



Boiling for Jesus

Gospel Culture, Part 4

Romans 12:11

David Sunday

February 11, 2018

Today we'll be focusing on Romans 12:11, but I want to read verses one and two as well, so we will remember the context. This is the Word of the living God:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Then in verse 11 we see three aspects of what it means to present ourselves to God like this:

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

A few weeks ago, we were just drenched with a heavy downpour of cold winter rain. The street we live on slopes downhill toward the Fox River, so usually when it rains the water flows through a ditch, under our driveway and down toward the river. But on January 22, that wasn't happening. The ditch was filling up on the east side of the driveway, overflowing our front yard and on to our driveway. It was turning into an ice rink out there. I knew enough to realize this wasn't good and that something would have to be done about it.

I could tell in the morning it was going to be a problem, and by that evening when I got home it really was a big problem. So if you would have driven down Fox River Drive around 9:00 p.m. on Monday, January 22—and I was really hoping none of you were driving down my street at that moment—you would have seen me out in the dark, literally lying prostrate on my face with my head hanging over this ditch that was full of water. I had kitchen gloves on and I was sticking my hands down into this frigid water, helplessly trying to figure out what was plugging this culvert. I even broke a rake as I was sticking it down there, thinking maybe a tree branch was stuck in there. I found out later that it was the electric wiring for our front yard outdoor lights.

When I went inside to thaw my arms under the hot water, I was mocked by at least a couple family members for my exercise in futility—not Kate though. I actually asked her if we had a pair of waders and rubber boots. I was going to call Dan Leeper to see if he had some waders so that I could go into that huge pool of water and to figure out what was plugging everything.

That's when I decided to put Romans 12 into practice. I decided that since God has given diverse gifts to the body, I shouldn't think of myself more highly than I ought. I should think with sober judgment. I thought, "Who in the body has the gift that I lack right now?" Two guys in our church came to mind, and one of them—Greg Anliker—showed up the next day, with his coworker Will.

They didn't do what I did. They didn't start flat on their faces with their arms in icy water where the water was flooding over. They didn't start on the east side, where all the water was. They went to the west side, where it was dry, where the water wasn't coming through. Wasn't that smart? Then they stuck a heated rod in the culvert, under the driveway—and wouldn't you know, there was a block of frozen ice in that culvert. So once that ice melted, the water began to flow freely. Wasn't that great?

I tell you this story, not to point out how foolish I can be at times—trying to unplug things I don't know how to unplug. I'm telling you this story because all of us know what it's like to become frozen in our service to the Lord. I won't ask for a show of hands like a pastor in England did when he asked the congregation to close their eyes and put up their hands if they felt disappointed with how following Jesus stacked up to their initial hopes and expectations. He said it was shocking how many hands went up in his congregation.

I would be surprised if most of us at times didn't feel like there's a blockage in our relationship with the Lord. I think most of us come to times when we feel stuck, not being able to honestly say every day, "I'm continually presenting myself as a sacrifice to the Lord, holy and acceptable and well-pleasing in His sight." I can't honestly say every day, "I'm excited to pursue the will of God, which is good and acceptable and perfect." I'm not always eager to use the gifts the Holy Spirit has given me to build up the body of Christ. I'm not always ablaze with a genuine love for God's people, hating what is evil and holding fast to what is good, loving with brotherly affection, outdoing one another to show honor.

No, that's not always the case. We get cold. Sometimes we get stuck, frozen. There's a blockage and we need to know how to get unstuck. We need to know how to get our passion back, which it starts with admitting that where we're at right now is not where we should be.

Honestly confess it to the Lord. Come to terms with His will. It's not God's will for us to be sluggish spiritually. We need to admit that our hearts are not where they should be.

1. Never be lacking in zeal.

God's will for us is expressed in three stirring exhortations, and the first is this: "*Do not be slothful in zeal.*" Or as the NIV puts it, "*Never be lacking in zeal.*" Or the Christian Standard Bible, "*Do not lack diligence in zeal.*" Or a paraphrase, "When earnest effort is called for, do not hold back." Do not hold back.

Zeal is not something to be afraid of—it's something to be pursued. It's something to be admired in believers. The Puritan Thomas Watson asks:

Do you know what a glorious thing zeal is? It is the luster that sparkles from grace; it is the flame of love... Zeal makes all our religious performances prevail with God. When the iron is red hot, it enters best, and when our services are red hot with zeal, they pierce heaven soonest.

