

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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“Fervent in Spirit”

Acts 18 introduces us to “*a certain Jew named Apollos,*” who was “*an Alexandrian,*” “*an eloquent man,*” and “*mighty in the Scriptures*” (**verse 24**). He “*had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus*” (**verse 25**). Initially, Apollos “*knew only the baptism of John*” (**verse 25**), but he was taught the need for baptism in the name of Christ by Aquila and Priscilla (**verse 26**), and became a fervent proclaimer of the Gospel (cf. **verses 27-28; 1 Cor. 3:5-6**).

The phrase “*fervent in spirit*” used to describe Apollos is an important phrase. In **Romans 12:11**, the Holy Spirit says this phrase should be true of each of us. Speaking of things we should and should not be, He says: “*not lagging in diligence; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord,*”

The Greek word translated “*fervent*” in both **Acts 18:25** and **Romans 12:11** is the root of the word often translated “*zeal*.” This word literally means “*to boil with heat, be hot*” (*Thayer*; see *Strong G2204*). It is used metaphorically at times to refer to one who is so passionate about something that it could be said he or she is “on fire.” Apollos had this much passion for the Lord.

The *lukewarm* church at Laodicea exemplified the more common approach to the will of God. They were rebuked for their spiritual apathy, and the Lord commanded them, “*Be zealous therefore, and repent*” (**Rev. 3:19**). Serving God is not something to be lukewarm about. The Laodiceans needed

to get “on fire” for the Lord.

While fervency is commanded, it must be properly directed. Misdirected zeal is a recipe for disaster.

Before he was converted, the apostle Paul [mis]directed his zeal toward persecuting Christians (**Phil. 3:6**), and thus persecuting Christ (**Acts 9:4-5**). Speaking of his actions before his conversion, Paul said in **Galatians 1:14**, “*I advanced in the Jews’ religion beyond many of my own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*” Pre-conversion, his life was a prime example of what it means to “*have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*” (**Rom. 10:2**).

These passages not only show how it’s possible to be zealous for something, yet be wrong; they show how it’s possible to be zealous for God, yet be entirely wrong.

God wants us to be zealous for good works (**Titus 2:14**), based on what *His Word* tells us is a good work (cf. **2 Tim. 3:16-17**). The many contradicting beliefs and practices among those who claim to be Christians today indicates that many in our time have a zeal for God that’s not according to knowledge. God’s Word doesn’t contradict itself.

While zeal without knowledge is a recipe for disaster, knowledge without zeal is no better. Scripture teaches that in his zeal, Apollos “*powerfully refuted the Jews, publicly showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ*” (**Acts 18:28**). Apollos passionately acted upon the knowledge he gained concerning Jesus.

Like Apollos, we must fervent in spirit to please the Lord.

Beware of Hypocrisy

In **Luke 12:1**, Jesus said to His disciples, “*Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*”

Thayer’s definition of the word used for “*hypocrite*” in the New Testament includes “an actor, stage player” (see *Strong G5273*). A hypocrite in the biblical sense *pretends* to be righteous, but is not. In other words, his service to God is an “acting job.”

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day exemplified this. Jesus rebuked them for doing things that appeared righteous on the outside while failing to be clean within (**Luke 11:39ff**). They didn’t respond with repentance, but with retaliation (**verses 53-54**). This exemplified their hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy can take on several forms.

Probably the most common picture of a hypocrite is one who criticizes *others’* sins, but overlooks his or her *own*. Jesus spoke against this in **Matthew 7. Verse 5** of the chapter says, “*You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye.*”

The hypocrite pretends to revere God by charging *others* to obey but doesn’t *really* care about pleasing God, as shown by his or her *own* actions.

Hypocrisy also manifests itself in doing things that appear righteous, but doing so with an unrighteous motive.

Consider those who did all their works “*to be seen by men*” (**Matt. 23:5**). When praying in public, for example, these hypocrites might use “*vain repetitions*” to appear wise, but they didn’t pray from the heart. Such is hypocrisy (**Matt. 6:7**; cf. **Matt. 6:5; 23:14**).

It’s an example of “honoring” the Lord with one’s lips, while the heart is far from Him (**Mark 7:6**).

Another form of hypocrisy is alluded to in **Romans 12:9**. There, the Spirit commands, “*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good.*”

Sincere love doesn’t just pretend to love others, but truly cares for their well-being, even when it leads to speaking things from God’s Word that they’d rather not hear. Unhypocritical love might be viewed as “hateful” in the eyes of a world that believes everyone should just be told to do what makes them happy.

As Jesus walked the earth, though, He never approved (or pretended to approve) of sin. He wasn’t spiteful in His approach, but He didn’t sugar-coat the truth. This showed the sincerity of His love (cf. **Mark 10:21**).

A more general example of hypocrisy is seen when individuals claim to be Christians, but don’t live Christian lives. “Acting” the part of a Christian only during the assembly of the saints is far from the *lifestyle* of obedience God commands (cf. **Rom. 12:1ff**).

Christians are instructed to *lay aside* all such hypocrisies (**1 Pet. 2:1**).

And if we’re ever discouraged by someone who claims to be a Christian but doesn’t follow Christ’s steps, we should remember that this isn’t a problem with God or His Word. Rather, it is *in spite of* what God promotes through His Word.

As discouraging as such hypocrisy can be, it’s no excuse for those who witness it to not obey God. The Lord doesn’t call us to follow the hypocrite, but to follow *Him*.

-Michael Hickox (both articles)