

A CASE OF ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

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The statement of Paul regarding the mindset of Israel following the establishment of the church was the result of Divine inspiration, not his merely being judgmental or mean-spirited. He wrote, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:1-3). In subsequent years and even centuries when this same condition is recognized, the desire of Paul's heart for his people Israel to be saved is shared by those who likewise love the people of their generation.

In the United States one of the best known Pentecostal preachers of the mid to late twentieth century is Oral Roberts. The Trinity Broadcasting Station, owned by Paul and Jan Crouch, recently has been airing film of the tent meetings Oral Roberts conducted in various places across the country in the 1950's. Roberts made two statements then which he continues to uphold which bear investigation and review.

First, in fervent tones he preached, "But as many as received him...." The elaboration that followed included accepting Jesus into the heart personally and literally and "getting saved." Then on to more of the verse, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power." Roberts' oration reached fever pitch as he embellished the reception of "the power" and claimed it even puts a twinkle in the eye! His discussion of the text in which these phrases occur stopped right at that point. He placed a period after the power.

Roberts' work constitutes a case of zeal without knowledge because, for whatever reasons he might have had and continues to have, he turned a text of sacred scripture into a pretext for what he wanted to say instead of what the Bible actually says.

An analysis of the full text of the verse will show that the application Roberts made of it is more than skewed; it is twisted and false. The verse from which he was attempting to quote is John 1:12-13 which says in full, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the

will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). Roberts taught that when a person “received him” he “gets saved” and after “getting saved” receives miraculous power. However, John wrote that the ones that received him, number one, obtained power, number two, “to become the sons of God,” number three. Roberts tried to make number one number three! In order further to expose the erroneous position of Roberts observe that if a person is saved when he “received him (Christ),” then that person is saved before he even becomes a son of God! The result would be a saved person who is not a child of God!

Second, Roberts then quoted Romans 10:9 and said after you are saved you want to and must confess Jesus Christ. He quoted the text accurately, but he was not embarrassed that he misapplied it. The text says, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Roberts has a person saved before he ever confessed Christ! The tenses of the verbs relating to salvation here are all in the future tense. The verse that follows likewise strengthens the point that belief in Christ and confession of Christ must be made “with a view toward salvation” or “unto” salvation. Paul wrote, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10). Again, Roberts showed a flagrant abuse of the Bible. Was zeal present? Indisputably. Was knowledge present? Absolutely not! In fact, a demonstration of twisting the scriptures to his own destruction was made (II Pet. 3:16).

The case just investigated presents zeal without knowledge. Several lessons may be gleaned from this shocking and sad recounting of Roberts’ preaching which he still upholds today. (The TBS presentation would show the fifties tent meeting and then flash forward to today with Roberts’ comments). First, some may never come to the knowledge of the truth. Paul wrote of this in II Timothy 3:7, “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Second, the faithful must remain ever vigilant in the battle for the truth. Those who teach fatal error have not changed their position across the years, and some even continue to wield a significant force. The elders from Ephesus were told, “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:31-32). The same sword that was used to cut error out of the hearts of men half a century ago must be kept sharp today. The book of Ephesians says, “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17).

Third, the ultimate defeat of the enemy and the final victory of the church do not occur in this lifetime. Paul wrote, “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” (II Thess. 2:8). Fourth, Christians living today should appreciate more and more what the previous generation did in defeating error and upholding the truth of God and preserving these soul-saving truths for those who follow. Moses the prophet by inspiration advised, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee” (Deut. 32:7).

Fifth, parents should insist that adequate preparation to meet the foes of the faith by equipping their children with the knowledge both of their arguments and how to answer them by the Bible be given by their Bible teachers in their classes at the church building, by those volunteering to work with the youth in their gatherings, and by the Christian schools if the families are privileged enough to send their children to them. Parents have the Divine right to ask for this from those entrusted with the spiritual development of their children (cf. Gal. 4:1-2). Sixth, being zealous about something does not insure its acceptability before God. Zeal alone may yield today, as it did with Israel in the first century, self-righteousness. Both knowledge and zeal are required. The Bible makes plain, “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:1-3).