The opposite of zeal is sloth, which is one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Sloth is indolence, apathy, being inactive when the practice of virtue is called for, being undisciplined, lazy in action, lazy in labor. Sloth is the sluggishness of our souls and when it settles in, our spirits become numb, prayer starts to languish and meditation on Scripture becomes anemic. Our motivation for good works evaporates and the weeds of evil deeds start to multiply in our lives. In the words of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "It is the sluggish Christian who eventually becomes the diseased Christian." God wants us to know that He is never slothful in His zeal for us and He will not tolerate slothfulness in our zeal for Him. God saved us to rescue us from spiritual slothfulness. He redeemed us so that we could be set ablaze, zealous in our service for Him.

Let's just read this wonderful description of the gospel—what God has done for us in Christ—from Titus 2. Let's see the connection between the grace of God in redeeming us and the zeal that should result in the lives of God's people:

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

See that? You've been redeemed. You've been purified from all lawlessness, from all sin. You've been rescued so that you can now pour yourself out in activity that pleases God and does good to others. You can never have too much zeal in the Christian life.

But zeal is something that's easily corrupted. Jonathan Edwards said, "There is nothing that belongs to Christian experience more liable to a corrupt mixture than zeal." We saw that already in Romans 10 where Paul is praying for his fellow Jews that they might trust in Jesus the Messiah and be saved. He says in verse two, "*I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*"

So in Paul's day, these followers of Judaism were really zealous for God. They weren't slackers. They weren't complacent. They were working really hard. They were passionate. But their passion was an effort to establish their own righteousness, to justify themselves, to prove, "I'm religious enough. I'm spiritual enough. I'm not a slacker." When that's what's going on in our hearts—when it's really an exercise in self-justification—one of the ways you can tell is that you're often harsh toward other people whom you regard as less spiritual, less devoted, than you are.

True zeal is motivated by the gospel. Just like we read in Titus 2, it's knowing I've been redeemed. God has justified me by His grace. I've been set free. I'm righteous in His sight. Therefore, in view of His mercies, I want to pour myself out in red hot devotion to God. This kind of gospel-motivated zeal shows itself in kindness toward others.

True zeal says, "Is an earnest effort called for right now? I won't hold back. Is there a brother in need of kindness? I want to be there for him. Is there someone deserving of honor? Let me be the first to show it. Is there anyone in need of hospitality? Let me open my home and my heart. Who can I show generosity to? Who needs forgiveness? Who can I bless today? How can I pour out my life as an expression of my gratefulness for all the mercies God has poured out on me?"

Don't be slothful in zeal. Be active in pouring out your life to God and to others.

2. Be fervent in spirit.

The second exhortation brings us to the inner place of what warms and fuels that passion. He says in verse 11, "*Be fervent in spirit...*" That word "fervent" comes from the Latin word for boiling. It means to boil or to be aglow with fire. In order to be fervent in spirit, the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—has to set your heart on fire for God.

If you try to manufacture zeal for God, it's going to be a false zeal. It's going to fizzle out. It's not going to last and it may do damage to others, because it's all motivated by the flesh—me trying to do something here. Trying to manufacture zeal is like wrapping a corpse in an electric blanket. You might be able to warm the surface of the body, but you're not going to be able to bring that dead body to life. Once the spirit has left the body, the corpse is cold and lifeless. The only way we get warm for God is by the Holy Spirit giving us life within.

When you trust in Jesus, He gives you new life. And that new life comes in the Person of His Holy Spirit, Who comes to live in you. He Who began this good work in you will be faithful to keep that work alive until it's finished (Philippians 1:6). Now, the Holy Spirit is a Person. We must never depersonalize Him and think of the Holy Spirit as an "it." There are metaphors that the Bible uses to describe the presence of the Holy Spirit and one of those metaphors is fire—the fire of God.

The Holy Spirit living within you is like a pilot light that will never be snuffed out. The devil will try to extinguish the fire of the Spirit in your life. Your own sins will quench the Spirit's fire, but the Lord Jesus will faithfully keep on giving His Holy Spirit to sustain the life of God within you.

I love how this is illustrated by John Bunyan in [The Pilgrim's Progress](#). Maybe you've heard this section before:

Then I saw in my dream that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand and led him to a place where a fire burning against a wall was. There was one standing by it, by that fire, always casting much water upon it to quench it, yet the fire burned higher and hotter. Then said Christian, "What does this mean?" The Interpreter answered, "This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart. He who casts water upon it to extinguish and put it out is the devil. But in that you see the fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, you shall also see the reason of that."

So he led him around to the back side of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of which he did continually cast oil secretly into the fire. "Then," said Christian, "what does this mean?"

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 you saw that the Man stood behind the wall to maintain the fire, this is to teach you that it is hard for the tempted to see how this work of grace is maintained in the soul. But this work of grace is maintained in the

soul. The God Who gave us His Holy Spirit will never take His Spirit from those who trust in Jesus, and Jesus will continually sustain that life, that fire, within us.”

