

Enthusiasm Energizes Everyone!

by Dr. Steven Riser

Texts: Romans 12:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:19

Introduction

A ministerial candidate was preparing to preach his candidating sermon at a new church. Filled with enthusiasm, he bounced into the church's very high pulpit, looked at the congregation and began to speak: "*Behold, I come...*" Then he froze, forgetting what he was supposed to say next. Trying not to panic, he told himself that if he would just sit down for a moment the words would come back to him. So he sat down for a moment, then bounced up, rushed back into the pulpit and said, "*Behold I come...*" Again nothing came. So he sat down again, and then rushed back into the pulpit crying out, "Behold I come..." This time he bounced up so hard that the pulpit broke loose from the floor and the preacher went tumbling into the lap of a woman sitting on the front pew. He got up, apologizing profusely. The woman said, "*Oh, please, don't apologize, young man, you warned me three times you were coming!*"

I would like to share with you from God's Word how enthusiasm can change your life. Our text is Romans 12:11, "*Never be lacking in zeal but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*" The Living Bible paraphrases the verse, "*Never be lazy in your work but serve the Lord enthusiastically!*" The good news that God has for us is that He not only wants us to be enthusiastic about our faith and service but He enables us to be enthusiastic for our good and His glory.

Make no mistake about it; enthusiasm can change your life and the lives of others for the better! Enthusiasm energizes everyone! But, no one can make you enthusiastic, because enthusiasm doesn't come from without, it comes from within. Properly understood, realistic and healthy enthusiasm comes from God!

Some of you will not find this word in the concordance of your Bible, however the concept of enthusiasm is clearly taught under such words as "zeal," "spiritual fervor," "wholeheartedness," "joy," and even "love." I would like for us to consider three very important questions:

- 1) What is enthusiasm?
- 2) Why is it important? And
- 3) How can we obtain it?

I. What is Enthusiasm?

First of all, let's see if we can discover the true nature of enthusiasm. We need to blast before we can build. It's helpful to discover what enthusiasm is not in order to discover what enthusiasm is.

A. Christian Enthusiasm is not merely excitement!

Excitement is an external substitute for genuine enthusiasm and it is the result of stimulation from the outside. No doubt some of you can get excited about certain sporting events such as the Kentucky Wildcats, etc. Enthusiasm comes from within. Excitement comes from without. You can remember that because the word "excitement" begins with "ex" meaning "outside" while the word "enthusiasm" begins with "en" meaning "inside."

The word "enthusiasm" comes from two Greek words "en" and "theos," and it means to be moved or motivated by God from within by His Holy Spirit. Biblically speaking, enthusiasm means that God is working in our lives giving us the desire and power we need to please Him (Phil. 2:12-13). The world calls us to be excited—stimulated by external circumstances. God calls us to be enthused—motivated by the Holy Spirit from within.

As a non-Christian, I was dependent on favorable external circumstances to excite me and make me happy. Since then I have discovered that genuine joy is the result of being motivated by God's Spirit from within. John Wesley, when asked why so many people came to hear him preach simply said, "*I set myself on fire and people come to watch me burn.*" When you think about it, that's not a bad definition of preaching!

B. Christian Enthusiasm is not merely emotionalism

It's not zeal without knowledge. Paul warns of this in Romans 10:2, "*For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their **zeal is not based on knowledge.***" Proverbs 19:2 says, "*It is not good to have **zeal without knowledge**, nor to be hasty and miss the way.*" Galatians 4:18, "*its fine to be zealous provided the purpose is good...*"

There's a story of a knight who returned to his castle at twilight. He was a mess. His armor was dented, his helmet skewed, his face bloody, his horse was limping and the rider was listing to one side of the saddle. The Lord of the castle saw him coming and went out to meet him asking, "*What hath befallen you, Sir Knight?*" Straightening himself up as best as he could, he replied, "*Oh Sire, I've been laboring in your service – robbing, burning and pillaging your enemies to the west!*" "*You've been what?*" cried the startled nobleman, "*But I don't have any enemies to the west!*" "*Oh!*" thought the Knight. "*Well... I think you do now.*" You see, zeal must have proper direction.

A zealous person without knowledge is nothing more than a fanatic. A fanatic is a person who has redoubled his efforts after losing sight of the objective. Properly understood, enthusiasm is the fervor of both reason and revelation. We're not enthusiastic despite what we know; we're enthusiastic because of what we know.

