

## WHAT IS GODLY JEALOUSY

When you think of the word jealousy what springs to your mind? Do you think of a jealous woman who is constantly suspicious of what her husband or boyfriend is doing, suspicious of any woman he talks to? Does it perhaps conjure up an image of a husband finding her wife cheating on him and him flying into a rage wanting to throttle the man his wife's been fooling around with?

When most people hear the word jealousy it usually has negative connotations. Most often it is thought to be bad but is all jealousy bad? This attitude of jealousy is mentioned in the Ten Commandments and not only that God applies it to himself. In **Exodus 20:5** God in giving the second commandment about not making any idols or graven images has this to say:

You shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them. For I the Lord your God *am* a **jealous** God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons to the third and fourth *generation* of those that hate me.

God here says that He is a jealous God. Since God is perfect and cannot sin and He says He gets jealous logically we must deduce from that there is a right kind of jealousy, a good jealousy and that, yes, there is such a thing as having a godly jealousy.

In this article today I would like to answer the question, "What is Godly Jealousy?" Just what do you mean by the term godly jealousy?

A logical place to start is by looking at how jealousy is defined in our English language as well as the way the Greek and Hebrew words are defined that are used for jealousy in the Bible.

Webster's Dictionary gives the following definitions for the word jealousy:

1. "apprehensive of loss of exclusive devotion"
2. "intolerance of rivalry or unfaithfulness"
3. "hostile toward one believed to enjoy an advantage"
4. "vigilant to guard a possession"

All four of those aspects of jealousy are seen in the verse we just read. God has a deep concern, a zeal to not lose the exclusive devotion we are to have for Him. Second, He will not tolerate rivalry or unfaithfulness. He is also hostile towards those false idols that enjoy the advantage of our devotion that should belong to Him and He is even hostile to those who persist in their unfaithfulness towards Him visiting their iniquity. Finally, He is vigilant to guard a possession, that is, the faithful devotion we should have toward God.

All of those four aspects of jealousy are also seen in the two examples of human jealousy I described at the start of the sermonette. We know instinctively that those examples of human jealousy are sinful so the question remains what is the difference between sinful human jealousy and godly jealousy? Let's probe a little deeper.

The online Wikipedia defines jealousy this way:

Jealousy typically refers to the negative thoughts and feelings of insecurity, fear, and anxiety that occur when a person believes a valued relationship is being threatened by a rival. Jealousy often contains a mixture of emotions such as anger, sadness, and disgust...

Jealousy is defined as a protective reaction to a perceived threat to a valued relationship, arising from a situation in which the partner's involvement with an activity and/or another person is contrary to the jealous person's definition of their relationship." (Bevan, 2004, page 195)

The Wikipedia makes this interesting distinction between jealousy and a similar word – envy:

While jealousy and envy are similar, they differ in that jealousy is about something one has and is afraid of losing, while envy is about something one does not have and either wants to acquire it or prevent another from getting it.

Jealous comes from zealous or zeal which means great intense desire or passion. The Hebrew word for jealous is “qanna” which has the same meaning as the English. A couple of Greek words are used for jealousy.

The first one is *zelos* which Strong's defines as:

properly *heat*, that is, (figuratively) “zeal” (in a favorable sense, *ardor*; in an unfavorable one, *jealousy*, as of a husband [figuratively of God], or an enemy, *malice*): - emulation, envy (-ing), fervent mind, indignation, jealousy, zeal.

The other Greek word is *phthonos* which is used in **James 4:5** and it is defined by Strong's as:

*ill will (as detraction)*, that is, *jealousy (spite)*: - envy.

*Zelos* is the Greek word used in the next verse which we'll look at over in **2 Corinthians 11:2**. The context of this passage is Paul's zeal that the Corinthians remain faithful to God and not go off with false teachers and false doctrines such as a false gospel. Here in **2 Corinthians 11:2** Paul says:

For I am jealous *over* you with godly jealousy. For I have espoused you to one husband, to present *you as* a pure virgin to Christ.

Ray Stedman in his online commentary explains this verse and comments on the difference between sinful and godly jealousy:

Perhaps the most vicious and destructive quality in the world today is jealousy. It has been properly called "the green-eyed monster." Jealousy is all angry, strong, powerful emotion that refuses to tolerate a rival. It can be a very powerful motivator to aggressive action. It is one of the most frequent causes for broken homes, broken hearts, and broken bodies in the world today. Yet amazingly, God declares in the

book of Exodus, "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God" (**Exodus 20:5**). All through the Scriptures there is this emphasis upon the jealousy of God.

