

# God's Jealous Love

When people study the attributes of God, jealousy is one that often gets overlooked. And when people study the names of God in Scripture, the same thing tends to happen – somehow jealousy gets left out. But that's not because Scripture is unclear – He put it right in the 10 Commandments.

**Ex.20:5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God**

When we are unfaithful to God it makes Him jealous, like a jilted husband. Scripture is very clear that God wants to be thought of that way.

**Ex.34:14 Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.**

That's how much God wants us to think of Him as being jealous – He introduces Himself to us by saying, "Jealousy is My *name*."

Perhaps some readers struggle with this because they have always thought of jealousy as a bad thing. There are some kinds of jealousy that are bad.

## Bad Jealously

For one thing, sometimes people think envy and jealousy are the same thing. They aren't. Envy is always evil – there is no good kind of envy. Envy is when you are distressed over someone getting some good thing. If you see someone who wins the lottery or who is famous or who has something you wish you had, and instead of being happy for that person it makes you unhappy – that's envy and it's always evil.

Jealousy is different – it has to do with people. Jealousy is the emotions of pain, anger, loss and sorrow that come from losing someone's affections. When someone you love starts turning their affections toward someone else instead of you, the sorrow and pain and anger you feel over that is jealousy.

Jealousy is a God-given emotion that is a good thing, but like most good things it can be twisted and perverted into a bad thing. Jealousy becomes a bad thing when you are jealous for affections that aren't rightfully yours. If you are single and you are really attracted to someone, but that person is interested in someone else – that is not an appropriate setting for jealousy, because that person's affections were never rightfully yours.

Another bad kind of jealousy is jealousy that is based on paranoia. A man who won't let his wife ever go out of the house, or who gets angry if she so much as smiles at another man - even when there is no valid reason to suspect any unfaithfulness in her heart - that is irrational jealousy and it's a bad thing.

Another bad kind is when a husband or wife is jealous of their spouse's feelings of friendship. A woman who doesn't want her husband to have any buddies because she is jealous of every split second of his time and every bit of his friendship has gone too far.

So there are perversions of jealousy. However when it is not perverted jealousy is a godly thing. Any time God describes Himself in terms of some human analogy the analogy drops at any point where our limitation and need enter in, because God is not limited or needy in any way. The perverted jealousy of an insecure husband who needs his wife's constant reassurance is an unpleasant thing. God's jealousy is not like that. He doesn't need us. He doesn't need anything from us, including our love or our praise or our worship or our faith. He is utterly self-sufficient.

John Piper draws a helpful analogy:

Instead God is jealous like a powerful and merciful king who takes a peasant girl from a life of shame, forgives her, marries her, and gives her not the chores of a slave, but the privileges of a wife—a queen. His jealousy does not rise from fear or weakness but from a holy indignation at having his honor and power and mercy scorned by the faithlessness of a fickle spouse.<sup>1</sup>

And the fact that God does not need our love makes His jealousy all the more wonderful a reality. His desiring our love is a gift of grace. Any "love" generated in my heart apart from His grace – anything that ultimately originates in me apart from Him – is worthless. The only thing that could possibly be desirable to God is something that ultimately came from His grace, because He is the source of all good. And so the love that is in me for Him is something that had a divine origin. The fidelity and commitment and faith and love and devotion to Him that He desires from us and that He jealously guards is something that He desires because it is of infinite, eternal value; which means it's something that came from Him.

## **Good Jealousy**

If someone else is becoming the object of your spouse's romantic or sexual love, or if someone besides you is your spouse's best friend, you should be jealous. And if you are not it means you don't love your spouse properly.

A non-jealous husband, who is indifferent about his wife's affections, is a man who just simply does not love his wife. If he does not desire her exclusive love and cares nothing about her unique affection, he does not love her. If her faithful romantic affection means nothing to him it's because he does not desire that affection, which means he does not love her. If he doesn't care whether he is desired by her, it's because he does not desire her.

And a wife in such a marriage is to be pitied. It's a terrible thing for a woman to be married to a man who is indifferent about her love. And the reason it's a terrible thing is because a man's jealousy for his wife's love is an indication of how valuable her love is to him. If she falls in love with another man and he doesn't care, it's because her love is worth nothing to him. When a man deeply loves a woman he will do anything to win her

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<sup>1</sup> ([http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1984/458\\_The\\_Lord\\_Whose\\_Name\\_Is\\_Jealous/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1984/458_The_Lord_Whose_Name_Is_Jealous/))

heart because her heart means the world to him. It is a great treasure to him. So if her heart means nothing to him, it shows he does not love her.

