

**Marc Roby:** We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine God's communicable attributes. Today we are going to look at the fact that God is jealous. Dr. Spencer, most people think of jealousy as a negative trait and, therefore, not a trait that is befitting for God. How would you respond to them?

Dr. Spencer: I would point out that the word jealous, like most words, has a fairly wide range of meanings, and not all of them are negative even in our modern usage. I should, for example, be jealous to guard the exclusivity of my relationship with my wife.

**Marc Roby:** I'm sure she would agree with that statement.

Dr. Spencer: I am too. Our society seems to have lost the idea that being faithful to our commitments is important, and it has especially lost the notion that a marriage commitment is a sacred, life-long covenant commitment. In Malachi 2:16 we read, "'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel"<sup>1</sup>, and God expects husbands and wives to be faithful to their spouses in marriage. We see clearly how important this is by the fact that adultery in the Old Testament was a capital offense and in the New Testament it is grounds for divorce. John Frame defines the biblical concept of jealousy in the following way: "*Jealousy* (Heb. *Qin'ah*, Gk. *zēlos*) is a passionate zeal to guard the exclusiveness of a marriage relationship, leading to anger against an unfaithful spouse."<sup>2</sup>

**Marc Roby:** I want to point out that you correctly called marriage a *covenant* commitment, which means that it is a formal and serious commitment, not something casual. And God frequently alludes to the human marriage relationship as an analogy to the relationship his people have with him.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he does. In fact, it is important to note God's overall sovereignty and plan in this regard. Marriage is not a humanly contrived or instituted relationship. It was established by God and was intended from the very beginning to be part of his plan for creation. And, as we have discussed before, God's purpose in creation is the manifestation of his own glory<sup>3</sup>, so marriage contributes to that. We have also mentioned before that marriage between a man and a woman, and the children resulting from that union, do a better job of reflecting the glory of our triune God than individual human beings can.<sup>4</sup>

**Marc Roby:** And the marriage relationship is also used by God to teach us many things. We learn more about our own impatient, selfish sinful nature, and as we work to make our families

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<sup>2</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, P&R Publishing Company, 2002, pg. 458

<sup>3</sup> See Sessions 2, 67 and 74.

<sup>4</sup> See Session 29.

function properly, we learn patience, what it means to truly love others sacrificially, the importance of authority and many other things as well.

Dr. Spencer: And I'm sure we could come up with other reasons for the marriage relationship being important, but to get back to our topic of God's jealousy, it is not a negative thing at all. It is in fact, a very good thing. We *should* be zealous to guard something as precious as our exclusive relationship with our spouse.

Marc Roby: I think part of the problem with people considering jealousy to be a negative trait is that human beings often corrupt that trait. For example, they can be irrationally and sinfully suspicious of their spouse without cause.

Dr. Spencer: That's very true. And that is definitely *not* the kind of jealousy that God has. As with all of the communicable attributes we must be very careful to strip sinful human perversions of them from our thinking. I think it will be useful to quote again something I quoted in Session 42 when we were discussing the science of hermeneutics, or how to properly understand the Bible.

In his book *Interpreting the Bible*, A. Berkeley Mickelsen wrote that "Grief, anger, wrath, etc., are all genuine responses of God. The metaphorical element arises from the fact that human grief, anger, and wrath are a complex array of elements. Grief can involve self-pity; anger can be filled with an irrational obsession for revenge; wrath can be overlaid with a passion to return in kind. Yet these elements must be excluded from an accurate picture of God's grief, anger, and wrath. God's response is genuine; it is the human counterpart that is tainted by corrupt elements."<sup>5</sup>

Marc Roby: And so, applying that thought to God's jealousy, John Frame quotes from the Song of Solomon 8:6, which says, "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." And then Frame notes about this verse that "Here, fiery jealousy is part of love, the prerogative of love that is as strong as death. It is the proper attitude of a man toward his wife (cf. Prov. 6:34). It is entirely right for him to be zealous for her purity and for the exclusiveness of her love for him."<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Spencer: That's a very good passage. Our society has greatly cheapened the institution of marriage, which is, I think, why so many people don't even bother to get married today. But when marriage is given the respect and honor it should have, and people treat it with the seriousness they should, it is a truly beautiful and wonderful thing. In God's plan marriage is the most intimate relationship two human beings can ever have. They should both come to it as virgins and the commitment they make to one another and to God is to be absolutely faithful to each other, forsaking all others, until death separates them.

