



**The Jealous Heart of God
and
Spiritual Transformation**

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Introduction

LORD Yahweh has revealed that His name is Jealous in Exodus 34:14. This article explores implications of God's jealous heart. The American culture currently views jealousy as a negative emotional construct. Does this view of jealousy implicate God as flawed or is there a perspective of jealousy that we need to recover from Old and New Testament teachings that will inform our spiritual journeys? Jealousy can be viewed as a universal human emotion and one that often surfaces within sexuality. Thus jealousy is central to our understanding of relating with God and living in His ways.

The concept of jealousy is examined within Jesus' teaching as well as the writings of those within the spiritual formation movement. The implications of jealousy for spiritual transformation include our understanding of spiritual adultery and our intimacy with God. Spiritual transformation can be framed as aligning the jealousies of our hearts with the jealous heart of God.

God's Jealous Heart

Various names of God are used many times in Scripture and others are used only a few. God's name Yahweh occurs 5,311 times in the Hebrew¹. The meaning of this Name reveals that God is the Self-Determinate One Who is always present². We can learn much about God's heart as we experience Him as the non-dependent One Who is always present in our lives and the world around us. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus reveals something of God through His name which indicates "he will save his people from their sins."³ Understanding God's means of saving us through His Son can help us perceive His heart more clearly. There are many Names of God and each reveal much about God and how He desires to relate to us.

A name of God that is used only once in the Scriptures is Jealous. In Exodus 34:14 LORD Yahweh reveals to Moses that His very name is Jealous. It would be easy to neglect this one passage as less than central to the heart of God, except for the fact that God had previously revealed to Moses within a strategic moment in time that He is a jealous God. This first direct revelation of jealousy came when the great I Am gave the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel as they began their freedom from slavery. God embedded several "for" clauses within these commandments. These clauses give sense to the reasons behind our ethical understanding. The first "for" clause is: "for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God ..."⁵

Is the precious heart of God revealed among the core ethical commandments for the nation of Israel? These stone commandments, along with manna and Aaron's rod that budded, were later placed within the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was then placed upon the seat of mercy and within the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and illuminated by His glory. Within this shadowland that foretells of Jesus and His sacrifice for our redemption, Yahweh revealed an extremely important aspect of Who He is. He is jealous. This revelation of God we cannot ignore for it holds a prominent place in the overall story of God.

God's jealousy seems out of sight for most believers today. Somehow this revelation and its importance to walking with God have been hidden from our modern eyes. Discussions about the proper place to display the Ten Commandments within American society are frequently in the news and from our pulpits we discuss the urgency of these commands. But when do discussions of these commands include an honest look at the jealous heart of God? This begs a question, is God's jealousy something that is essential to understanding our relationship with Him and our spiritual transformation? Was it by accident that He symbolically wrapped His

¹ Larry Richards, *Every Name of God In the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 23-25.

³ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Matthew 1:21.

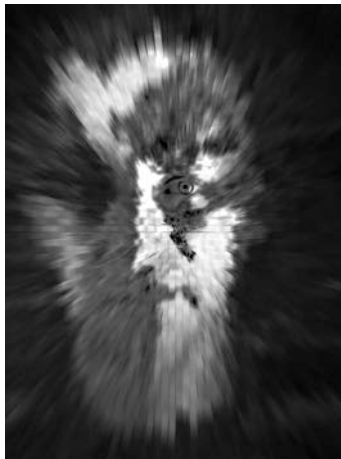
⁴ All Scripture references are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Exodus 20:5.

jealous heart with ethical commands and a promise of provision within the holy of holies – a promise that brings forth life encased by a covenant of mercy which overcomes the justice demanded by His own holiness which was highlighted in His eternal glory? These embedded symbols of the Tabernacle (see Hebrews 8, 9) were not to be lost in the community of faith. But unfortunately, they have often been lost in our day.

Today's world is not the first to lose sight of the jealousy of God. In Hosea's time, the people of faith "knew" God apart from His jealousy. They understood that when they sinned they could always come back to God. "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence."⁶ They thought they had cracked the formula of God's restoring ways – "after two days" they reasoned God will predictably give them what they wanted. However, God rebuked them for the shallowness of their love and brought judgment upon them.⁷ Their formula didn't work. Something was missing in their understanding of God's love. They had failed to recognize and live into His jealous love. They had trivialized God's love by making Him Someone they could manage while still playing games of spiritual harlotry.

