

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-10: "God is Jealous"(part 4, the love and zeal of God)

Perhaps the greatest personal blessing that one reaps from defending the truths of Christianity is that one always gains more accurate knowledge about God. In fact, the very creeds we have in Christianity regarding such crucial doctrines as the Trinity and Hypostatic Union were developed in responses to attacks on the truths of Christianity. Let us never forget that as rational beings we have a natural desire to learn and the highest and greatest knowledge is none other than knowledge of God—accurate knowledge of God. My appeal to you is to be committed to Truth no matter what it costs and no matter where it leads.

Modern understanding of the characteristics and attributes of God by most of contemporary Christianity is rife with vacuity as well as heresy. By vacuity I mean a real emptiness with regard to concepts used of God. What I mean is that most Christians have no clue regarding what they are talking about when they talk about the attributes of God.

Let's take the examples of love and goodness as applied to God where these concepts die the death of a thousand qualifications by a Christian who really does not understand what these concepts mean in reference to God. This believer, often with great enthusiasm, will be quick to tell the unbeliever that God loves us as a father loves His children. But then the unbeliever points to a child dying of inoperable cancer of the throat. It is pointed out that the child's earthly father is driven frantic in his efforts to help, but His Heavenly Father reveals no obvious sign of concern. The Christian will then begin to "kill" God's attributes by a death of a thousand qualifications: e.g., God's love is 'not merely human love' or it is 'an inscrutable love' or 'we just don't know'. So the atheist says, 'describe God's love' which the believer cannot do. God's goodness cannot be understood apart from understanding *Esse* and biblical metaphysics. No accurate understanding or explanation is possible apart from philosophical realism.

Take the "omnipotence" of God. Ask most Christians what that means, and they will likely tell you it means that God can do anything. They might even cite Scripture! Then, if you ask them if that means that God can take nap, ride a bicycle, make Himself nonexistence, or be dishonest, you will like get a variety of responses from blank stares and talk of mysteries to a litany of qualifications on the "anything."

There are two main issues here that the believer needs to understand with regard to the attributes and characteristics of God. First, he must actually understand the attributes of God which is impossible apart from philosophical realism. Second, he must understand that all language of God is analogical (not univocal or equivocal). I will spend more time unpacking the attributes of God when we get to God's speeches in our Job series. I will expatiate on the nature of God-talk language as this series develops. I introduce this excursus to bring to attention the importance of understanding the attributes of God and God-talk as we move through adjectives like jealousy which, as we have seen, is explicitly used to describe God.

Let us get back to jealousy (zeal) and God. We have noted that throughout the Old Testament God possess a very passionate concern for Israel. This passionate love includes God experiencing pain (analogical language of anthropopathism) as God is pictured as a wounded husband (analogical language) who continually attempts to woo His people back into harmony with Him. Consider the vivid depiction of His intense love and grace provisions in the Word:

Isaiah 5:1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. 2 And He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it, And hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones. 3 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. 4 "What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? 5 "So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. 6 "And I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress. 8 Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, Until there is no more room, So that you have to live alone in the midst of the land! 9 In my ears the LORD of hosts has sworn, "Surely, many houses shall become desolate, Even great and fine ones, without occupants. 10 "For ten acres of vineyard will yield only one bath of wine, And a homer of seed will yield but an ephah of grain." 11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink; Who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! 12 And their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; But they do not pay attention to the deeds of the LORD, Nor do they consider the work of His hands. 13 Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; And their honorable men are famished, And their multitude is parched with thirst. 14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure; And Jerusalem's splendor, her multitude, her din of revelry, and the jubilant within her, descend into it. 15 So the common man will be humbled, and the man of importance abased, The eyes of the proud also will be abased. 16 But the LORD of hosts will be exalted in judgment, And the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness. 17 Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, And strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy. 18 Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, And sin as if with cart ropes; 19 Who say, "Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; And let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near And come to pass, that we may know it!" 20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And clever in their own sight! 22 Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine, And valiant men in mixing strong drink; 23 Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!

Psalm 81:10 "I, the LORD, am your God, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. 11 "But My people did not listen to My voice; And Israel did not obey Me.

Ezekiel 18:31 "Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, change your mind and live."

The theme of divine love and vulnerability (analogical God-talk) runs throughout the Old Testament where God is presented as a wounded lover who is reluctant to censure His people. The zeal of God's love for His people is not the pettiness of a power-hungry deity obsessed with dominating people (as the New Atheists charge). In His wonderful love and grace all He asks from His people is to change their minds ("repent") and come back to Him. What God wants more than anything from you and me is for us to be closer to Him. God loves us more than any human being could ever love us. His love is unconditional. His love is perfect! His zeal (jealousy) is evidence of the extreme intensity of His love.

This love and concern is not only a great source of comfort with regard to one's own life, but regarding those we love. As parents we love our children and want more than anything else for them to walk with and grow in the Lord. We want the best for our children and know that the best is always in the Lord. In our *zeal*, it is likely that there are times when we have such great concern for them that we plead with God to protect them with an implicit attitude that somehow we love them more than God, and so entreat (or cajole) Him for extra-protection for those we *love so much*. We should pray for them, but never be deceived into thinking that you love them more than God. You do not! You cannot! Let us remember that no matter how much we love our children, our love pales in comparison with God's *zealous* loving concern for them. God loves them unconditionally. We can "chill out" whether they be our children or anyone we have a loving concern over. God is not only in control, His love and concern are unconditional and matchless☺

In His Matchless Grace,

Pastor Don

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of/for (of/for = plenary genitive = understanding of Christ's love for Paul motivates his love for Christ) Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.