

His Name is "Jealous"!

How God feels about cheatn' hearts.

"For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods. Thou shalt make thee no molten gods." Exodus 34:14-17

Someone once defined jealousy as a feeling of displeasure that comes over us when we hear about the success of others. Because a tendency, whether conscious or subconscious, resides in all of us to project our faults to others, to ignore our flaws, but condemn the same in other persons (Matthew 7:1-5), any thought about God being jealous can be troubling. Yet "jealousy" helps to define God's character, and it may be surprising to know that for Him, jealousy is not the negative quality that we might presume it to be.[1] In the Law, God even goes by the name, "**Jealous**" (Exodus 34:14).

Caution therefore, ought to be exercised before considering that our emotions equate to God's. We should not project His divinity to be like our depravity. How we feel below does not transfer to how He feels above. We need to let God be God. We should allow His revelation, the Bible, to speak for Him, about what He means when He repeatedly declares, "**I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God**" (Exodus 20:5; See Deuteronomy 5:9; 6:14-15a; Joshua 24:19.). We should not paint God in our image. If we dare malign God to be as we are, then the inference can be idolatrous. So how should we understand divine jealousy? To understand God's jealousy, the analogy of marriage may be helpful.

As "**God is love**" (1 John 4:8, 16), the Bible pictures God as married to His people. Israel is described as "**the wife of Jehovah**" (Isaiah 54:5; 62:5; Hosea 2:19), and the church as "**the bride of Christ.**" As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "**For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin**" (2 Corinthians 11:2). In the Bible, marriage is the chief means by which the relationship between God and His people is explained. Like any loving husband, the One who is "**Jealous**" is zealous. He will protect that which lawfully belongs to Him.

Every declaration that God is "jealous" is made in the context of His warning against idolatry (Exodus 20:4-5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 5:9; 6:14-15a; Joshua 24:19-20). In other words, the Lord is "jealous" to protect His relationship with His covenant people. God tolerates no rivals within the hearts of the people He loves, and who profess to love Him. As Wikipedia puts it, "Jealousy typically refers to the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that occur when a person believes a *valued relationship* is being threatened by a rival." [2, Emphasis mine.] As such, we can see that God's jealousy coordinates with God's love. In His prohibition against idols, God states, "**You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of**

those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Emphasis mine, Exodus 20:4-5). God's jealousy describes the intensity of His covenant love for His people.[3] As such, and unlike us, His jealousy is not impulsive, greedy, or bad-tempered.

About the human institution of marriage, a commentator observes that any husband who feels, "no jealousy at the intrusion of a lover or an adulterer into their home would surely be lacking in moral perception; for the exclusiveness of marriage is the essence of marriage." [4] As such, and from a divine point of view, God's jealousy may be compared to the emotion that persons experience upon suspecting, or finding out, that their spouses have been unfaithful.

But in this era of sexual promiscuity, open marriages, and easy divorce, we might be desensitized to any idea that God possesses righteous jealousy. Dementedly, some might even suggest that God's jealousy indicates He is a narcissist. This hypothetical accusation needs to be addressed.

Narcissism is self-love. But in contrast, the Triune God loves others. The Father loves the Son (John 3:35; 15:9; 17:23, 24, 26). The Son loves the Father and desires to be with Him (John 17:1, 21). The Holy Spirit focuses His attention on the Son (John 15:26). If any virtue characterizes God, it's selflessness, not selfishness, and altruism, not narcissism. **"For God so loved the world that He gave . . ."** (John 3:16).

What is God passionate about? He is passionate for His covenant people! He intensely desires that no idol, whether imagined or real, come between Him and them. That is why when "the wife of Jehovah" committed spiritual harlotry, Moses sang, **"They made Him jealous with strange gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger"** (Deuteronomy 32:16). If God was not so jealously passionate, there are those who would turn around and accuse Him of promoting spiritual promiscuity. Therefore, the thinking that divine jealousy stems from self-love is wrong.[5] As the Bible reveals Him to be, God is passionate about those who are His children, those in covenant with Him.

