

# "Guided and Misguided Enthusiasm"

Text: Romans 9:30-10:4

May the peace of God fill your hearts and silence all doubt or uncertainty, assuring you of his continual love and forgiveness in Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, it's hard not to like, or at least appreciate, enthusiasm. Enthusiasm energizes and inspires. We see it in someone and naturally find ourselves encouraged and motivated. On the other hand, the opposites, apathy and lethargy, also have their effect. Where enthusiasm draws us to activity and encourages us to care, lethargy and apathy promote the opposite. Interestingly enough, it often only takes one, in either direction. One enthusiastic person can inspire a crowd; one apathetic deadbeat can drain the life and heart from a multitude.

Which are you? Human beings have this unique characteristic that we want and need to be noticed, remembered, and valued – but only when we want to be. We also insist on being ignored and forgiven when we check out or present a negative example. *"Notice and admire me when I'm doing something well. Ignore me, while still thinking highly of me, when I am not."*

It's no great secret that things just don't work that way. We don't get to pick and choose which of our actions and attitudes will affect others. All of them do, both positive and negative. A key element of Christian maturity is both coming to terms with this reality and conducting ourselves accordingly. By word and action and attitude we affect others, building up or drawing down. Even enthusiasm, when *misguided* or *wrongly directed*, provides a negative example. In other words, what you're enthusiastic about sends a message and makes a difference. Energetically pursuing what is *displeasing* to our God encourages others to do the same. The Christian's goal is to be enthusiastic about all the right things.

Our text for this morning gives examples of both negative and positive enthusiasm, of passion that is misguided and of that which is righteous and God-pleasing. That text is found in the Ninth Chapter of Paul's magnificent Epistle to the Romans:

<sup>ESV</sup> **(Romans 9:30-10:4)** *What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup> but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. <sup>32</sup> Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup> as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."* <sup>ESV 10:1</sup> **Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup> For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup> For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**

This is God's Word. Thank God for giving us such perfect truth and guidance. In asking our God to bless us through the study of his gift of these holy, perfect words this morning, so we pray:  
**"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"**  
Amen.

The only safe way to find and exercise passion in life is to first identify a proper goal. You're all familiar with what happens when individuals get this wrong, when someone is passionately enthusiastic about a profoundly misguided goal. Arguably one of the greatest examples of passion and enthusiasm in recent memory resulted in looted stores and burnt buildings, in defunded police departments and bankrupted businesses. The enthusiasm was off the charts. The problem was that the goals were deeply misguided. A multitude ran hard, but in the wrong direction. Bad goals lead to bad outcomes. Passion and enthusiasm just get you there quicker.

It's easy to grow self-righteous and prideful here, especially if we only talk about the misguided goals, and enthusiastic pursuit of those goals, *by others*. If we look around a bit, and inside, we will find other examples that knock us off our hypocritical pedestal. Every single one of us could come up with personal examples of our own misguided enthusiasm if we took even just a few moments to think about it. One of the most common is the

passionate, enthusiastic pursuit of wealth, at the expense of spiritual growth – struggling to gain what does not last, at the expense of that which does. There are, of course, are many others. Exercise, golf, alcohol, fishing, shopping, video games, phones – all can become unhealthy, misguided obsessions that drain the reservoir of our enthusiasm.

Nor is misguided enthusiasm limited to secular things. It easily and routinely bleeds over into the spiritual, where it actually poses the greatest danger. The word the Bible typically uses for *enthusiasm* is *zeal*. To be *zealous* is to be *enthusiastic*. Listen to how the Apostle Paul described to a crowd of angry Jews in Jerusalem his *misguided* enthusiasm prior to his conversion, along with its disastrous consequences: ***"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. <sup>4</sup> I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women."*** <sup>ESV</sup>(Acts 22:3-4) Paul was addressing an extraordinarily enthusiastic group of very religious men in Jerusalem, men who moments earlier had been energetically trying to beat him to death. He was explaining to them that he once shared their zeal – right up until God himself revealed to him that his enthusiasm was profoundly misguided.

Which brings us to our text for this morning – words written by this same Apostle Paul several years later. Note in particular here what Paul said about his own countrymen, the Jews, concerning their spiritual enthusiasm: ***"For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."*** These Spirit-inspired words teach us the difference between guided and misguided enthusiasm. The difference is communicated in our text by the phrase ***"but not according to knowledge."*** Greek has two similar words for "knowledge." The first refers to *knowledge* and the second to *true* or *certain knowledge*. The difference in Greek is that an intensifying prefix is added to the word for knowledge – similar to the English *sensitivity* vs *hyper-sensitivity*, or *vigilance* vs *hyper-vigilance*. The Greek word used in the phrase ***"but not according to knowledge"*** was the intensive form - *true and certain knowledge*. In other words, the enthusiasm of the Jews was based only on what they thought to be true, not on what was actually and objectively true.