Today we have a understanding and God. Is God loving or is popular agreement is that Being Who welcomes the Scriptural evidence of God schizophrenic? When When will His wrath manage God's responses discussion seldom His jealousy. Does not immense tenderness and at being spurned?



dilemma in our experience of the heart of He a God of wrath? The He is loving – a benevolent everyone into heaven; but His wrath is undeniable. Is can we expect His love? appear? How can we to us? This age-old includes an understanding of jealous love bring both also a proper sense of anger

In the Song of Solomon, the lover's song, the nature of jealousy is revealed. "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame" (Song of Solomon 8:6). Love's jealousy is unyielding, it can burn, and it is mutually possessive. This jealousy is within the beautiful love described in Solomon's Song: *a jealous love that possesses, provides, protects, honors, frees, and delights.*

⁶ *The Holy Bible: New International Version.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Hosea 6:1, 2.

⁷ Ibid. Hosea 6:4-7.

In today's world, though we often view God as loving, we seldom view Him as the Lover of our souls. Consequently, some have formularized and "played" with God. In this view, He can be controlled. He can be scripted to say what we want to hear. He can be predicted. He can be manipulated to allow us all the freedoms we demand by constraining Him to always be "loving". And if He steps outside any definition of love that would deny us material provisions or freedom to secure sensual pleasure, then we can reject Him as a stingy or powerless God or an angry God who is wrongly judging us. We might even conclude He is a schizophrenic God Who is loving one moment and wrathful the next.

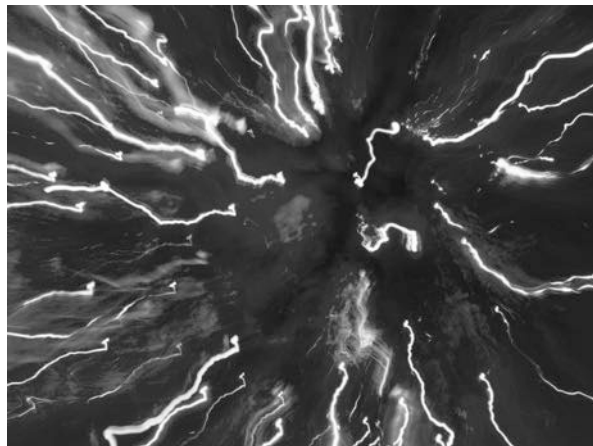
The Scriptures tell us that God is loving and that His love is jealous. His jealousy accounts for both tender mercies and for wrathful judgment. He is the Jealous Lover of our souls worthy of our worship.

Isn't Jealousy a Bad Thing?

The concept of jealousy is often viewed only as negative within our society. Jealous is over-possessive. It restricts and binds people. It manipulates and controls people. It is selfishly oriented. Jealousy is envious of others and thus drains the life out of others. Jealousy is a disease within relationships that, if extracted, would allow people to live in freedom with one another – even free sexual love. Jealousy is almost always bad for relationships within our cultural framework.

This view of jealous was not always the case. Sociologist Gordon Clanton noted the changing construct of jealousy in the American culture. He stated:

"From the end of World War II until the late 1960's, virtually all of the articles in popular magazines said that a certain amount of jealousy was natural, proof of love, and good for marriage ... By about 1970, a new view of jealousy was taking root in a substantial and influential minority of Americans ... According to the emerging view, jealousy was not natural; it was learned. Jealousy was no longer seen as proof of love; it was, rather, evidence of a defect such as low self-esteem or the inability to trust. Thus, jealousy was not seen as good for relationships; it was bad for them. From this it followed that



one could and should seek to eradicate every trace of jealousy from one's personality." ⁸

Moreover, the Scriptures repeatedly call us to avoid jealousy. This usually implies being "*jealous of*" someone or something. Jealousy is included with many other aspects of behavior and motives that we are called to flee from. "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, *jealousy* ⁹, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."¹⁰ What then could possibly be good about jealousy?

If we conclude nothing is good about jealousy, then we have a theological problem since God, Who is good, has proclaimed Himself to be jealous. Is this word really worthy of being His name? So again, what is good about jealousy? A while back I had the privilege of leading a Sunday school class of young adults. One day I asked this question, "Who thinks jealousy is a negative emotion? And who thinks it is a positive emotion?" Of the twelve people, only one voted that jealousy was positive. So we asked her why. Her response was powerful. "When my husband stopped being jealous *for me*, it was the end of our relationship." In like manner, to frame jealousy within our relationship with God, we might say, "When the God of the universe ceases to be jealous *for us* that will be the end of our relationship with Him." A "*jealousy for*" someone can be good – very good.