So when the Bible commands us to be zealous for God, He is not asking you to manufacture something on your own. He’s not telling you, “Just try harder. Work harder. Do more. Be more active.” No. It goes deeper than that. He’s calling you to fan into flame the life-giving fire of the Holy Spirit Who is in you. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes how he himself puts Romans 12:11 into practice in his own life; working in his own heart to not be sluggish in his activity for the Lord. He says in Colossians 1:28-29, “Here’s how I do it. *Him we proclaim. This is my ministry—proclaiming Christ. I’m warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. I’m making disciples. I’m teaching. I’m training. I’m equipping. I’m wanting people to grow up in to Christ, to be moving toward Him and to be mature in Him. For this I toil. I’m working hard. I’m zealous for the Lord.*”

But here’s where this zeal comes from: “I’m *struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.* This isn’t just me making an effort. God is working in me, so that I am not slothful in zeal. God is keeping this fervency in my spirit for Him. This is the work that He’s energizing within me.”

When you trust in Jesus, that same Spirit is working mightily within you with the same power that created the universe and raised Jesus from the dead. So praise God that when He asks you to labor for Him, to be zealous for Him and to pour out your life in service for Him, He’s not saying you’ve got to manufacture that energy or power. He’s within you, by His Spirit, working to give you the energy, joy, love and power you need.

I want to ask what are you not doing for the Lord right now, because you’re afraid it won’t be fruitful, that it won’t succeed, so you’re just holding back? How are you holding back? Are you thinking, “I’m not strong enough. I don’t know enough. I’m afraid I’ll fail”? What if you knew and believed that when you attempt to obey the commands of Christ, the Spirit of God Himself will be empowering you and helping you, making you fruitful? What if you stop worrying so much about what you can’t do and start thinking a lot more about what the Holy Spirit is able to do in and through you?

Would it change your outlook toward ministry, toward others, if you acted like someone who has God Himself living within you? How would that change your outlook? How would that free you or embolden you to minister to others? Try consciously thinking, “God, You are living in me. Your Spirit is in me. I can be fervent in my spirit, boiling for Jesus. I can be active in devotion to others because You’re working this in me”

God’s not asking you to produce that kind of fire for Him. The fire is in you through the Holy Spirit. The pilot light of His Spirit will not be extinguished. You can rake the ashes of unbelief away. You can provide some oxygen through prayer. You can fuel that fire through your meditation on the Word. These are some of the ways you can fan that flame—the gift of God, the Holy Spirit, Who is in you.

Know that God will not let the fire go out. Jesus will not quench the dimly burning wick. The fervency of spirit is what gives you the energy not to be slothful in zeal. And that Spirit within you? He can be fanned into flame. Just like when the blockage under my driveway needed to be cleared up, it took something hot to melt the ice. The Spirit of God is within you to melt the ice in your heart, to set you ablaze in your service to the Lord.

3. Serving the Lord.

That brings us to the third exhortation this morning in verse 11, this beautiful little phrase: “*Serve the Lord...*” If the first two are describing the intensity and activity we need to have—zealous and fervent in spirit—this last phrase describes the focus. “I’m serving the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This week, before I went to work out one day, I was kind of complaining to Kate and moaning in my heart. While I was working out I was listening to a sermon by John Piper who said something really simple: “The greatest thing in the world is to be saved.” I just pondered that for a little bit. Then after he drove that home, he said: “And the greatest privilege in the world is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.” I just had to stop my workout and write that down: “David, don’t forget what a privilege it is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.” Do I realize Who I’m serving?

I watch these Olympic athletes, seeing tears in their eyes sometimes with this sense of honor with the American flag behind them. “I get to represent my country here.” That’s an honor. Multiply that by infinity, friends. You serve the Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for you.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, “This is the ultimate antidote to sluggishness and sloth in the Christian life. It’s to remember in every aspect of my life, I am serving the Lord Jesus Christ.” Friends, I want you to hear today that this does not just apply to the work you do within our church. Just because you’re working in the church doesn’t even necessarily mean you’re serving the Lord Jesus. You could serve the Lord as an usher, greeter, Sunday school teacher, nursery worker, Awana leader. You could be a leader in the youth group or The Rock. You could be a deacon or an elder. You could serve the Lord in these ways, but you can also be doing all those things and not even be thinking about the Lord, not serving the Lord, not having a heart that’s fervent and on fire for Him. Just because it’s a church activity doesn’t mean it’s serving the Lord. And just because you’re not working in the church doesn’t mean you’re not serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

I love what Colossians 3:23-24 says: “*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*” Whatever you do. You need to understand this when you go to your work as a teacher in St. Charles East High School that you are serving the Lord Christ. When you commute into Chicago to work at Northern Trust Bank, you are serving the Lord Christ. When you prepare a mortgage for someone, you’re serving the Lord Christ. When you counsel someone, you’re serving the Lord Christ. When you pour concrete, put plumbing and electricity into a new building, when you help your pastor unplug his ditch, you’re serving the Lord Christ. When you fix someone’s car, when you stay home to take care of your newborn baby, when you volunteer at Lazarus House, when you go to school or college to learn—in all these vocations, and in many more, you can be serving the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, you are serving the Lord Christ. The key is doing whatever He’s given you to do as unto Jesus.

