

Our Jealous God  
Exodus 34:10-28  
3/16/2014

Jealousy can be either a good thing or a bad thing. It's a bad thing when it gets selfish and self-centered, and wants to take things away from other people simply because they have those things that we want. That kind of jealousy is bad. However, not all kinds of jealousy are bad. For instance, there is a proper kind of jealousy in a marriage relationship that desires that relationship to be exclusive. No one should barge in and try to break apart that exclusive relationship. Husbands and wives need this kind of jealousy. Of course, that kind of good jealousy can be twisted into something bad if either of them gets paranoid. There has to be a trust between husband and wife. The best kind of jealousy of all is God's jealousy over His relationship to us, which is a marriage relationship. Verse 14 tells us that God's very name is Jealous, and that He is a jealous God. We must be very careful to understand what that means as well as what it does not mean. We will look at that as we go along. Verses 10-17 show us God's jealousy of the Israelites as compared with the other peoples of the earth. Verses 18-26 show us God's continued jealousy even after the golden calf. Verses 27-28 show us God's jealousy in making sure that the words of the covenant are permanently set down in writing.

So, first we see that God is jealous of the Israelites as compared with the other peoples of the earth. This means that Israel alone is God's people during this time in history. No other people group has any kind of relationship to God at all. As Paul would say in Ephesians, they were aliens and strangers to the covenant of promise. God promises to do great things before all the nations around them. This is what God is saying in verse 10. Furthermore, God will do many great works to all those nations, which will hardly be comfortable things. This is what God says in verse 11, when all the Canaanites will be driven out of the land. The purpose of all of these works is to show the world (Israel included!) that God loves Israel alone in a saving way.

Verses 12-17 are God's commandments to Israel for how they are to maintain an exclusive relationship with God alone. Given the recent incident of the golden calf, the people are well aware at this point that they are to have no other gods but the one true God. However, a temptation will exist for Israel to get too friendly with the Canaanites. The problem with that is that the Canaanites have their own gods, and those gods are not the one true God. You cannot invite an idolater into your covenantal relationship with God without there being spiritual adultery going on. The idolater and his idol cannot be separated by us, no matter how hard we try. Only God can break that idolatry. This is why our deepest friendships need to be with those who are believers. We do need to evangelize the lost, yes. And yes, that means making friends with them. There is a somewhat delicate balance there that we need to observe. If we separate ourselves too much from the world, then we will never evangelize anyone. If we spend all our time in the world, we will become corrupted, and we will be lured away from God by idolaters and their special connection to their idols.

For anyone who spends the majority of their time with non-Christians, here is a warning and an encouragement to you. Do not make your non-Christian friends your closest friends. They will slowly but surely draw you away from your better Christian friends. They will draw you away from the church. They will draw you away from God. They will instill in you a desire for the world, and a desire for worldly things, and worldly entertainment. They will influence you to become a skeptic. They will influence you to become cynical. You will lose your joy in the simple things of the Gospel, and instead you will become fascinated by everything the world has to offer. All of this can happen in a way that is quite gradual and almost unnoticeable. Stop and think. As yourself these diagnostic questions: am I spending more time in the Word and in prayer and at church because of these friends? Or are they holding me back in the process of becoming more holy? Instead of allowing this slide to happen, maintain and deepen your friendship with your Christian friends. Spend your disposable time with your Christian friends, even if that means saying no to some parties and events that look very fun, and even if that means people think you are a stick in the mud because you won't play with them all the time. If that event is going to take you away from church, away from the Word, away from prayer, and away from God, don't do it! The cost is way too great.

If this is true of friendships, it is all the more true of marriage. Verse 16 forbids the Israelites from marrying any idolaters. This is surely the text Paul had in his mind as he forbade us from even considering a marriage with a non-believer. Why is that? Because non-believers are, by definition, idolaters! We all worship. It is our very nature to worship. So if we don't worship God, then we will most certainly worship someone or something else. All non-believers are idolaters. They will seek to pull us away from our worship of the one true God. We all need to make it a priority, then, for ourselves, and for teaching our children, that we are not even going to consider marrying someone, no matter how attractive they may be, if that person is an unbeliever.

This brings up a seemingly difficult topic, that of marrying someone who is a Roman Catholic. Our doctrinal standards state very clearly: "Such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies." The word "papists" is the word that the Puritans used to describe those who follow the Pope. So it is their word for Roman Catholics. The question for us is whether Roman Catholicism has changed to the point where that needs to be revised. I have done quite a bit of reading on Roman Catholicism in the last year or so, and the conclusion I am coming to is that Roman Catholicism is actually worse now than it was in the time of the Reformation. It is not closer to the truth, but rather further away. The idolatry of the Mass is still there. And some of the worst things they believe happened after the Reformation. The decree that the Pope is infallible in certain circumstances happened in the 1870's. It is still an idolatrous religion, especially in terms of the images that they make and bow down to, as well as their doctrine of the Mass, in which they worship bread and wine, even while they claim to be worshiping Jesus. Although there are some things that we hold in

common with them, we as Protestants still believe that the Roman Catholic Church is not part of the true church, but is apostate. This may sound harsh, but the stakes are too high for us to play footsy with this. Do not marry a Roman Catholic! Love them with the love of Christ, share the gospel with them, evangelize them, but do not marry them. We serve a jealous God. We need to make sure, then, that our closest relationships will help us in our walk with God, and not hinder us.