A "*jealousy of*" someone is more appropriately called envy. Gordon Clanton (1998) makes a connection between jealousy and envy. He states:

It is widely believed that jealousy and envy are the same emotion. In fact, although jealousy and envy often are mixed together in real life, they are responses to quite different situations. Jealousy always involves an attempt to protect a valued relationship (especially marriage) from a perceived threat (especially adultery). Envy is resentment toward someone who has some desirable object or quality that one does not have and cannot get. Envy, in other words, is hostility toward superiors, a negative feeling toward someone who is better off. Envy is *not* the wish for the object or advantage that provoked the envy. Rather, envy is the much darker wish that the superior would lose the object or advantage. Envy is the pleasure, the malicious joy, that is felt when the superior fails or suffers.¹¹

Thus "*jealousy of*" someone should be seen as envy and dealt with as the type of jealousy that Scripture calls us to avoid.

⁸ Gordon Clanton, "Jealousy in American culture, 1945-1985". In Gordon Clanton & Lynn G. Smith (Eds.). *Jealousy* (3rd ed.). (New York, NY: University Press of America, 1998), 262-264.

⁹ Italics mine.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Galatians 5:19.

¹¹ Gordon Clanton, "A Sociology of Jealousy". In Gordon Clanton & Lynn G. Smith (Eds.), *Jealousy* (3rd ed.), (New York: University Press of America, 1998), 305.

Moreover, this powerful emotion of jealousy can be seen as a universal emotion. Psychologist David Buss asserts this basic universality:

Jealousy turned out not to be merely a mark of some character defect. It is expressed in perfectly normal people who show no signs of neurosis or immaturity ... By uncovering the origins of this emotion, we can better understand its modern manifestations and learn how to grapple with them. Jealousy, I was forced to conclude, is no less basic than fear or rage, its expression no less important than flight or fight.¹²

The nature of godly jealousy – that is, “*jealousy for*” – in a relationship includes being *mutually possessive* of each other, *delighting* in each other, *honoring* each other, *freeing* each other to be who they are individually and together, *providing* what is needed for individual and mutual growth, and *protecting* each other from outsiders who would destroy their relationship. This jealousy is evident between good friends and can be the seal of love within a marriage relationship.

Similarly, God possesses us while freeing us. This relational paradox seems to stand against the American value of freedom. We seek to be free, not possessed. The marvel of understanding this aspect of God’s jealousy lies within the mutual aspect of possessiveness. God possess us. And He also allows us to “possess” Him. We can call Him “our God” (see Mark 12:29) and “our Father” (see Matthew 6:9). These commonly known phrases from the Bible reveal that God does not require absolute distance from His created ones. He calls us into a mutually possessive relationship. But this possessiveness frees us. It is not over-possessive. It doesn’t give up on the other without a fight (see Song of Solomon 8:5, 6). God’s jealousy protects us and provides goodness for our souls. He shields us from the Evil One’s desires to destroy us. He also protects us from our own lust and pride as we surrender to His protection. Furthermore, jealous hearts delight in each other. Jealousy is not just about legal rights (possessiveness and freedoms) and obligations (protecting and providing). It is about the joy of our hearts. Jealous hearts delight in each other’s presence and honor each other. Just being with each other is a wonderful “leaping of the heart” experience. We enjoy times together; we anticipate returning to each other; we seek opportunities for secret times; we speak languages of love to each other; we help each other grow. Love’s jealousy impacts our entire relationship with each other. This type of godly jealousy is being “*jealous for*” someone, not “*jealous of*” someone.

Our awareness of jealousy is often heightened when a breach of relationship occurs. Jealousy, that is always present and seals a relationship, flares when one leaves for another lover. This understanding of God’s jealous heart speaks into the story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac. God called Abraham to love Him

¹² David Buss, *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy Is as Necessary as Love and Sex* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 26-27.

more than Isaac, and Abraham's heart responded "yes" to his jealous Lord because Abraham's heart was jealous for God above Isaac.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul had a jealousy for the believers at Corinth. "I am *jealous for*¹³ you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."¹⁴ We can see the threads of possessing, freeing, honoring, providing, protecting, and delighting within Paul's jealous ministry to many.

Furthermore, Milne reviews and explains the Old and New Testament words used for jealousy.

