

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-11: "God is Jealous"(part 5, zealous love and idolatry)

Those claiming that God's jealousy is petty and constricting usually liken God to a husband who won't let his wife even talk to another man. However, a more appropriate analogy is a husband who is concerned that his wife is being emotionally drawn toward another man. He loves her and wants to protect the preciousness of marital intimacy, which is in the best interests of his wife and their blessed marriage.

The New Atheists resist the notion of God's rightful prerogatives over humans. The idea of jealousy (zealous love) with its accompanying irritation, wrath, or anger somehow makes them uncomfortable. As we have noted, anger is *not* necessarily sinful (Eph. 4:26)—indeed, at times it is virtuous. The never-angry person is morally deficient. The slow-to-anger person is the virtuous one. Note that the following passages do not speak of a person 'who never gets angry':

Proverbs 15:18 A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, But the slow to anger pacifies contention.

Proverbs 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

Proverbs 19:11 A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.

James 1:19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

Likewise, God is frequently described as "slow to anger"—in analogical language (e.g., Exod. 34:6). God's jealousy (zealous love) and anger spring from love and concern, not from hurt pride or immaturity. God's jealous/zealous love is a natural result of His intense desire for second-personal intimacy with believers. God's zealous love is not capricious or petty. God is jealous for our best interest as well as His. His commands are given "for your good":

Deuteronomy 10:13 and to keep the LORD's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?

Deuteronomy 8:16 "In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end.

Deuteronomy 30:9 "Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers;

Rather than looking at His commands as unnecessary burdens, we should look at them as expressions of His love. In fact, we only harm ourselves when we live for ourselves and create our own idolatrous God-substitutes. Instead of looking *negatively* at the jealousy (zealous love) of God over us and our love for Him, we should consider it one of the greatest blessings of life, namely, that He would love us so very much. If He did not care about our love for Him, He would not be jealous over us. The husband who does not care if his wife sleeps with other men does not love her. The wife who does not care if her husband has girlfriends he sleeps with on the side does not possess true love, let alone zeal, for her husband. Righteous jealousy is a very natural result of intense love. God's jealousy arises naturally out of His love for His people when they become adulterous with kosmos diabolicus.

God's jealousy is not only a result of the violation of the special relationship He desires with His people, it also includes concern for their ultimate well-being. God is the all-good Creator or Life-giver. He desires that His creatures live life as it should be. When believers get in bed with the kosmos (e.g., mammonism, spiritual adultery, pornography, suppressing the truth about God, and putting the details of life before Bible doctrine), God's jealousy surfaces so that the person might abandon his or her self-destructive ways and return to an abundant life found in a life of relationship with the First Love: "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love," Rev. 2:4. Rejection of a continually growing intimate life with the Lord always leads to idolatry. Anytime God is not number one there is an idol taking His place. All it takes to become idolatrous is something like greed: "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry," Col. 3:5.

C.S. Lewis's insightful perspective puts divine jealousy and human idolatry into proper perspective:

If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹

In His Matchless Grace,

Pastor Don

¹C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 26.