Verses 18-26 show us God's continued jealousy even after the golden calf incident. This is a truly remarkable passage in many ways, because of where it is in the narrative. Every single one of these laws has been written down before and spoken to the people before. They are all repeats, in other words. Why, we might ask? And why these laws in particular, and not other laws? The answer to that lies in this simple truth: these are the laws which, if Israel pays attention and follows them, will keep them in that exclusive relationship with God. They are the laws that Israel most needed to hear. And they are the laws that Israel is most likely to break in its current condition. In verses 18-24 we find laws that emphasize that our first and best stuff belongs to God. Whether it is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or the firstborn of a donkey, or the Sabbath, or the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Ingathering, the people of Israel belong exclusively to their God. They show this by always bringing to God the first and best of who they are, and of all their resources, whether it's their stuff or their time or themselves.

A couple of points need to be made about these laws. They are very specific. Consider verse 21, for instance. The text says that plowing season and harvest season should have no effect whatsoever on Sabbath Day observance. Those times, of course, were the very busiest in the year. There would be the most temptation for them to just take that extra day for themselves, and not give it to God. But in this context, don't you see what that means? It means idolatry! Breaking the fourth commandment means breaking the first commandment also! If we break the Sabbath, then we are saying that our time belongs to us; we are lords of our own time; God doesn't own any of it; it's mine to do with as I please. This is one reason why church attendance is so important. In a very real way, if we are not attending church, we are committing idolatry. As we have noted before in several sermons on the Sabbath in the past, we should want to attend church on Sunday, because of all the gifts of grace that God offers us at that time. But if we don't want that grace, then we are, in effect, thinking that our time would be better spent elsewhere. What? If a husband said to his wife that instead of that weekly date that they planned, he was going to go off and spend time with another woman one on one for a date because he thought that would be time better spent, what exactly would the wife be thinking at this point? But that is exactly what we do whenever we allow a trivial excuse to keep us from worship. "Oh, I just didn't feel like it." "I had trouble getting out of bed." "I'm just too tired." These kinds of excuses reveal something very important about us. They reveal that we don't want God's grace, and that we do want some other kind of idol that is taking God's place. Furthermore, we need to be aware that these excuses are not the harmless little things that we usually think they are. They are words of treason, because we are saying that

our comfort and our time are more important than time spent with God. Satan wants nothing more than to keep us from church. All the more reason why we should want to be in church! We should definitely want what Satan hates, and hate what Satan wants, just as we should love what God loves, and hate what God hates.

Verses 25 and 26 are very interesting in their placement at the end of this section. Verse 25 has to do with avoiding leaven, or yeast, in the preparation of the Feast of the Passover. All along, Moses has been talking about leaven, in a way. He has been talking about anything that gets in the way of our relationship to God. That is sin and idolatry. A little yeast can leaven the whole loaf, Jesus says. This is why we must be so ruthless at rooting out idolatries in our lives, even as we depend completely on the Holy Spirit to do so. Verse 26 about not boiling a young goat in its mother's milk is something of a puzzle. What does it mean, and why is it placed here? I believe the text means that we should not mix the principles of life and death together. Milk means the life-sustaining nutrition that a young goat would get from its mother. It is not appropriate to mix that symbol of life in with the boiling water that symbolizes the young goat's death. Mixing life and death together is a very hazardous procedure, because death usually wins. That is another way of looking at what Moses has been talking about all during this passage: the sins mentioned are death to the believer. Don't mix death with life. "How can we who have died to sin live in it any longer?" Paul would say. Don't mix death with life. Don't mix the yeast of sin in with the dough of your life.

Lastly, verses 27-28 show us the importance of having the jealous words of the jealous God written down. The covenant that God made with Israel is exclusive. It is also permanent. That shows us again how jealous God is. He is not just temporarily jealous. He is permanently jealous. He doesn't just want His people for a moment, but for all eternity. Therefore all these things must be written down. Truly then, the entire Bible is God's love letter to us. It is His eternal jealousy written down for us. Praise the Lord for His jealousy! If He were not so jealous, then He would let us go out of His strong hands, and let us wander our own way permanently. Not only does God save us in Jesus Christ, but He also keeps us as his sheep. He has said so in that record of eternal jealousy, the Bible. Do you believe that God is jealous? And will you respond with the right kind of jealousy to His call? Jesus Christ is the seal of that jealousy, the ultimate sacrifice that ends our idolatries and joins us inseparably to Him. For to speak of God's jealousy is speak of God's love as it is poured forth to us, who are grafted on the tree of God's true people, no longer strangers and aliens, but instead fellow citizens of the kingdom of God.