The principal OT term rendered as jealousy in the English Bible is *qîn'â* from the verb *qānā*, root meaning 'become dark red' (Nu. 5:14; Pr. 6:34; Ezk. 16:42; etc.). The normal LXX translation of *qîn'â* and its cognates is *zēloō* or the cognate *parazēloō* (Dt. 32:21; cf. Rom. 10:19), and these are the principal terms used in the NT (Acts 7:9; Rom. 11:11; 1 Cor. 10:22; 13:4). Both Heb. and Gk. words refer to an exclusive single-mindedness of emotion which may be morally blameworthy or praiseworthy depending on whether the object of the jealousy is the self or some cause beyond the self. In the former case the result is envy, or hatred of others (Gn. 30:1; Pr. 3:31; Ezk. 31:9), which for the NT is the antithesis of love and hence the enemy of true Christian fellowship (1 Cor. 13:4; 2 Cor. 12:20; Jas. 3:14). The Bible however also represents the other possibility, of a 'divine jealousy' (2 Cor. 11:2), a consuming single-minded pursuit of a good end (1 Ki. 19:10; Ex. 20:5; 1 Cor. 12:31). This positive usage is frequently associated with the marriage relationship where a jealousy for the exclusiveness of the relationship is the necessary condition of its permanence (Nu. 5:11ff.; Ezk. 16:38; 2 Cor. 11:2). Jealousy is referred to God as well as men (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Na. 1:2). Difficulty is sometimes felt with this, due principally to the way in which the negative connotations of the term have come to predominate in common English usage. Scripture however also witnesses to a positive application of jealousy and finds in this idea a highly relevant term to denote God's holy zeal for the honour of his name and the good of his people who are bound to him in the marriage of the covenant (Dt. 32:16, 21; 2 Ki. 19:31; Ezk. 36:5f.; Zc. 1:14f.; Jn. 2:17). *In this sense the jealousy of God is of the essence of his moral character, a major cause for worship and confidence on the part of his people and a ground for fear on the part of his enemies.*^{15 16}

¹³ Italics mine.

¹⁴ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3.

¹⁵ B. A. Milne, "Jealousy". In Wood, D. R. W. ; Wood, D. R. W. ; Marshall, I. Howard (Eds.): *New Bible Dictionary*. electronic ed. of 3rd ed. Downers Grove : InterVarsity Press, 1996, c1982, c1962, S. 544.

¹⁶ Italics mine.

Thus a positive as well as a negative usage of jealousy must be considered within the discussion of jealousy and we can conclude that the jealousy of God is all positive.

Connecting to Jealousy through Sexuality

Let's consider a foundational question regarding jealousy. How does humanity even have the capacity to connect to the concept of the jealousy of God? Consider this question: Since we are created in the image of God, what aspect of His being would we not intuitively understand if we had not been created sexual beings? God could have made us asexual beings (like earthworms) and thus secured the multiplication of human bodies. But He made us male and female. He complicated humanity by making us sexual beings. Within sexuality and regardless of behavioral practices (heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual) with the possible exception of bestiality, jealousy remains a significant component of the dance of sexuality. It's everywhere in human society, but often just below the surface of our normal recognition and dialogue.



The Hollywood film industry often tries to diminish jealousy in order to justify "free sexual love". In the long run, however, jealousy always surfaces (even in films) unless people have dulled this powerful emotion beyond recognition. The pornography industry is an attempt to access sexual love freed from the strings of jealousy. Viewing naked people in various positions, interactions and combinations may excite our lust, but it doesn't free our hearts from the bonds which jealousy provides. These bonds can help secure healthy relationships between sexual beings. These bonds can cause severe pain when a foreign lover is interjected within any bonded relationship. The dance of sexual beings is fundamentally a dance of jealous hearts. And within this dance, we are called to a greater dance with the Jealous Lover of our souls Who rejects all foreign lovers between us and Him. Understanding this symbolic meaning of sexuality can impact our sexual identities and behaviors as well as our relationship with God. As we foster jealous love as sexual beings, we learn to possess, free, provide, honor, protect and delight in ways that nurtures all our human relationships.

In the dance of sexual beings, men and women often connect to jealousy from different perspectives. Gordon Clanton and Lynn Smith report:

Men are more apt to *deny* jealous feeling; women are more apt to *acknowledge* them. Men are more likely than women to express jealous feelings through rage and even violence, but such outburst are often followed by despondency... Women often *internalize* the cause of jealousy; they blame themselves. Similarly, a jealous man is more likely to display *competitive* behavior toward the third party while a jealous woman is more likely to display *possessive* behavior. She clings to her partner rather than confronting the third party.¹⁷

Whether from a male or female perspective, the play of jealousy in human relations can be a foretaste of God drawing us into His jealous heart.

Within this understanding of God's jealousy, the prophet Ezekiel exhorted his fellow Jews, with the most highly sexual terms used in Scripture, to return to their God. First he calls them prostitutes who pay their lovers and then God announces His jealous response.

You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband! Every prostitute receives a fee, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favors. So in your prostitution you are the opposite of others; no one runs after you for your favors. You are the very opposite, for you give payment and none is given to you.¹⁸

I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers. Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you...¹⁹

In His intent to shake them loose from their spiritual adultery, God gave Ezekiel even stronger sexual language that reveals His jealous heart as a spurned Husband.

