

# What Happened to My Zeal?

*by Bryan Gibson*

We've all seen it happen—people who seemed to be so zealous in their service to the Lord, only to become very weak or even fall away. We need to know why, to keep it from happening to us, and to help others avoid the same fate. For answers, let's turn to 2 Corinthians 8-9. Paul was busy collecting funds from various churches in order to relieve needy Christians in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Some churches had already given liberally and willingly (2 Corinthians 8:1-5), and in these two chapters Paul urges the church at Corinth to do the same. Since these two chapters speak so often of zeal or diligence, let's see what we can find to help us better understand how some people's zeal can wane, or even disappear.

Their zeal, or diligence may be more style than substance, more talk than action. That was the very thing Paul didn't want to happen in Corinth. These brethren were eager to help, and had promised to do so (8:10-11; 9:1-5), but it was time now to "complete the doing of it" (8:11), to "show...the proof of your love" (8:24). Zeal is not just what you're eager to do, or promise to do; it's about what you actually get done.

Their zeal, or diligence, may be more of the self-serving type. For these people, it's not about bringing glory to the Lord (8:19; 9:13); it's about bringing glory to themselves. The churches of Macedonia were praised for their zeal, for giving so willingly and liberally (8:1-5), but they did so because "they first gave themselves to the Lord" (8:5); and they did that because the Lord had given Himself for them (8:1, 9). Could it be that the zealous person who fell away was in it more for himself than for the Lord?

Their zeal, or diligence, may not be well-rounded. Look carefully at what Paul said to the church at Corinth: "But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—**see that you abound in this grace also**" (8:7). His desire was that they show the same zeal in giving that they had shown in these other areas. We've all seen Christians who were all fired up for various aspects of service, only to fade very quickly. A more well-rounded zeal may just be the antidote for that.

Their zeal, or diligence, may be mostly out of compulsion ("because I have to"). These brethren in Corinth needed to give, but notice the approach Paul uses in various passages: "I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love..." (8:8); "that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation" (9:5); "not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (9:7). When we

can move beyond the “because I have to” stage to the “freely willing” stage (8:3), our zeal will remain strong.

Their zeal may have waned or died because they just didn’t realize how much good they were doing. To make sure that wasn’t the case in Corinth, Paul wrote, “For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you” (9:12-14). Please don’t grow weary—diligent service in the Lord’s kingdom accomplishes more good than we can even sometimes imagine.

“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope **until the end**, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:11-12).