As it seeks common ground with other religions and spiritualities, emergent evangelicalism reveals its flirtn' and cheatn' heart. Forsaking "One-Way Jesus," the **"only begotten Son of God"** (John 1:14; 3:16; Hebrews 11:17), is spiritual adultery leading to idolatry. If, for reason of pluralistic (i.e., various religions worship the same God) and syncretic (i.e., faith should include the beliefs of all religions) tendencies, evangelicals are flirting with other spiritualities, then we can be certain of one thing: The One who's name is "Jealous" is jealous!

In the real world, people, even Hollywood celebrities, find it difficult to cope with cheating spouses, and this despite the popular notion that sex ought to be unrestrained and open.[6] Most Hollywoodites can't personally cope with the infidelity of their live-in or marriage partners. First, they become jealous. Next, they separate. Then, if married, they hire lawyers and file a legal grievance for their share of the estate, including compensatory "damages." Finally, they are divorced. If this is how the Hollywood set plays it on earth, how can any of us be so hypocritical to suggest that, for all of the right reasons, our faithful God has no right to be jealous in heaven? If, like the Hollywoodites, people can't accept infidelity of their spouses, then

surely they have no right to expect that the One who's name is "Jealous" will dispassionately tolerate spiritual adultery committed by His covenant people.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Human terms describing God's person are "anthropomorphisms." Human emotions used to portray God's feelings are "anthropopathisms." I am reluctant to categorize human characteristics as necessarily anthropomorphic or anthropopathic for God is, after all, the Person from whom we derived our person (Genesis 2:7). Between the human and divine, there is necessary identity, though not equivalency. Given God's infinitude and our finitude, it becomes idolatry to think that our emotions equate to God's. Humans should not project who they are to be who God is, for idolatry is thinking wrong thoughts about God, or ascribing wrong characteristics to Him. Yet Scripture reveals to us that God feels deeply, and one of His deeply felt emotions is jealousy. He is so identified with this emotion that His name is "Jealous" (Exodus 34:14). But while He may be jealous, God is not envious. Unlike us, God's jealousy is not coveting (See Exodus 20:17; Colossians 3:5).

[2] "Jealousy," *Wikipedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jealousy>).

[3] On this point, I am indebted to the discussion of Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972): 101-103.

[4] R.V.G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956): 106. John Calvin also wrote, "Therefore, as the purer and chaster the husband is, the more grievously he is offended when he sees his wife inclining to a rival; so the Lord, who has betrothed us to himself in truth, declares that he burns with the hottest jealousy whenever, neglecting the purity of his holy marriage, we defile ourselves with abominable lusts, and especially when the worship of his Deity, which ought to have been most carefully kept unimpaired, is transferred to another, or adulterated with some superstition; since, in this way, we not only violate our plighted troth, but defile the nuptial couch, by giving access to adulterers." See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter VIII, Number 18, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), Henry Beveridge, Translator, Volume II, 331.

[5] "In jealousy there is more self-love than love." (François, Duc de La Rochefoucauld, Maxims, 1665 Quoted in "Quotations about Jealousy," *The Quote Garden*, (<http://www.quote garden.com/jealousy.html>)

[6] "At least 95 percent of married and cohabitating Americans expect sexual exclusivity," said Judy Treas, a sociology professor at the University of California at Irvine. See Russell Goldman, "Are Open Marriages More Successful Than Traditional Couplings?" ABC NEWS, August 10, 2007 (<http://abcnews.go.com/US/LifeStages/Story?id=3464575&page=1>). Counselors report that overcoming jealous feelings is the greatest hindrance to open marriages. Like that which is in man by creation, God's connection with people demands "loyal love" (Hebrew *hesed*, Jeremiah 31:3). God's love is closed, not open. And like Him, we humans long for the fidelity of exclusivity. And such longing cannot be rationalized away, even by those promoting the promiscuity of open marriage.