

Our Jealous God

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[0:00] In 1996, Ray Ortland, a Christian pastor and author, wrote a book called Whoredom, God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology.

! It's a catchy title, I guess, but it was a marketing failure, apparently. In 2003, they had to change the name and they released the book again under God's Unfaithful Wife, Spiritual Adultery in Biblical.

Biblical Theology. Whoredom apparently was too distasteful of a title, but the ickiness and the distastefulness of that title is no more distasteful than to the sin that it refers to.

Whoredom was a name that caught people's attention. In Exodus 34, God uses another name, another title, to get our attention about what He is like and what He expects from us.

So if you could turn there to Exodus 34 and verse 14. So Exodus 34 and verse 14, He says, Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous god.

[1:27] Now, maybe you've been to one of those big meetings or a group meeting or some sort of event where people wore those name tags around on a string on their neck or maybe a sticker on their shirt there.

And so suppose you're at one of those meetings and you find yourself standing by someone that you've never seen before, you've never met them. And so you stick out your hand, hello, my name is Jason and you are.

And then you look down at their name tag and it says, hello, my name is Jealous. Well, that would be a little unnerving, a little off-putting.

You're not sure what to even make of that. But I wonder, have you met your god? His name is Jealous. And as I've thought about this this week, there is something very deeply unsettling about that.

And I mean that when I say deeply, I mean deep down inside of me. It is unnerving to think that our God is jealous. We live in a world and my own heart readily agrees with it so much.

[2:48] And probably yours does too. The world says God is easygoing. He's just happy to have us love him any way that we want.

That his grace is easy grace. And he's just happy to have us pay any amount of attention to him. Isn't that what the world thinks about our God? That if you give him just a little bit, that's fine.

That's what he's due. And so if you want to share yourself with another, that's fine. That's good. I'm just glad you give me what you can. And that spirituality reflects it in our sexually promiscuous world.

It's a hookup culture where people don't take relationships or devotions seriously. Commitment and faithfulness and jealousy are all old-fashioned, unnecessary.

Well, that's our world. And our world is my heart and your heart and your heart and your heart all writ large, all put together.

[3:52] It's just what's in my heart and in your heart put together. And so we think, or we have the tendency to think, that God is altogether like us. That the seriousness of our relationship is as serious as we take it.

Not necessarily as seriously as he takes it. But here he says, my name is jealous. Because I am a jealous God.

Now I have three questions that I just want to answer in the brief amount of time that we have in the next few minutes. What does it mean? Why is this good?

And what should we do? So what does that mean? Why is that good? What should we do? So what does it mean that God is jealous?

We usually think of jealousy as a bad thing, don't we? In Galatians it talks about the acts or the works of the flesh. And one of those things is jealousy. So you have a nice house.

[4:57] I wish I had that nice house. I don't like the fact that you have it. And I don't. I'm jealous. Jealousy in that sense is a bad thing.

But jealousy does have another sense. It means demanding covenant love. Love. Demanding covenant love. And this kind of jealousy is a good thing.

It's a kind of jealousy that guards a relationship and values a relationship and loves the relationship and loves the person who they are in covenant with. And you can see this idea of covenant and devotion in just the passage that we have.

So look again in verse 10. So you're chapter 34. Now we read verse 14. Now back this up to verse 10. And you can see there's a whole context of where God says, I am jealous.

This is a covenant context. It's talking about the relationship that God, the Lord, has with Israel. So verse 10. Then the Lord said, I am making a covenant with you.

[6:00] Before all your people, I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you.

Obeys what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare to you.

Break down their altars. Smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. Do not worship any other God. For the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

So God says, I am in covenant with you. I am making a covenant. I am establishing this relationship with you. But he says, now be careful that you don't make a treaty with these other nations.

And the word there is the same word, covenant. Don't make a covenant with them. You've made a covenant. I'm making a covenant with you. That means you can't make a covenant with them.

[7:06] That excludes a relationship with these people and their gods, with those who are in the land. God's saying, you are all mine. Don't give yourself to them and to their gods.

Instead, smash their idols, cut down their Asherah poles. They'll be a snare to you. They'll take your love away from me. So jealousy is this demanding, devotional, covenant love.

Song of Songs describes married love. For love is as strong as death. It's jealousy, unyielding or demanding as the grave.

How demanding is the grave? How unyielding is it? Well, it demands every single one of us.

Barring Christ coming back, it will get every single one of us. And there's no talking the grave out of it.

[8:13] There's no robbing the grave of its dead. It's demanding. It won't be denied to the last person here. It will take us.

It wants us all and it's never satisfied. You notice that? No matter how many people we put in the ground, it keeps on wanting more. It's demanding and demanding and demanding.