When she carried on her prostitution openly and exposed her nakedness, I turned away from her in disgust, just as I had turned away from her sister. Yet she became more and more promiscuous as she recalled the days of her youth, when she was a prostitute in Egypt. There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses. So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt your bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.²⁰

When the people ceased to have any sense of their adulterous behavior before God, God is disgusted and He equates their actions to those of prostitution

¹⁷ Gordon Clanton & Lynn G. Smith (Eds.), *Jealousy* (3rd ed.). (New York: University Press of America, 1998), 11.

¹⁸ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Ezekiel 16:32-34.

¹⁹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Ezekiel 16:41-42.

²⁰ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Ezekiel 23:17-21.

and bestiality in hopes of shaming them into good judgment and into returning to His faithful and jealous love as their Husband.

Jealousy, Ethics and the Teachings of Jesus

In the Old Testament God revealed two linked ethical systems. We are most familiar with the laws of good and evil behavior. These are based in the authority of God to detail His commands to humanity. A second system is based in the rules of “clean and unclean”. This ethical system is linked with the laws of good and evil behavior, and yet it stands apart by bringing an aesthetic aspect to the discussion. Both systems of ethical reasoning are ultimately based within the beauty of God’s holiness and His jealous heart. From a Biblical viewpoint, that which is ethical relates to that which God values. To fully grasp this, we must understand that which God values comes from His jealous heart.

Again Ezekiel illustrates this jealous heart of God. The children of Israel had corrupted both ethical reasonings. “Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them”.²¹ To live ethically requires that we embrace both the lawful and the clean. This ultimately requires that we seek the beauty of God’s holiness. And that holiness is revealed through His jealous heart toward us.

In the shadowland of the Old Testament, jealousy was revealed. But the noticeable omission of the term jealousy from the teachings of Jesus would bring into question the importance of jealousy within our relationship with God. Not one time did Jesus directly speak of God’s jealous heart. He spoke of the Ten Commandments; He gave us a new commandment to love one another; He gave us the Beatitudes; He said many things about Himself, the Father and the Spirit, but He never spoke directly about jealousy. If the heart of God is jealous, we would have to conclude that Jesus left it hidden or considered jealousy unimportant. In one sense He did leave it hidden; in another sense Jesus often spoke from the language of jealousy.

When Jesus tossed the moneychangers out of the temple, He revealed His jealousy for the Father. When Jesus saw His Father’s temple, which was designed as a place of worship, turned into a business venture, He did what His jealous heart demanded – He cleaned house. Jealousy calls us to cleanse the rooms of our hearts from things that supplant God as the true Lover of our souls. Jesus calls us to this path of worship – a jealous path.

²¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Ezekiel 22:26.

Consider the core teachings of Jesus from Luke 13-17. These are amazing windows into the heart of God when viewed through the lens of His jealous love. Below are a means of viewing God's jealous love through Jesus' teaching:



1. A jealous love that sorrows over His children (13:34).
2. A jealous love that invited us into the honor of fellowship and feasting with Him (14:15-17).
3. A jealous love that can be aroused when we spurn Him (14:18-23).
4. A jealous love that requires total allegiance above all other relationships, even with oneself (14:26).
5. A jealous love that rejoices at the return of one lost person over the smugness of ninety-nine who have no apparent need for the pure righteousness that God's jealousy offers (15:7).
6. A jealous love that diligently seeks that which is precious and rejoices at being sought in return (15:8).
7. A jealous love that clothes us with symbols of honor, privilege and protection ... with the best robe, a ring and sandals (15:22).
8. A jealous love that celebrates with music, dancing and lavish dining (15:23) over the possessiveness and freedom in relationships. "This son of mine ... was lost and is alive again" (15:24).
9. A jealous love that spurns the rival of the material world (16:13).
10. A jealous love that is symbolically understood through the marriage relationship, divorce and adultery (16:18).
11. A jealous love that reserves hell for those who reject Him and heaven for those who yield to be embraced by Him (16:19-31) Who rightfully owns us.
12. A jealous love that brings woe to those who would cause others to stumble in their relationship with Him (17:1-3).

When jealous love is breached, Jesus implicitly makes it clear that God is longsuffering. The story of the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11-32) reveals the heart of God Who will jealously receive back a wayward child. He delights in his son's return. He honors him with clothes, sandals, a ring and a feast. He freely restores him to the position of a son rather than receive him back as a servant. The jealousy of God is strong; He is longsuffering when we turn from Him. He is quick to receive us with love and honor. Yet, His jealousy can lead to anger. In this regard, He is unpredictable, untamed, and unsafe while at the same time remaining our security and hope and allowing us the full privilege of calling Him Father. Such is the paradox and consistency of jealous love.