On the basis of God's Word, what do we know as Christians? We know that: 1) Christ loved us and died for us while we were yet sinners. 2) All things work together for good for those who don't know God. 3) We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. 4) God will finish the work that He began in each of us. 5) We have the privilege of being used by God in the lives of others. 6) Nothing can separate us from the love of God is Christ Jesus our Lord.

Enthusiasm is not emotionalism—zeal devoid of reason but rather it's the fervor of reason. Enthusiasm is not excitement nor is it "the energy of the flesh;" rather enthusiasm is God's energy working in and through us for our good and God's glory. The greater our honesty, the greater our knowledge of our sin. The greater the knowledge of our sin, the greater our experience of forgiveness. The greater our forgiveness, the greater our love. The greater our love, the greater our joy/enthusiasm.

II. Why is Enthusiasm Important?

Now that we understand what enthusiasm is, let's briefly consider why it is so important. Emerson said, "*Nothing was ever really accomplished without enthusiasm.*" Ecclesiastes 9:10a says, "*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.*" Enthusiasm is the fuel of action and the surest precursor of success. When Charles Dickens was asked the secret of his success he answered, "*Whatever I tried in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well; whatever I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself completely!*" Dickens' statement mirrors Paul's advice to the Colossians when he said, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.*" Someone said, "*The most valuable thing I have or ever expect to have is enthusiasm, and I would rather pass this on to my children than anything else.*"

A well-known preacher said, "*I never saw anybody that was much good until he was charged. That's the business of Christianity—getting people lighted (educated) & charged (energized).*" "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:...*" (Phil. 2:5)

Just how important is your attitude?

The Stanford Research Institute as well as The Harvard Research Center has discovered that 15% of a person's success in life is determined by knowledge compared to 85% being determined by attitude. It's not an overstatement to suggest that your attitude is more important than your aptitude. Therefore it is extremely important for us as Christians to manifest Biblical attitudes—not the least of which is the attitude of enthusiasm.

If we would do God's will, we must do it His way—with all our heart. If we would wholeheartedly serve the Lord, we must serve Him enthusiastically!

FedEx CEO and founder Fred Smith first developed the idea for an innovative air-freight company while he was a student at Yale University. His professor was less than impressed; the paper Smith submitted outlining the concept earned him a "C." Thirty years later, FedEx is the world's largest express transportation company,

with 128,000 employees and more than \$7 billion in capital.

This short-sighted professor didn't take a few things into consideration. One is Smith's persistence—he refuses to give up. Another is his resourcefulness—when plan “A” doesn't work, there is always a plan “B” to put in motion.

Most important, however, is Smith's ability to recruit others to his vision. People want to be part of what he is involved in—even to the point of sacrifice. In the early days, for example, his pilots often refueled company jets with their own money. Sometimes they sat on paychecks for months to help keep the company afloat. *How does he command such devotion from his employees?* Fred Smith's greatest asset is his enthusiastic determination to get the job done. It sounds like a cliché, but he believes in what he's doing. The result, he inspires loyalty.

The Christians in Philippi offered Paul this same kind of loyalty. They supported him through prayer, hard work, and sacrificial giving. *Why?* Maybe they were inspired by the enthusiasm they observed in Paul when their church was first founded. After being beaten in the town square, Paul and Silas were thrown in jail. They were singing hymns late into the night when an earthquake came and shook the foundations of their jail cell, freeing them from their chains. Paul could have escaped. He could have left Philippi and never come back, but instead he stayed, and took the opportunity to lead the jailer to Christ. Paul believed in what he was doing and his enthusiastic determination to spread the gospel encouraged the Philippian believers (Acts 16).

Your enthusiasm has a profound effect on others. When you approach anything with an upbeat commitment to get the job done, people begin to take notice. When they see that you believe in what you are doing, they become willing to join in the process. The secret, then, is to pour your life into something that captures your heart, and give it all you've got. Solomon said, “*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might*” (Eccl. 9:10) You'll find that your zeal is contagious, and it will spread to the people around you. This congregation has a positive attitude, in large measure, because the leaders have a positive attitude.

III. How Can We Become More Enthusiastic?

Our final question for consideration is this: “*How can we be more enthusiastic?*”

There are many people who would like to be on fire for the Lord but they can't ignite the flame. But God can! They know they should pray and read the Bible but they can't make themselves desire these experiences. They go to church out of a sense of duty, habit or the fear of God and wish it could be more enjoyable for them; the way they think it is for others. We know that one of the characteristics of great churches is that they are made up of highly motivated people who find worship and work in and through the church to be a delight rather than a burden.