If jealousy is so bad, why is God jealous? Here Paul says that he feels a "godly jealousy" for these people. Surely that indicates that jealousy can be both good and bad. So when you feel jealous of someone, you have to ask yourself, "Is my jealousy a rightful one, or is it false?"

The difference is right here: False jealousy is always selfish. It is concerned with your own feelings. It is possessive, and it wants to control another person. It is therefore often dominating and even cruel and tyrannical. It usurps the rights of others and insists on its own way. It is imposed upon someone else whether that person likes it or not...

A true jealousy, a godly jealousy, on the other hand, as Paul felt for the Corinthians, is one that arises from a deep passion for the welfare of another. It becomes careless of self, and it is always manifested in a tenderness and a thoughtfulness about someone else...

Paul likens his jealousy to that of a father who has betrothed his daughter to a young bridegroom... symbolized today when, in a wedding ceremony, the father walks down the aisle with the bride. This is a rather startling analogy to use about these Corinthians, for we saw in 1 Corinthians 6 their impure backgrounds. There Paul tells us that some of them had been adulterers, immoral people, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, robbers, and cut-throats. "And that is what some of you were," he said (1 Corinthians 6:11). And yet now he says, "[I have desired] to present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (<http://www.raystedman.org/power/0923.html>).

Just as there is a right and wrong kind of anger there is a right and wrong kind of jealousy. Both types of jealousy have in common a deeply passionate feeling of intolerance, hurt and anger at another person being unfaithful to them. This is the emotion of jealousy. It's in the motive, the attitude of jealousy and the actions that flow from that attitude or motive where the right and wrong kind of jealousy separate.

The wrong kind of jealousy is selfish. Someone with this kind of jealous motive is only concerned for themselves. It is possessive and controlling. It is suspicious and does not want to trust. It **WANTS** to hurt and injure the parties that have hurt its feelings. It doesn't care about what is best for the other party.

Godly jealousy is not selfish. It is concerned for the self and is protective of what belongs to them but not at the expense of what is best for the other party. Godly jealousy is a protective jealousy to protect them from what is harmful. God knows when we put others or other things before Him we will get hurt and we will lose out on what He can offer us.

A godly jealousy is not suspicious. It **WANTS** to trust and is willing to take a chance and do the actions of trust even when the feelings of trust are not there yet. It doesn't want to hurt but will cause hurt if short term punishment will lead to the long term good of a better and restored relationship.

Let's look at one more passage in the New Testament that talks about godly jealousy over in **James 4:4-5** where we read:

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity *with* God? Therefore whoever desires to be a friend of the world is the enemy

of God. Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The spirit that dwells in us yearns to jealousy?'"

God is jealous over what we give our hearts and our time and effort to. He doesn't want us with one foot in the world and one foot in the church. What do we give our time and hearts to that might come before Him? What other lovers do we have on the side? God has given us His standard and His laws. Where do we put our own ways ahead of His ways? What rivals to God and His way are there still in our lives?

In the [thatalltheearthmayknow.com](http://thatalltheearthmayknow.com) commentary on the names of God it says the following about God being called a jealous God:

Through out Scripture, God demands our worship. He goes to the point to say that He is jealous of our worship. Imagine the God of all creation is so desirous of our worship and fellowship that He is jealous of whatever takes our worship...God's law forbids us to worship any idols, whether statues or anything else we put in place of God! **(Exodus 20:3-6)** God is so jealous of our worship that He commanded many times that all other false god's altars be destroyed. **(Exodus 34:1-17)** It angers God when ever His people begin to give His worship to other gods or things. **(Deuteronomy 4:23-24; 6:14-15; Joshua 24:19-20)** Man is to fellowship and worship God! This is why He becomes so jealous when we fail to spend time worshipping and exalting Him. Nothing should ever take priority over our worship of God.

In summary, godly jealousy could be simply defined as an intolerance to unfaithfulness that seeks to preserve or restore the exclusive relationship that we have promised to Him.

What is the value of understanding what godly jealousy is and how deeply God feels it towards us?

Firstly, it helps us to understand how deeply He loves us. His feelings for us must run very deep for Him to feel so hurt when we give our heart and time over to other lovers. We are the fiance of Jesus Christ so He looks at us and feels for us in the same special way we would love a girlfriend or a spouse. Knowing the depth of God's jealousy and how deeply He is hurt when we give our hearts to other things should motivate us to be more devoted to Him and more careful to keep Him first priority and the number one love in our lives.