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<sup>5</sup> A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974, pg. 185

<sup>6</sup> Frame, op. cit.

**Marc Roby: Not many people think about marriage that way anymore.**

Dr. Spencer: And that is to their great loss. Real love is sacrificial and focused on the other person. It isn't just a feeling, it is a firm commitment to do for someone else that which is best for that person. We only learn that to the fullest extent possible when we commit ourselves to working out whatever problems arise in a marriage. There cannot be any plan B. I can't have in mind that I will stay married so long as we are both happy or so long as it makes me happy, or so long as I still "love" my wife.

**Marc Roby: I think that anytime someone goes into a marriage with that kind of attitude, the probability of the marriage ending in divorce is about 100%.**

Dr. Spencer: I completely agree. We've both been married to our wives for long enough to know that it isn't always wonderful. I'm a sinner. And my wife is a sinner. And whenever two sinners live together there will be trouble.

**Marc Roby: And our children are also sinners, which introduces even more trouble!**

Dr. Spencer: That's true. But as I said a moment ago, real biblical love is not something you can fall in and out of, it is a firm commitment to do what is best for the other person. When we get married, we make a vow before God to love our spouse, and we are to keep our vows. It is, as we noted earlier, a covenant commitment. Being faithful is extremely important.

**Marc Roby: And the extreme value and importance of marriage shows why being jealous, in the proper sense, is a good thing.**

Dr. Spencer: That's exactly right. As I said earlier, God is the sovereign creator and everything he does works together to accomplish his purpose of making his own glory manifest. So I am quite sure that when God established the institution of marriage, he had in mind that it would, in addition to many other things, teach us something about our covenant relationship to him and the importance of our being faithful in that relationship.

**Marc Roby: And God compares idolatry to adultery. For example, Jeremiah Chapter 3 uses adultery as a metaphor for the Jewish people being unfaithful to God.**

Dr. Spencer: That's a great chapter to make this point, so let's take a moment to look at it.

**Marc Roby: Let me begin by reminding our listeners of the history that they need to know to understand this chapter. Jeremiah prophesied in the late 7<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. Prior to this time the united Jewish kingdom of Saul, David and Solomon had been divided into two and the northern kingdom, here referred to as Israel, had already been destroyed and its people taken into captivity by the Assyrians in the late 8<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. The southern kingdom of Judah was all that remained and they were soon to be defeated and taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Jeremiah was one of the prophets God sent to warn his people of this coming disaster.**

Dr. Spencer: And now, with that history in mind, let me read Jeremiah 3:6. It says, "During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, 'Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery

there.” The references to every high hill and every spreading tree refer to the pagan altars at which the Jewish people had been worshipping pagan idols.

Marc Roby: And God then refers to the destruction and captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel in Verse 8. Jeremiah tells us that the LORD said, “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery.”

Dr. Spencer: And that verse establishes the point I wanted to make perfectly. God compares sending his unfaithful people into captivity with divorce and he compares their unfaithfulness with adultery. God should be jealous of his covenant people. How wicked it was for them to forget all that he had done for them and to run off and worship false gods made of wood and stone.

Marc Roby: And God mocked these idols in the chapter just before this. We read in Jeremiah 2:27-28, “They say to wood, ‘You are my father,’ and to stone, ‘You gave me birth.’ They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, ‘Come and save us!’ Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah.”

Dr. Spencer: Whenever any of God’s people trust in something other than God, the Creator and Lord of all creation, they and the things they trust in deserve to be mocked. God wants his people to be holy and blameless and able to worship and serve him properly, and that is absolutely impossible when they worship false gods.

