

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

# THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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## Zealous for Good Works

Speaking of "*our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*" (**Titus 2:13**), the Holy Spirit says "*who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works*" (**verse 14**). Consider some things Scripture teaches related to the Lord's desire for His people to be "*zealous for good works*."

The words translated "zeal" or "zealous" in Scripture have reference to passion. More descriptively, the words have reference to *heat*. Being zealous involves being so passionate about something that it could be said we are "on fire" for whatever our zeal is directed toward.

This point is brought out strongly in the Lord's rebuke of the church at Laodicea. Notice **Revelation 3:15-16**: *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth.* In **verse 19**, Jesus said, "*As many as I love, I reprove and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent.*"

Part of Strong's definition of the word translated "*zealous*" in **verse 19** is "*to have warmth of feeling for or against*" (Strong G2206). Thayer's definition includes the words "*to burn with zeal.*"

The Christians at Laodicea were apathetic in their service to God. Spiritually speaking, they were lukewarm. They were thus instructed to develop a burning passion and

resolve toward God.

The Bible makes it clear that such zeal must be properly directed. Zeal without knowledge causes harm rather than good (**Rom. 10:2; Gal. 4:17**). The apostle Paul persecuted the church prior to his conversion, and in **Philippians 3:6**, he indicated that he did so in demonstration of his zeal for the Jewish traditions he followed.

Knowledge without zeal, though, will cause the Lord to be disgusted with us (**Rev. 3:15-16**).

Thus, it is imperative to have both zeal *and* knowledge of how to *properly direct* that zeal.

This is indicated in the phrase "*zealous for good works*." If our zeal is directed toward what God defines as a good work, it will please Him.

To know what God defines as a good work, we need only look to the written Word of God, the Bible (cf. **2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3**). More specifically, we today must look to what the New Testament teaches is a good work (cf. **Col. 2:14**).

For instance, the New Testament shows that studying God's Word is a good work (**Acts 17:11**), and thus we should zealously study God's Word.

Such zeal is alluded to in the Holy Spirit's command to Christians, "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.*" (**1 Pet. 2:2**). Like a newborn baby longs for physical milk, Christians should desire the spiritual nourishment provided for in God's Word. We should have a strong "spiritual appetite"

for *doing* what God says is right (**Matt. 5:6**), and this requires fervency in *learning* about God and what He says is right.

This fervent study of God's Word should be accompanied with sincere self-examination (**2 Cor. 13:5**). As we learn what God expects and examine where we are falling short, this will inevitably lead to the conclusion that correction needs to be made at times. When we see something that needs to be corrected, we should be zealous to correct it (cf. **2 Cor. 7:11**).

For instance, if we examine ourselves and find that we are guilty of gossip (**Rom. 1:29-30**), or covetousness (**Eph. 5:5**), or lust (**Matt. 5:28**), or anything else that is contrary to God's will, we should be zealous to turn *from* that. If we find that we are lacking self-control or patience (**2 Pet. 1:6**) or anything else that God commands, we should zealously turn *toward* that.

We should be zealous for opportunities to assemble with saints and build up one another (**1 Thes. 5:11**). We should be zealously engaged in worship we offer to God (cf. **Eph. 5:19**). We should zealously help others as we have ability and opportunity (**Gal. 2:10**). We should be fervent in prayer (**Luke 18:1**), among other things.

Such zeal can be helped when we recognize the value of these things and appreciate them as we should.

Moreover, such zeal can be strengthened when we understand and appreciate the blessings God offers to all and bestows on His faithful children.

One of the key words in **John 3:16** is "*perish*." To appreciate being rescued, saved, clean, and healed, we must recognize the perishing, lost, filthy, broken condition that sin puts us in.

No matter how much good we have done

from the world's perspective, each of us who has reached the "age of accountability" has sinned against God (**Rom. 3:23**), and thus would be doomed for eternal condemnation without the blood of Christ (**Rom. 6:23**).

Without Christ, we would all face the wrath of God and be eternally separated from Him. We would forever be enslaved to sin, with no way of paying the ransom price to be set free from bondage.

Yet, because of Christ, we can stand before God un-condemned, have His wrath against us appeased, be set free from sin, and be reconciled to God (cf. **Rom. 5:6-10**).

The love of God and His Son that made these blessings possible must not be forgotten or under-appreciated.

Appreciating God's grace helps serve as motivation for zealously obeying Him (cf. **1 Cor. 15:10**; **1 John 4:19**).

The church at Laodicea was made up of Christians who *thought* they were doing well (**Rev. 3:17**), yet were apathetic toward God's love and the service He commands. The seriousness of their lukewarm spirit is seen in the Lord's words that he would vomit them out of his mouth (**verse 16**).

One who has not yet been "*baptized into Christ*" (**Rom. 6:3**; **Gal. 3:27**) for the forgiveness of sins (**Acts 2:38**) should zealously choose to do so. Yet, those of us who *have* done this must not become spiritually lukewarm and/or self-righteous like the Christians in Laodicea did.

If we have been guilty of lukewarm service toward God, may we heed the Lord's command in **Revelation 3:19**: *Be zealous therefore, and repent*.

Moreover, may we *direct* our zeal toward what *God* says are good works so we can be a people who are "*zealous for good works*."

- **Michael Hickox**

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