If there is a young woman who is desired by no one, whose affections no one wants, as she becomes aware of how unwanted she is she will despair with feelings of worthlessness. If there is a man she deeply loves and desires, and that man hears a rumor that she is in love with someone else, and when that man hears that rumor he doesn't care in the least, that will break her heart. But if when that man hears that rumor he weeps, that will thrill her heart.

It should thrill our hearts when we hear the news that God is jealous for our love.

God built jealousy into marital love to protect the sacred marriage relationship. Jealousy stands like a guard against any third party that would break in and destroy the holy, precious, beautiful exclusivity of marital love.

If you are a wife drifting toward adultery, it is a sad, pitiable thing if your husband is not jealous. And in a much greater way it would be a sad, pitiable thing to have a non-jealous God. If He were not jealous when we were unfaithful it would only mean one thing- He doesn't love us.

His jealousy is the only thing that gives your love for Him value. If your faithful love for God meant nothing to God, then your faithful love for God would be utterly worthless, which means you would be utterly worthless because if the best thing about you is worthless, then you really are worthless. The only thing that gives my existence any meaning or value at all is the fact that my love means something to God.

Beyond that, it is God's jealousy that is behind His work of preservation. My sinful heart is so prone to wander from God, and so prone to drift off toward some earthly thing, that if God were not constantly working in my heart to preserve my love for Him, I would fall away from Him and apostatize completely in a very short period of time. God tenaciously fights for my affections – and that is the only thing that keeps me alive spiritually. When I sin He brings consequences. When I seek Him He rewards me with His presence. When I fall into self-deception He uncovers that with conviction from the Holy Spirit. When others try to deceive me He protects me by opening my eyes and alerting me with His Word. When I begin to falter He sends godly men and women to strengthen me or rebuke me or encourage me or give me whatever I need. God is constantly working in my heart to keep my love for Him alive. And it's a lot of work. If God didn't have powerful, compelling zeal in His heart to maintain my love for Him, the rebellious, unfaithful bent of my flesh would very quickly pull me so far away from Him that I would have no desire to return at all. And the thing that keeps God working so zealously is His jealousy.

So our love for God ultimate came from Him, making it of infinite value; but it is also coming from our hearts in a very real way. It's not like me buying myself a gift and then putting it in my child's hands and pretending it's really a gift from him. Somehow, by some unfathomable mystery, the gifts we have to offer God, even though they ultimately came from Him, really are from us. Our love for God really is *our* actual love for Him. The gifts He enables us to give Him that please Him really are, by some astonishing, inexplicable miracle, from us.

We should walk through the day delighted that we have the ability to please Him; that we have something He wants. It's so frustrating when my wife is in need of something I can't provide. It's so frustrating when I don't have what it takes to comfort her or cheer her up or make her happy or fill her with delight. But when I am able to do all those things, what joy that brings me! So how much greater joy should it bring me when I can actually give something to You that delights God!

Whenever we are tempted with sin, we should remember that the pull that sin has on our hearts makes God feel the same way you would feel if you saw your spouse falling in love with someone else. And that should move us to want to give Him the undivided, exclusive love that He graciously enabled us to give Him and in which He delights.

**Psalm 73:27-28 But behold, all how are far from You will certainly perish; You destroy all who commit adultery against You. <sup>28</sup> But as for me, the nearness of God is my good**

Those who are far from God are parallel with those who commit adultery against Him. And the opposite of one who commits adultery against Him is one who considers His nearness to be his good.

We are always looking to something as our good. And if it's anything besides His nearness, we are adulteresses. Paul said the Corinthians were moving toward impurity and adultery simply because they were tolerating false teachers in their midst, and giving them a hearing. (2 Cor.11:2-4) He gives no indication that I see that they were believing the false gospel – just that they were interested to hear it.

Adultery doesn't begin with marrying another man. It begins with being enticed in some subtle way and having the desires of the heart drift toward that enticement. And unfaithfulness to God begins when we want to give a hearing to some false doctrine.

Learn to enjoy God's protective jealousy, and marvel in the fact that your love matters so much to Him!