Marc Roby: I’m sure that when you used the phrase “holy and blameless” you had Ephesians 5:25-27 in mind, where the apostle Paul commands us, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Dr. Spencer: That is exactly what I had in mind. And those verses clearly indicate God’s jealousy. Remember that Frame said that God’s jealousy is “a passionate zeal to guard the exclusiveness of a marriage relationship”. And here in Ephesians 5 we see that. God uses the example of Christ as the husband and the church as his bride to explain to us how we should be concerned for the eternal welfare of our wives. Jealousy is an aspect of true love.

Marc Roby: And it is also related to wrath and judgment, because God will judge those who oppose his church and his people and he will pour out his wrath upon them. We read in Nahum 1:2 “The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies.”

Dr. Spencer: That is absolutely true. We read over and over again in the prophets about the coming judgment against God’s enemies. God is jealous for the glory and honor of his own name. We read in Isaiah 42:8 that God says, “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.”

And God's church, which is called the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:27 and the bride of Christ in Revelation 19:7, is meant to bring him glory as well. Therefore, because God is very jealous to protect his own glory, he is also very jealous to protect the glory of his church.

**Marc Roby: And that should be a great comfort to all members of God's church. If the supreme Lord of the universe is jealous to protect our honor and glory, we are safe.**

Dr. Spencer: Very true. And the Bible makes clear that God is jealous. We've already seen that in several verses, but there some others we have yet to share that are quite explicit about this being an important aspect of God's being. For example, when God renewed his covenant with his people after their horrible apostasy in having Aaron create a golden calf to worship while Moses was still on Mount Sinai meeting with God, we read in Exodus 34:14 that God told the people, "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

**Marc Roby: And when God says his "name is Jealous" he is clearly saying that it is an essential part of his nature.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is exactly what he means.

**Marc Roby: And that episode in Israel's history is a remarkable example of God's gracious love and man's terrible sin. God had brought the people out of their slavery in Egypt by doing mighty miracles among the Egyptians, and had established his covenant with them. We read in Exodus 24:7 that Moses, "took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.'"**

Dr. Spencer: And the Book of the Covenant included the Ten Commandments. The second commandment is given in Exodus 20:4-6 and it says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

**Marc Roby: And, amazingly, it was right after the people had said "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey", that they had Aaron make the golden calf for them to worship. How unbelievably gracious it is that God would not destroy them for their almost immediate violation of the covenant.**

Dr. Spencer: It is amazing that God would be that gracious and would renew the covenant rather than destroying them for violating it. But his doing that was a result of his own covenant faithfulness and for his own glory. In Exodus 15 we read what is called the Song of Moses, which he sung after God had destroyed Pharaoh's army when it came after the Jewish slaves who had left Egypt. In that song, in Exodus 15:13, we read, "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling." The words "unfailing love" translate the Hebrew word *hesed*. We mentioned this word in Session 77 as well, it primarily refers to God's covenant love for his people.

God's covenant love, which includes his jealousy, is the reason he did not destroy his people. He will bring to fruition his plan of salvation. No one can thwart this plan, not Satan or his demons, not the world, and not even the sins of God's own people. He will discipline us and he will work within us to be transformed, and ultimately, he will perfect us, but in his jealous zeal he will not allow the people he has chosen for himself to be lost.

**Marc Roby: What great comfort that provides to us. As Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6, he was "confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."**

Dr. Spencer: And God will accomplish this for his own glory. He has chosen his people and he calls us his treasured possession. When the Israelites first arrived at Mount Sinai after leaving Egypt, one of the first things God said to them through Moses was, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession." We read that in Exodus 19:5.

**Marc Roby: And we noted in Session 67 that God's people are called his treasured possession six times in the Old Testament. What an amazing thing that is.**

Dr. Spencer: It is an astounding thing. But I want to wrap up our discussion of God's jealousy by tying together all the strands we've been discussing. God's purpose in creation is the manifestation of his own glory. God is loving and faithful and he will have a loving and faithful covenant people to be with him in heaven and display his glory. He is zealous for his glory and will not allow his plans to fail or an enemy to succeed, and that zeal for the honor of his own name is his jealousy. It is a wonderful attribute of God.

**Marc Roby: That's a good summary and with that we are out of time for today. As always, we invite our listeners to email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org) and we will respond.**