In all our vocations, we can show we’re serving the Lord by the quality of our work. “Lord, help me do this with all my heart and with excellence for You.” We can show we’re serving the Lord by the integrity and honesty of our work, by the way we depend on the Lord for the strength to do our work. We’re not just going to work day in and day out without thinking, “Lord, I need You. I’m depending on You.” We depend on Him for strength, then we show we’re serving Him by the way we treat the people with whom we work. In all these ways we can be serving the Lord Christ.

If we could identify all the lives that are going to be touched by this church family just this week, it’s amazing how many people we’re going to come into contact with. You’re going to encounter several whom I will never meet working as a pastor within this church. You are called to help move them a step closer to Jesus. And maybe through the Spirit working through your

ministry as unto the Lord, God's going to work in such a way that they're going to come here into this church, then we are going to be able to meet.

Do you know what this Wednesday is? Ash Wednesday—40 days before Easter Sunday. Even though there's over a foot of snow on the ground, Easter is coming. What if we started praying now and planting seeds now, thinking, "Who is in my life that I could invite to worship with us on Resurrection Sunday? Who could I invite to come and hear and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead that's coming on April 1?" Let's not let that date blow by. Let's be intentional. Even on Ash Wednesday you can be intentional about conversations with people whom you will meet in your workplace and in school. It's an opportunity to serve the Lord.

So don't think there's just this small sphere of activities that really count as the Lord's work. No, the whole earth is the Lord's—everything that's in it and those who dwell in it. When Jesus calls you to belong to Him, He sends you into the world to do Kingdom work. And that Kingdom work is happening wherever the children of the King are serving and saying from their hearts, "Lord Jesus, this is for You. Take my life—my hands, my silver, my gold, my feet—let it me consecrated, Lord, to Thee."

Let's look at Sean Gallagher as an example. When is Sean serving the Lord? Is Sean serving the Lord when he's making an architectural design for a new building or the renovation of a building in Geneva? Is Sean serving the Lord when he goes to the Geneva Preservation District and presents his proposal about how to beautify a neighborhood and put up a building that looks great? Can he serve the Lord doing that?

Or how about when Sean goes to Judson University? Now he's at a Christian school, teaching and mentoring new students. Is that when Sean serves the Lord? Or how about when he comes to this building, leading a deacon meeting? Now is Sean serving the Lord? Or what about when Sean, with his fellow deacons, goes and ministers to the physical need of someone associated with this congregation—is that when Sean is serving the Lord?

I hope, if you understand Scripture, you realize the answer to these questions is, "All of the above." "All of the above" is an opportunity to serve the Lord Christ. When we get sluggish, when we get slothful in our zeal, it's often because we've forgotten Whom we serve. We've forgotten what an honor and privilege it is to give our lives for the One Who gave His life for us on Calvary.

I want to conclude with this statement made by Augustine, an early church leader. He said the most important quality to understand what the Bible teaches is that your heart has to be passionately in love with the Lord. Without that love, you won't get it. I love how he put it:

Give me a man in love; he knows what I mean. Give me one who yearns; give me one who is hungry; give me one far away in this desert, who is thirsty and sighs for the spring of the eternal country. Give me that sort of man; he knows what I mean. But if I speak to a cold man, he just does not know what I am talking about.”

As I listen to the Apostle Paul in Romans 12, I think he’s saying something like that in verse 11. It’s like he pauses in the middle of all these exhortations, all these teachings, all this wonderful doctrine he’s put forth in Romans, and he’s saying, “Listen. You’re only going to get what I’m saying if you’re in love with Jesus; if your heart is boiling with passion for Him. You’ve got to be yearning for the Holy Spirit to turn up the heat and make you boil for Jesus. You’ve got to be hungry to see something happen in Christ’s church through you that is beyond you.

“You’ve got to be thirsting and sighing like you’re in a desert, longing for the spring of the eternal country. You’ve got to love Jesus Christ and remember you’re serving Him. You’ve got to have that love flame ablaze in your heart. Otherwise you’re just not going to get what I’m saying in this chapter. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Be aglow with the Holy Spirit. That’s where that zeal comes from. And remember Whom you serve—you are serving the Lord Christ.”

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