Satan has mass-produced this particular trap, and every single human being is therefore at risk – including every single Christian. *All* are in danger of allowing ourselves to be guided by what we *believe* to be true, rather than by that which is actually and objectively correct or accurate. In the secular realm, that's exactly why our society today is so bitterly divided. Denying the very existence of God, and therefore also denying that God's Word conveys true and certain knowledge, at least half of our society is guided by their own false truth – homemade knockoff truth which they nonetheless believe to be genuine. Which also means that their enthusiasm is genuine but misguided. They are zealous in the extreme, but not according to true or certain knowledge.

Yet while this sort of division in our secular society is frustrating and troubling, division in the spiritual realm is catastrophic. In our text, Paul refers to the latter, to the catastrophe of misguided spiritual enthusiasm, identifying also the problem that caused the division. The Jews enthusiastically pursued a righteousness based on keeping the law (or good works). The Gentiles were credited with righteousness not by working to earn it but by receiving it through faith in Jesus Christ. Unlike the Jews, they believed their sins were forgiven by God not because of what they themselves had done but because of what their Savior had done. Jesus' perfection, they believed, was credited to them by faith, not by works.

Listen again to how our text described the difference or division: ***Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup> but Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. <sup>32</sup> Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.***

The difference was, of course, based on the individual's relationship to Jesus. Paul goes on in our text: ***They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup> as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*** That ***"stumbling stone"*** is clearly Jesus. Rejecting Jesus, the Jews

had absolutely no viable path to heaven. No human being can choose or even find that path on their own. They have to be guided onto that path by God the Holy Spirit.

Paul goes on in our text to provide more critical information. First, that the level of human enthusiasm does *not* determine what is true, and second, that if it is to remain God-pleasing, enthusiasm must always be guided. From our text, referring to the Jews who were enthusiastically trying to earn their way into heaven: ***For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup> For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.***

Paul freely here acknowledges that the Jews had an energy, a zeal, an enthusiasm ***“for God.”*** They were not just spiritual or religious people; they were fanatically so. Their devotion and spirituality might well put ours to shame, but it all fell apart when they refused to be guided by the very God they so enthusiastically believed they served. The core problem was identified in our text by this simple phrase: ***“seeking to establish their own...”*** – their own path to heaven, their own salvation plan, their own concept of what God accepts as righteousness. Their idea did not truly exist. It wasn't real, which is why they were ***seeking to establish*** it – trying pointlessly to make their concept of righteousness true or genuine.

Paul finally concludes our text with one of the great gems of God's Word – a passage every Christian would do well to fully understand and then to commit to memory: ***For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*** This jewel shines as a testament to divine inspiration because of its brilliance. Yet to fully understand and enthusiastically embrace it we need to be guided – by God the Holy Spirit speaking to us through his Word. Let God's Word then be our guide.

The original Greek begins the sentence with (and thereby emphasizes) the word ***“end.”*** Don't think of ***“end”*** here in terms of *“done for now but to be continued,”* as in, *“I'm done mowing the lawn, see you next week.”* The word means *“ended for good, with no more of the same to follow.”* Jesus used the word to describe

what Judgment Day is to all life on earth – the end, after which no life on earth will continue.

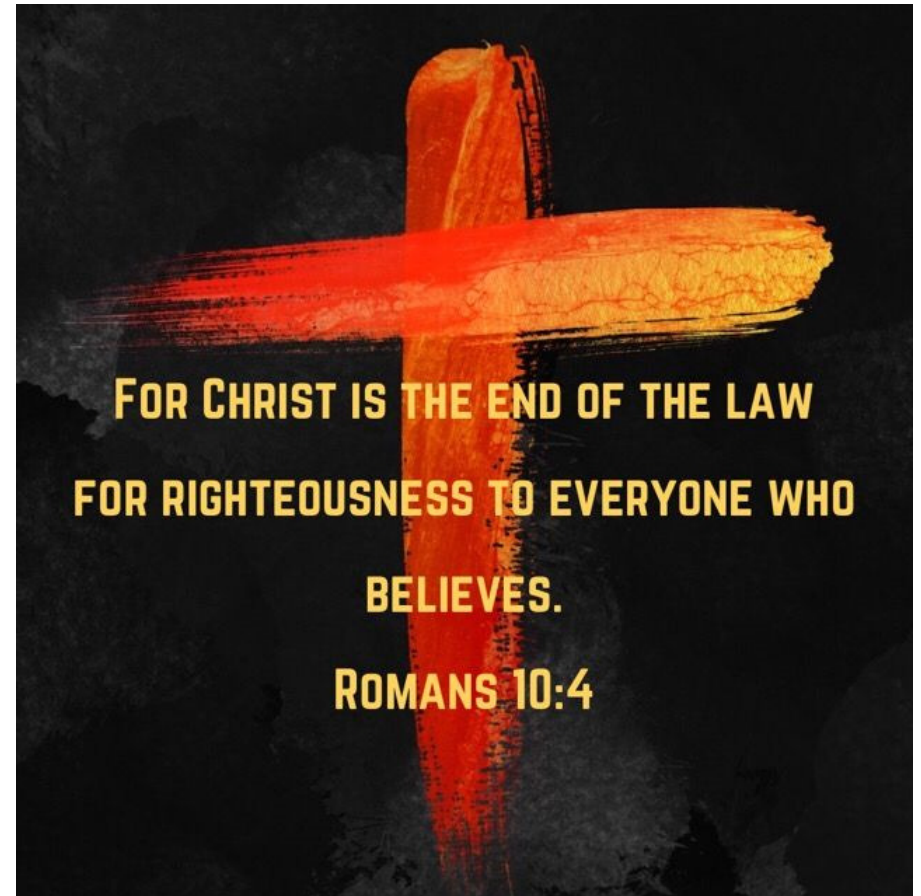
That's the “end” indicated here, but of what? “Law.” All law. Every law. Christ is that end, the end of law – law as a threat and law as a Jewish salvation plan. Yet Jesus didn't suddenly become that “end of law” when he kept every law perfectly in our place and then offered his perfect life on the cross as his payment for our sins. He was already that “end of law” for every Old Testament believer. It has always been only through faith in Jesus that anyone is saved. Abraham, for example, looked forward in faith. We look backwards at the same Christ, the same Messiah.