What's the key to their motivation? The Bible makes it very clear that the key to this motivation for worship and our desire for the things of God is ***our wholehearted love for Him***. And only those who love God sincerely and wholeheartedly find great delight in doing His will enthusiastically.

The truth of this principle should become clear as we analyze our normal relationships with others. We find great delight in trying to please those whom we deeply love. The same holds true in our relationship with God. The more we love God, the greater our desire to please Him. Jesus said, in John 14:21, that the way to express our love for God is by obeying His commandments. And when we love God, His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

If loving God is the key to being motivated to please Him, ***what is the key to teaching people to love God?*** The Scripture says that we love God because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19). It also says that God is love and anybody who comes to know God who is love will certainly love Him. We experience His love and forgiveness by responding to His grace with repentance and faith!

There was a time in my life when I didn't love God because I didn't desire to please Him. And that gut level honest admission was the first step in learning to love God. Common sense tells us that: We must first admit we have a problem before we can solve that problem. God makes this task of learning to love Him easier for us because those things that please our heavenly Father most are the very things that benefit us most of His children. Enthusiasm is ours when we learn to wholeheartedly love God!

Enthusiasm is ours when we learn to respond to God's grace with gratitude and seek to live for His glory! G. K. Chesterton, a British author who lived a long and useful life, wrote an autobiography in his last says. In that story of his life, he set himself to defining—in a single sentence—the most important lesson he had learned. It was quite a task.

What would you say? What is the most important lesson you have learned? Chesterton concluded that the most important lesson he had learned was “*whether to take things for granted or for gratitude.*”

Do you take things for granted or do you accept things in a spirit of gratitude? The difference in those two attitudes makes a radical difference in the attitude of your living. The attitude of gratitude is at the root of enthusiasm! Enthusiasm comes when we function for the purpose for which God created us: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. If we would be enthusiastic we must learn to enjoy God and to extend His influence in our relationships with others. Enthusiasm comes when we realize that God's truth and love will ultimately triumph. Therefore, we are on the winning team despite circumstances to the contrary. There is a certain spark in your spirit when you know that, although the game of life is not yet over, you know and your team is going to win!

One of the best biblical examples of how enthusiasm develops is found in Luke when the resurrected Christ is walking along the road to Emmaus with two of His dejected disciples who had not yet experienced the reality of the resurrection. They asked each others after encountering the risen Christ, “*Were not our hearts burning within on the road as He opened [or expounded] to us the Scriptures?*” Dr. Warren Weirsbe, in his book called *Real Worship*, said, “*If the experience of the Emmaus disciples is a pattern for believers today, then the blessing of the true Biblical*

exposition is an ignited heart, not an inflated head.” You can’t kindle a fire in another heart until it is burning in your own. In order to do great things for God, one must be enthusiastic about one’s faith in the resurrected Christ! And as Hebrews 11:6 says, you must believe that it is worth your while to seek after God!

Conclusion

Nobel Prize winner Sir Edmond Appleton put it well when he said, *“In my work I would rather have a second class person with enthusiasm than a first class person with apathy.”* As we have seen, enthusiasm can change our lives... it can influence everything we do... it can affect all our relationships.

Yet we cannot generate it by simply saying, *“I’m going to be more enthusiastic”*—that’s the energy of the flesh. Others cannot generate it in us—that’s excitement. Enthusiasm comes when we open ourselves to the truth of God’s Word and the love of God’s Spirit and allow Him to work in and through us for our good and His glory.

Alfred North Whitehead said, *“People will believe your enthusiasm when they will not accept your reasoned logic.”* If you want to serve the Lord enthusiastically, let His Spirit influence the way you relate to your church. It’s the difference between growth and decline.

According to Lyle Schaeffer, one of the most knowledgeable persons in America in the area of Church Growth and congregational life, *“The most crucial factor in church growth is the attitude of the members... a common characteristic of growing congregations is that the members are enthusiastic about their faith as Christians, about the congregation of which they are members, and about the life, programs and ministry of that congregation.”*

You and I can afford to be enthusiastic because we are on the winning team. Someday God’s truth and love will ultimately prevail. In the meantime, we can have the joy and privilege of being used by God in the lives of others. The Apostle Paul concludes his famous chapter of the Resurrection with these words, *“So, my dear friends, since future victory is sure, be strong and steady, always abounding in the Lord’s work, for you know that nothing you ever do for the Lord is ever wasted.”* Friends, let us serve the Lord together enthusiastically!