down the banks, even until the feet of the priests had been dipped in the water. This is the constant law of divine help. It is not given in advance. As we come up to the need the supply is ready, but not before. Yet many Christians worry because they cannot see the way opened and the needs supplied far in advance of their steps. Shall we not let God provide and have faith in him?</p>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DHW Bible Study: Please pick up your study notes from at the book table in the Fellowship Hall. • Pray for those who are sick: Douglas (knee pain), Maria (ankle and joint pain), Constance (left heel pain), Margaret (cough) • Pray for those applying for visa: Josh & Hannah • Pray for on travel: Joey & family (Switzerland & Greece), Joshua (Europe), Sophia (Europe), Joshua & Hannah (New Zealand), Grace & Chun Long (S'pore), Joy (Brunei), Sharon (Tanzania), George & Susan (M'sia). 						