

THE JEALOUSY OF GOD

Text: Exodus 20:5, “*...for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.*”

A jealous God! How can a God who is holy, just, loving, gracious, merciful, and long-suffering possibly be jealous? We need to know the basis of this character trait of God.

The Meaning of God’s Jealousy

The root idea in the Old Testament word *jealous* is to become intensely red—dark red. It seems to refer to the changing color of the face or the rising heat of the emotions which are being felt. The sense of it is “*to boil.*”

Being *jealous* and being *zealous* is essentially the same thing in the Bible. God is zealous—eager about protecting what is precious to Him. When the term jealousy is applied to God in Scripture it is usually because His people are worshiping idols (Ps. 78:58).

There is no trace of selfishness in God’s jealousy. It is perfectly pure. It is the appropriate expression of His holiness. His divine, righteous jealousy is born out of pure love—love that will never tolerate a rival.

He Is Jealous for His Holy Name

“For you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Exo. 34:12-14).

It wasn’t long after God first spoke of His jealousy that He had occasion to demonstrate it. Moses had come down from Mt. Sinai with the two tablets of the law in his hands only to find the people of Israel carousing in idolatrous worship before the golden image of a calf. He threw the tablets to the earth, burned the calf and ground it to powder, then commanded the Levites to discipline the people. It was a vivid expression of God’s jealousy operating through His servant Moses.

***I am the LORD, that is My name;
I will not give My glory to another,
Nor My praise to graven images*** (Isa. 42:8).

God’s name is the epitome of who and what He is, and He says His name is Jealous. Jealousy is not merely a passing mood with God. It is the essence of His person. He cannot help being jealous. Since He is the highest and greatest being there is, infinitely holy and glorious, He must be passionately committed to preserving His honor and supremacy. He must zealously desire exclusive devotion and worship.

He says, “***I shall be jealous for My holy name***” (Eze. 39:25). His jealousy does not grow out of insecurity, anxiety, frustration, covetousness, pride, or spite, as ours usually does. It is the natural and necessary by-product of His absolute sovereignty and infinite holiness (Richard L. Strauss).

Soli Deo Gloria!