Packer, Calvin and Barth's View of God's Jealousy

“The jealous God’ – doesn’t it sound offensive? For we know jealousy, ‘the green-eyed monster’, as a vice, one of the most cancerous and soul-destroying vices that there is; whereas God, we are sure, is perfectly good.”²² Thus J.I Packer addressed the issue of how unimaginable it is for us to see God as jealous and yet he maintains that it is only through God’s self revelation in Scripture that we know Him to be jealous. Packer delineates between corrupted human jealousy and God’s praiseworthy jealousy. “And in the same way, God’s jealousy is not a compound of frustration, envy, and spite, as human jealousy so often is, but appears instead as a (literally) praiseworthy zeal to preserve something supremely precious.”²³



Packer also links jealousy to sexuality and affirms it’s proper role in this relationship.

But there is another sort of jealousy—zeal to protect a love-relationship, or to avenge it when broken. This jealousy also operates in the sphere of sex; there, however, it appears, not as the blind reaction of wounded pride, but as the fruit of marital affection. As Professor Tasker has written, married persons ‘who felt 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’ (*The Epistle of James*, p.106).²⁴

Cementing his case for God’s jealousy, Packer turns to John Calvin.

Calvin hit the nail on the head when he explained the sanction of the second commandment as follows:

The Lord very frequently addresses us in the character of a husband ... As He performs all the offices of a true and faithful husband, so He requires love and chastity from us; that is, that we do not prostitute our souls to Satan ... As the purer and chaster a husband is, the more grievously he is offended with 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 lust, and especially when

²² J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (Madison, WI, InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 151.

²³ Ibid, 153.

²⁴ Ibid, 154.

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 (*Institutes*, II, viii, 18).²⁵

The idea of the jealousy of God is intricately tied to the coming reign of the Triune God. Karl Barth wove the concept of the jealousy of God into his discussions of grace, covenant and His coming kingdom:

Quite apart from the exegetical violence done by his thesis, A. Ritschl failed to see that with the present experience of the divine wrath he was also eliminating its eschatological reality, and that with the elimination of the idea of divine wrath in general he was eliminating that of divine grace and love, converting it into an idea which has scarcely anything in common with the contingent reality in which, according to the witness of the Old and New Testament, God in His own person encounters man. If God does not meet us in *His jealous zeal and wrath*²⁶—exactly as He meets Israel according to the witness of the Old Testament, exactly as He meets it later in the crucifixion of His own Son—then He does not meet us at all, and in spite of all our asseverations about divine love, man is in actual fact left to himself. That man is not abandoned in this way, that God is really gracious to him, is shown in the fact that God confronts him in holiness. It is in this way that God is present with him, taking over and conducting the cause which sinful man is impotent to conduct himself. It is in this way that God reconciles man to Himself.²⁷

We are, it seems, prone to de-fang God, removing jealousy from his character. But in so doing, we remove the greater meaning behind the work of God's grace in the lives of His people. A covenant made with a non-jealousy god ultimately will bring no salvation, no redemption, no holiness. For Barth it is precisely because of God's jealousy that the Son became Incarnate, that we received the most gracious visit of God with his people:

The position is now clear that God's patience does not leave man to his own devices. His *jealous*²⁸ zeal in and for the creature cannot be more powerfully manifested than in the incarnation of His Word. He has espoused the cause of the creature to the final depths. From this point of view the divine patience certainly cannot consist in an indifferent self-withdrawal of God in relation to its being, action and destiny. If He allows the many to go their own ways, if He leaves them their freedom, if He gives continual time (and food for it), if through it all He constantly waits for them, He does so for the simple reason that

²⁵ Ibid, 155.

²⁶ Italics mine.

²⁷Karl Barth; Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Thomas F. Torrance: *Church Dogmatics, Volume II The Doctrine of God, Part 1* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004), S. 365.

²⁸ Italics mine.

He has already overtaken them in the One, His only Son, that in Him He has already walked with them in His own way and at His own time, and to the very end. He does so because, in the One in whom He has given Himself utterly to all, they have already fallen into His hand. He does so because this One stands in place of them all and for them all has accomplished the genuine penitence which was expected from all. For the sake of this One, God has patience with the many.²⁹

This is the God that we meet in Jesus Christ; the One who reveals the jealous and righteous heart of God to people. We want the love of God, but that love, when emptied of the Triune God's own character becomes not love, but rather sentimentality, and such sentimentality cannot save us. What is more, such a god would not be worth being in a relationship of total trust. Instead, as Barth points out, His righteousness and goodness, the very nature of His character, is shown to us in the jealous nature of God's love for the people He enters into covenant with through Jesus Christ:

Faith in God's righteousness is at one and the same time the source of all comfort and the epitome of God's most *jealous*³⁰ demand upon man. For in this faith it is a matter of cleaving to God who does what befits Him and what is worthy of Him. That doing this He espouses man's cause, covenanting and keeping faith with him, is the comfort of this faith. But it is also God's strictest claim in that it affirms and apprehends as the covenant-partner of man the God who in this covenant does what befits Him, what is worthy of Himself.³¹

For Barth the jealousy of God reminds us not that we are merely saved from something (a negative eternity) but towards Someone, Someone whose love is true, Who gives life to His creatures, and Whose character we can always know is joyously saying "Yes" to us, even while He fervently says "No" to our rebellion and sin.