And the poet in Song of Solomon says, that's what married covenant love is like. It just wants more and more and more. It's never satisfied.

And that's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. And it's jealousy. It's unyielding as the grave. It doesn't want to share with anyone else.

So that's married love. It's not happy with yesterday's love. It wants today's love. And it's not happy having some of you. It wants all of you. It's jealous.

[9:13] It wants soul possession. And that's what God wants. He won't relent until he has us all. He won't stop demanding until he has us all.

He won't share us with another. He won't let us run out on him. He won't let us go and sleep with other gods and cheat on him and say, that's okay, whatever.

I'm just glad I can have a little bit of you. He's jealous. He's jealous for you. He wants all of you. And he doesn't want to share us with another.

Well, that's what it means. God doesn't want to share Israel's love with any other gods. He doesn't want any of their devotion and worship and love and self-giving going to any of the other gods or any of the other nations.

He wants it all for himself. And that's what it means. Now, why is that good? And the reason I want to say why is that good is because I think we probably are all feeling the pinch of that, aren't we?

[10:19] And there is a place for the pinch, for the realization, who here can say, yeah, he has all of my love all of the time?

There is a place for the pinch, but I want to get to that. But first, I want to see why is that good? Why is this good? Because this tells us that God is not a half-hearted lover of any of us.

He's not a half-hearted lover. Some of you wonder how much he loves you. It's hard for you to imagine that the God of the universe could even love you, could even pay attention to you.

And you know that's what it says, but that is one of the hardest things for you to believe. Though he is so great, he really loves you and really cares about you.

That's how you feel. But what does God's word say? Bring those natural feelings. And what does it say? He says, I am jealous.

[11:20] I'm not a half-hearted lover. I'm all in. And so what's his love like? Love is as strong as death. It's jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame, like the very flame of the Lord.

God is hot with love for you. Is that amazing? That's amazing. He's hot with love. He burns with love for you. His jealousy is not a sign of his dislike or his cruelty or his mean-spiritedness.

His jealousy is a sign that he loves you fiercely. He really loves you. Husbands, you know that jealousy, or any married person here, you know that jealousy within the marriage context is not a sign of meanness.

It's not a sign of something wrong. It's a sign of ultimate love. It's a sign of love that wants everything. It's a sign of big love. So in Proverbs 6, the father in the Proverbs is talking to his son. And he says, son, listen to me. If you are hungry and you rob somebody to get some food, if you steal because you're hungry, he says no one's going to despise you.

[12:41] No one's going to look down on you. They'll punish you. He says that. But they won't despise you. They're not going to disrespect you for what you've done. But then he says, but a man who commits adultery lacks judgment.

In other words, he said, you're a real idiot if you commit adultery. Why are you a real idiot?

Because, and this is his reason, because jealousy arouses a husband's fury and he will show you no mercy until he takes revenge.

You'd be stupid to arouse the jealousy of a husband. So I just heard this past week of a rich man who had an affair with a married woman and the husband found out and he said to that man, I am going to kill you.

And it was obviously so serious that the rich man put himself into his house and built a fence around his house and was afraid to come out. He knew if that husband was given a chance, he was going to do something drastic and terrible.

What is the point of all that? The point is just simply this. Jealousy is not small love. Jealousy is committed love.

[14:02] It's demanding. It's full hearted. And what God is saying to us and to Israel, but to us as we are in Jesus Christ is that's how I love you.

That's how I love you. And so why is this good? Because this tells us that he really loves us. He's not halfway in. He doesn't have a foot in and a foot out. He's not thinking about how we can leave. He's here, both feet, in the relationship, and he loves us. And he's not going anywhere, and he doesn't want us to go anywhere because he loves us. He wants us close.

So why is this good? It's because he loves us. Secondly, he finds joy. This tells us that he finds joy in having us all to himself. He finds joy in having us all to himself.

This name jealous is a gateway to God's heart. A jealous husband loves having his wife all to himself.

[15:01] He wants her in his arms and not another. God wants you like that. God enjoys having you like that. You and him. The picture I thought of is, you've ever sat around a fire?

And we all do this, but you're sitting around the fire, and you're looking at the fire, and the fire seems so happy. I know fire doesn't have real feelings, but doesn't fire just seem so happy sitting there eating up that wood, enjoying it, every bit of it?

It seems so happy there. That's God and his love for you. He's happy to have you. He loves you. He loves his people with a certain fierceness and joy. So the world doesn't think very highly of us, does it?

The world doesn't think anything much of us. None of us are important. And in fact, when they hear what we believe and what we think and what we live by, they think, that's foolish. That's old-fashioned.

