

Romans 10:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

Analysis

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge—Paul testifies (*martyreō*, μαρτυρέω, "bear witness") that Israel possesses *zēlos* (ζῆλος, "zeal, fervor") for God, but *ou kat' epignōsin* (οὐ κατ' ἐπίγνωσιν, "not according to full knowledge/recognition"). This is misdirected religious passion—sincere but fatally wrong. The Pharisee Saul of Tarsus exemplified this zeal (Phil 3:4-6; Gal 1:14), persecuting the church with genuine belief he was serving God (Acts 26:9-11; John 16:2).

Epignōsis implies not just intellectual knowledge but recognition and acknowledgment of truth. Israel's zeal lacked knowledge of God's righteousness revealed in Christ (v. 3), the end of the law (v. 4), and the simplicity of faith-righteousness (vv. 6-10). Sincerity does not equal truth—orthodoxy matters. Zeal without knowledge produces Pharisees, Crusaders, and religious terrorists. True worship must be "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Historical Context

First-century Judaism featured multiple zealous movements: Pharisees meticulously observing oral tradition, Essenes pursuing ritual purity in desert communities, and Zealots planning violent revolution. Paul knew this world intimately as "a Hebrew of Hebrews, concerning the law a Pharisee" (Phil 3:5). Religious zeal characterized Judaism's resistance to Roman occupation and led ultimately to the catastrophic war of AD 66-70.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How can you cultivate theological *epignōsis* (full knowledge) to match your spiritual *zēlos* (zeal)?
2. What modern expressions of "zeal without knowledge" do you see in the church—and in your own heart?
3. How did Paul's pre-conversion zeal warn him to test all passion by Scripture (Acts 17:11)?

Interlinear Text

μαρτυρῶ	γὰρ	αὐτοῖς	ὅτι	ζῆλον	θεοῦ	ἔχουσιν	ἀλλ'	οὐ
I bear	For	them	that	a zeal	of God	they have	but	not
G3140	G1063	G846	G3754	G2205	G2316	G2192	G235	G3756
κατ'	ἐπίγνωσιν.							
according	to knowledge							
G2596	G1922							

Additional Cross-References

Acts 21:20 (Parallel theme): And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

Romans 10:3 (References God): For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

Philippians 1:9 (Parallel theme): And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

Proverbs 19:2 (Parallel theme): Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth.

Philippians 3:6 (Parallel theme): Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

2 Corinthians 4:4 (References God): In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Galatians 1:14 (Parallel theme): And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

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