Thus for Packer, Calvin and Barth, God's jealousy is an inseparable aspect of His being that bears much consequence in His relations with His people. God's jealousy is to be honored and praised for His is our faithful Husband.

Jealousy and Spiritual Transformation

In describing the process of spiritual formation, Dallas Willard highlighted the importance of the heart. He stated, "Spiritual formation in Christ is the process leading to that ideal end, and its result is love for God with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and of the neighbor as oneself. The human self is then fully

²⁹ Karl Barth; Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Thomas F. Torrance: *Church Dogmatics, Volume II The Doctrine of God, Part 1* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004), S. 418.

³⁰ Italics mine.

³¹ Karl Barth; Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Thomas F. Torrance: *Church Dogmatics, Volume II The Doctrine of God, Part 1* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004), S. 385.

integrated under God.”³² And, “... for him (Jesus) and for his Father, the heart is what matters, and everything else will then come along.”³³ Though acknowledging the importance of heart, Willard, however, did not extend this discussion directly to the heart issue of jealousy.

In calling us to love God, Thomas Merton addressed the hierarchy of desires that are competing and connected issues of the heart.

All desires but one can fail. The only desire that is infallible is the desire to be loved by God. We cannot desire to do this efficaciously without at the same time desiring to love Him, and the desire to love Him is therefore a desire that cannot fail. Merely by desiring to love Him, we are beginning to do that which we desire. But if we love God for something less than Himself, we cherish a desire that can fail us. We run the risk of hating Him if we do not get what we hope for. It is lawful to love all things and to seek them, once they become means to the love of God. There is nothing we cannot ask of Him if we desire it in order that He may be more loved by ourselves or by other people.³⁴



Kenneth Boa, while writing an overview of spiritual transformation approaches, hinted at the play of jealousy without directly discussing this powerful emotional and relational dynamic. “Our Lord invites us to the highest calling of all – intimacy with him – and day after day, we decline the offer, preferring instead to fill our stomachs with the pods of short-lived pleasures and prospects.”³⁵ Furthermore, Boa neglected to include jealousy as an aspect of the attributes of God which directly relates to this call to intimacy.

Our capacity to love God is related to our image of God, so we do well to pray for the grace of growing apprehension of the glories of his attributes: his unlimited power, presence, and knowledge; his holiness, justice, goodness, truthfulness, and righteousness; his goodness, grace, compassion, mercy, and love; his beauty, glory, greatness, transcendent majesty, and dominion; and his self-existence, eternity, infinity, and immutability.³⁶

³² Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 31.

³³ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁴ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2005), 17

³⁵ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 32.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

If Merton is correct that “if we love God for something less than Himself, we cherish a desire that can fail us. We run the risk of hating Him if we do not get what we hope for”³⁷, then we must consider that if we do not love God as the jealous Lover of our souls, we may well run the risk of hating Him when we do not get what we hope for.

How might all this impact our understanding and experience of the transformative Gospel of Jesus? ***If the jealousies of our hearts are being aligned with the jealous heart of God, would we not then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be transforming from the inside out to become like Jesus?***

This idea runs the risk of overstating the importance of jealousy. However, to say that if our hearts are growing to reflect the very heart of God, we all would more quickly agree that spiritual transformation is in process. And conversely, if our hearts are not becoming “*jealous for*” that which God is “*jealous for*”, then we are not being spiritually transformed. Furthermore, in the glory of eternity, our hearts will be aligned with God’s heart. And if God is the Jealous Lover of our souls and Jesus is the Jealous Bridegroom at work to present us “to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish” (Ephesians 5:27), then it is safe to conclude that who or what we are “*jealous for*” and “*jealous of*” matters to God. This play of jealousy is a marvelous work of the Spirit of God within us drawing us into the heart of God.



If we relate to God as a distant Creator or as the Master or Teacher or even as a loving Being, we can fail to grasp the full nature of the relationship God has restored us to. As the bride of Christ, we are privileged to relate to God Who is our Lover, our Husband (see Isaiah 54:4).