[16:07] Can you believe anyone says that? We're out of touch. But God loves us with this joy, this demanding joy. And he says, I am his, and he is mine.

So, you know, the world can think whatever it wants about us. But if we know the joy of the Lord as he loves us, well, it doesn't matter what the world thinks, does it? So, you know, you go into a house with a husband and a wife who are really dedicated and devoted to each other, and they're jealous in the best sense and intensely in love with each other.

You know what? They don't care what the world has to say. And they don't even care so much about, yeah, bad things happen. And people might have bad opinions of them. But they've got each other, don't they?

Face-to-face, heart-to-heart, demanding covenant love. And that's how God feels about us. His jealousy, when we give into it and lay ourselves down into it, it protects us from what the world thinks about us.

Who cares? He loves me. He's jealous for me. So why is this good? Because it reveals, in the third place, it reveals the glorious grace of God. It reveals the glorious grace of God.

[17:18] Now, everyone here, you know, I'm talking about how he loves us, and it's fierce, and it's joyful. And I think if you think about it, part of us are like, but I don't deserve that kind of attention.

I don't deserve that kind of attention. How could that be true? How could God love me like that? It seems too good to be true. It seems too much to believe. Why would he be troubled over me? And I think that word jealous does mean that there is some trouble in his heart when we go and worship other gods and we go and do other things. When our love isn't for him, he's not just unaffected.

A jealous husband is not unaffected when he sees his wife loving another man. Jealousy means some sort of displeasure, some sort of anger, some brokenheartedness. When he sees us worshiping and trusting another god.

And we would say, why would he do that over me? Why would he bother being brokenhearted over me? What's the answer?

[18:30] It's just grace. Sheer, undeserved love and grace. No, we don't deserve it. But he is so wonderful and awesome and kind that he would stoop to love us.

And love us like that. It's grace. And he loves us to the praise of his glorious grace. And that helps. He loves us in a way so that in ages and ages to come, we're going to be saying, wow, look at that grace.

Look at how he loved me. See, in a certain sense, it doesn't make any sense that he would notice me and love me and care about me. Of course it doesn't make any sense. He's so big and high and holy and I'm so small and wicked.

But to him, it makes perfect sense. He's committed to loving us because he's committed to his own praise. So God's jealousy is good news for silly, poor, half-hearted creatures like us.

He's for us. He loves us. He's committed to us because he's committed to his own glory. And so why is it good? Look at how he loves you. Look at how he loves you.

[19:47] He says, my name is jealous. Then the third question. What should we do? What should we do? If this is our God and he's not an easygoing, love me when you have the time lover, what should we do?

Well, he says, break down your altars. Break down the altars. Do you know the altars of your heart? Do you know them?

The things that you are giving your heart to? Your love to? You know, you're probably thinking of a few things.

Things that you say, yeah, he is jealous. And that, I've been giving my love. Not to him, but to this. So young people, it could be video games.

You just give yourself to them. And you play, and you play, and you play. And it's all you can think about. You want to play. You can't wait to play again. It's all you want to do.

[20:59] That's an altar in your heart. It's something that you're giving yourself to. And so he says, tear it down.

Does some video game have the place of God in your heart? The God who made you. And made you for himself. Does that, do those things have a place in your heart that only he has?

He has. Maybe it's sports. You know, sports can be good. But we live in a sports-crazed culture. And we need to make the distinction.

I was reading an article the other day. The two most profitable sections of Yahoo.com are the finance section and the sports section. Money.

Sports. The gods of our age. So what about you? God wants those places. God wants that love.

[22:01] And he isn't happy when you give it to another. What about us mid-career family people? People like me.

People like a lot of you. We have our houses. And we have our 401ks. Our IRAs. And we like our comfort. We like our ease. We like the lives that we've built for ourselves.

Don't we? The processes that we put in. And so, you know, when you're younger, you do love sports. I used to love sports.

Now I don't care very much anymore. Not really. I kind of like video games, to be honest. Did you know that? Kind of like them. But I can live without them. I don't need to have them.

But a growing retirement account. Pizza and a movie on Friday night. And I'm happy. And I'm good.

[23:02] And I couldn't ask for anything more. But in all that nice picture, there's just one person missing.

My God, whose name is Jealous. And so, we have to smash the idols of our hearts. Refuse to give our hearts to them.

This is heart work, isn't it? This is heart work. And it's violent heart work. Smash. Break down. Break down. Those are not gentle words. And so, we can't expect the idols of our hearts to come down so easily. But, with God's help, and with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, you know what?

Our altars can be smashed. And the Asherah poles of our hearts can be cut down and lying at our feet. But it will take violence. It will take violence.