If law has then been ended by Christ, what's left? The second half of our concluding verse answers: ***“righteousness to everyone who believes.”*** Our passage then says this: ***“The end of law is Christ, therefore righteousness belongs to everyone who believes.”*** As this applies to you, you believe, and you therefore have exactly what is here promised – righteousness in the sight of God. The forgiveness Jesus earned is yours. You have been guided by God the Holy Spirit into this truth. Don't be afraid or ashamed to be enthusiastic about it. Amen.

ESV(**Deuteronomy 4:1-9**) "And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. <sup>2</sup> You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you. <sup>3</sup> Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor. <sup>4</sup> But you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today. <sup>5</sup> See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup> Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' <sup>7</sup> For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? <sup>8</sup> And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? <sup>9</sup> "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children."

ESV(**Mark 7:14-23**) And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. <sup>18</sup> And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, <sup>19</sup> since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) <sup>20</sup> And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup> coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

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# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – September 1, 2024**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 16 (Red Hymnal-207 Melody)

"Blessed Jesus, at Thy Word"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Deuteronomy 4:1-9) Our first reading reminds us that there is only upside to keeping God's Commandments, as there are only negatives or downside to abandoning them. This was made clear to the Children of Israel in a most striking way after they were freed from their captivity in Egypt. Not only were those who obeyed preserved and allowed to enter the Promised Land, they grew in wisdom and gained the respect and admiration of those who witnessed their obedience. They did not, of course, earn their way into heaven.

## Psalm 45 (Supplement page 32) (Brown Hymnal)

**The Gospel Lesson:** (Mark 7:14-23) Jesus is speaking in our second lesson. He here reminds us that a person is not defiled by what goes into the body (food and drink) but by what flows out (our thoughts, words, and actions). Since all have sinned, all are naturally defiled and therefore unworthy of salvation. All therefore need an external source of righteousness, which is exactly what Jesus came to provide by offering his perfect life on the cross as payment for our sins.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 738 (Lutheran Service Book Hymnal)

"Lord of All Hopefulness"

## The Sermon – Text: Romans 9:30-10:4 (Printed on the back page)

**"Guided and Misguided Enthusiasm"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 289 (Red Hymnal)

"The Law Commands and Makes Us Know"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 283 (Red Hymnal)

"God's Word Is Our Great Heritage"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

## Attendance – Sunday (29) Average (38)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Sam Rodebaugh is considering the call to St. John's of Okabena, MN. Pastor Zachary Sippert is considering the call to Grace of Sleepy Eye, MN.

**Return to Regular Schedule** – Next Sunday we return to our regular non-summer schedule, with Sunday school and Bible Class at 9am. Midweek Confirmation class and Bible Study are scheduled to resume on September 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Dinner Cruise** – The Dinner Cruise scheduled as part of the Women's Retreat on Friday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, has been opened to any men who would like to attend. Cost is \$20.

**September Schedule** – The following events are scheduled for the month of September:

- September 8 – Regular Sunday schedule resumes
- September 9-12 – WCPC in Loveland, CO
- September 13 – Dinner Cruise on the Missouri River
- September 13-15 – Women's Retreat in Bismarck
- September 16-18 – CLC Board meetings in Eau Claire
- September 25 – Midweek Classes resume