Practically, how lovers nourish and protect their jealous love becomes a driving question to reflect and act upon. Instead of prescribing formulas to address this crucial question, we must approach this issue in “face-to-face” relationship. The first “step” in aligning our jealousies with God’s jealous heart is to authentically walk in His presence. God calls us to come boldly before His throne of grace, to call upon Him, to enjoy His presence that is everywhere, to acknowledge His delight in us. We must let ourselves out of the “box” before Him. Expose ourselves honestly before God Who already see us fully. Tell Him what we see about ourselves, what we really desire. And look upon the Triune God – the revelation of Himself in Scripture, in nature, and in humanity created in His image (yet marred but not beyond recognition of a divine image shadow). By doing so, we begin to deeply receive His

³⁷ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2005, c1955), 17.

mercies, His promises, His provisions, His beautiful holiness, and His glory that is revealed in His jealous heart for us. These are tremendous steps that form and transform our intimacy with God into a measure of Jesus' love for the Father.

This understanding of God's jealousy will impact our spiritual transformation journeys – our souls, our behaviors, our relationships with others and nature, our lifestyles, and our 24/7 worship. A. W. Tozer made a profound statement regarding our knowledge of God.

That our idea of God corresponds as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us... I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.³⁸

At every level and in all arenas of our lives, noble thoughts of God's jealous heart can positively impact us, our worship and ethics, if we choose to bask in His jealous love. However, neglecting His jealousy can be perilous to us all. We then essentially give ourselves the freedom to “construct” God to be Who we want Him to be rather than Who He has revealed Himself to be in Scripture. By aligning what we are “*jealous for*” with His jealousy, thereby cleansing the “*jealous of*” portions of our hearts, we align our relationships with God, people and nature in ways that honors God for Who He is. This delights His very heart.

The Apostle John ends his first epistle by saying “My children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). This conclusion to a book that focuses on walking in the light, in God, may seem somewhat strange. However, it is a call that is moored in the jealousy of God as first expressed within the Ten Commandments. Understanding the ways of God's jealousy will help make our hearts clean and good and keep our hearts from the idols of materialism, sexual addiction, worship of Satan, career prestige, and any other idol our culture or Satan offers.

Our view of the Trinity is greatly impacted by our understanding of godly jealousy. Jesus made a fascinating statement the night before His crucifixion. He proclaimed, “... the world must learn that I love the Father ...”³⁹ Most American Christians grew up learning “Jesus loves me this I know.” Jesus also wanted the world to know “Jesus loves the Father.” Such a declaration of tender love within a Godhead Whose Name is Jealous staggers the mind and the heart. The Father is jealous for the Son and the Spirit; the Son for the Father and the Spirit; the Spirit for the Father and Jesus. Our understanding of the God's jealousy within the Godhead is extremely limited. But the willingness of the Father to send the Son Who loves the Father to jealously reclaim humanity – such is a scenario that requires the human heart to bow with awe, humility, bewilderment and utter thankfulness. This is a

³⁸ Aiden W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961), 2.

³⁹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), John 14:31.

scenario that requires humanity to admit that the jealous love it desires it also does not deserve.

As we look back in history, we find others who have used the language of jealousy that indicate profound spiritual transformation. Here are some reflections from Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881).

Not because you are religious, but because I myself have experienced and felt it keenly, I will tell you that in such moments [times of suffering and solitude] one thirsts like “parched grass” for faith and finds it precisely because truth shines in misfortune. I will tell you regarding myself that I am a child of the age, a child of nonbelief and doubt up till now and even (I know it) until my coffin closes. What terrible torments this thirst to believe has cost me and still costs me, becoming stronger in my soul, the more there is in me of contrary reasonings.

And yet, sometimes God sends me moments in which I am utterly at peace. In those moments I have constructed for myself a creed in which everything is clear and holy for me. Here it is: to believe that there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more sympathetic, more reasonable, more courageous, and more perfect than Christ; and not only is there nothing but I tell myself in *jealous love*⁴⁰ that never could there be.⁴¹

Thus in his sufferings, in his times of peace, in his imaginations of beauty, in his holy moments, Dostoevsky’s experiential reality with Jesus Christ was enshrined with a jealous love. This represents a journey of spiritual transformation for all of us to pay close attention to. A step into this direction would be to examine our jealousies (especially when we are suffering), confront our blatant and subtle spiritual adulteries and repent of them, and align our hearts with God’s jealousy heart as we delight in His presence and our mutual ownership – we are His people and He is our God.

⁴⁰ Italics mine.

⁴¹ Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, translated by Michael A. Minihan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 151-152.

Conclusion

Many questions remain. How can we nourish godly jealousy, of being *“jealous for”*, in a world that exploits sensuality and materialism? How can we keep our hearts from the attractions of ungodly jealousy, of being *“jealous of”*, that is deeply envious of others? As we journey forward as missional communities of believers in our cultural contexts, we would do well to reflect on this important aspect of the nature of God’s love. His Name really is Jealous. And aligning our hearts with His jealous heart will profoundly impact our spiritual transformation journeys.



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