[24:06] Jealousy has a violent streak, doesn't it? Well, then we need to get violent about getting rid of our gods.

What other things can we do? I would just encourage you to read the rest of Exodus 34. I'm going to pull out a few things. But I found, if you read the rest of Exodus 34, you're going to start to see, oh, this is the theme here.

This is why these random rules are put together like they are. He's talking about, what does it look like to be devoted to God? What does it look like to have your life devoted?

And so, he's jealous for me, and I am jealous for him. I want just him. Some of the things. He talks about remembering the Passover.

That was the Israelite salvation from slavery, wasn't it? That was the typical redemption. So, how do you live with a jealous God?

[25:08] How can we give ourselves more to him? How can we do this hard work of living with him and devoting ourselves to him? Well, you have to remember how he saved you and that he freed you. So, he broke into the prison of our sin and our death and slavery to sin and Satan and hell and all the rest.

Jesus broke into that and rescued us with a mighty hand. He saved his bride. And so, if you want to live a heart, devoted life to God, remember what you were saved from and remember how he did it. Remember who saved you. It says, six days you should labor. And on the seventh, you rest.

Couples need a date night.

God's people need the Lord's Day and the Sabbath. So, how can you give yourselves more wholeheartedly to God? Use the Lord's Day well.

Very practical. Guard it. Put hedges around it. Make good use of it. Don't let other things come into it. Remember, it's not just about being about a day.

[26:22] Exodus 34 helps me to understand what the Lord's Day is about. So often, I think, I don't know, maybe I and probably you, we're just sort of like, it's the day you give to God. But you have the rule, but you forget why there's a rule.

Why is the command there? Because it's about you and God. It's about this relationship that you have with him. So, he says, six days you should labor.

Seven you rest. On the seventh, you rest. In verse 25, he says, bring the best of your first fruits to the house of the Lord your God. It's talking about money.

It's talking about the things that you've produced. And God's jealousy puts strings on our wallet. It guides what we do with our money. And he's saying, I want the first.

Not because he needs anything. He doesn't need anything, does he? But because he wants my heart. And where my treasure is, that's where my heart will be also.

[27 : 28] When I put money in the offering box, I'm helping my heart give itself to God. I'm helping me to be devoted to him.

He talks about redeeming your firstborn. He says, my status as your God and your Savior, you know what? It filters down into your family.

And your firstborn is mine, and you have to redeem him. And the idea is, all your children are mine. So, men, what are you doing with your families? Dads, are you leading your families for God?

Or are you being unfaithful to him and leading your families toward other gods? Moms, the way you interact with your children.

Is it about God? Because you love him, and he loves you. Now, if you're like me, you see a lot of room for improvement.

[28 : 33] A lot of room for improvement. A lot of room for growth. In other words, when I look into my heart, and I'm sure you can do the very same thing, you see a lot of half-hearted love, don't you?

And half-hearted living. So, what do we do? A lot of unfaithfulness. That's not just a little half-hearted.

That's a lot of unfaithfulness. What do we do? Well, we go to the cross together, and we confess our sins.

And we own our waywardness. And we own our wandering. And then we ask forgiveness, and we claim Jesus for ourselves.

You see, he never wandered. And if you were to take a microscope and look into his heart, all the arrows were always pointing straight to God.

[29 : 33] Every cell, every red blood cell in his body was loving God. He always loved wide open all the way. And the wonderful thing is, is he did that for us, because we didn't.

He did it to be our righteousness. So that he could take all of my unfaithfulness.

And take it to the cross. And then in its place, give me all of that faithfulness that he worked out over 33 years of beautiful devotion to God.

And so, what do we do? We own our unrighteousness. But then we also trust in his righteousness. We claim it as our own. And then we begin again, like we've done a hundred times before, we begin again to love God for what he's done for us.

Let's pray. Oh, Holy Father, you are a jealous God.

[30 : 37] And we are fickle creatures and sinful. Will you please help us to love you? And with the psalmist, we say, help me not to wander.

Lord, don't let me stray from your commands. We need your help. We need the help of the Holy Spirit.

If we had some sort of physical problem, then we could do it with our own two hands. But we have deep heart problems and things that we can't even reach to and see and know how to fix.

So, Lord Jesus, will you please share your life with us by the Spirit? Give us grace so that in the day-to-day, the hour-by-hour, moment-by-moment living, we would not be distracted, but that we would love and be attentive and pay attention to God.

Will you forgive us for just our small thoughts, but our infrequent thoughts of you? Please weigh upon our minds. And I pray that you would show yourself as holy and as jealous to some lost person here today to know that the way they have been loving you is not good and you are not happy with it.

[32 : 06] Will you please make them to feel the demand of God upon their own hearts? I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.