Love is not Jealous, so Why is God?

Eric Lyons

The argument goes something like this: (1) 1 John 4:8 indicates that “God is love;” (2) 1 Corinthians 13:4 says that “love is not jealous” (NAS); and yet (3) Exodus 20:5, along with several other passages, reveals that God is “a jealous God.” “How,” the skeptic asks, “can God be jealous when several verses say God is love and 1 Cor. says love is not jealous?” (McKinsey, 1992). Simply put, if love is not jealous, and God is love, then God logically cannot be called jealous. Or conversely, if love is not jealous, and God is jealous, then God cannot be considered loving. Right? How can these verses be contradictory?

The term “jealousy” most often carries a negative connotation in twenty-first-century America. We pity the man who is jealous of his coworker’s success. We frown upon families who react to a neighbor’s newly found fortune by becoming overcome with jealousy. And we are perturbed to hear of a jealous husband who distrusts his wife, and questions every possible wrong action that she might make, even going so far as demanding that she never leave the house without him. Add to these feelings about jealousy what various New Testament passages have to say on the subject, and one can understand why jealousy what various New Testament passages have to say on the subject, and one can understand why some might sincerely question why God is described at times as “jealous.” The apostle Paul admonished the Christians in Rome to “behave properly,” and put off “strife and jealousy” (Romans 13:13, NAS). To the church at Corinth, Paul expressed concern that when he came to their city he might find them involved in such sinful things as gossip, strife, and jealousy (2 Corinthians 12:20). And, as noted above, he explicitly told them that “love is not jealous” (1 Corinthians 13:4). James also wrote about the sinfulness of jealousy, saying that where it exists “there is disorder and every evil thing” (3:16; cf. Acts 7:9). One religious writer described such jealousy as “an infantile resentment springing from unmortified covetousness, which expresses itself in envy, malice, and meanness of action” (Packer, 1973, p. 189). It seems, more often than not, that both the New Testament and the “moral code” of modern society speak of “jealousy” in a negative light.

The truth is, however, sometimes jealousy can be spoken of in a good sense. The word “jealous” is translated in the Old Testament from the Hebrew word qin’ah, and in the New Testament from the Greek word zelos. The root idea behind both words is that of “warmth” or “heat” (Forrester, 1996). The Hebrew word for jealousy carries with it the idea of “redness of the face that accompanies strong emotion” (Feinberg, 1942, p. 429)—whether right or wrong. Depending upon the usage of the word, it can be used to represent both a good and an evil passion. Three times in 1 Corinthians, Paul used this word in a good sense to encourage his brethren to “earnestly desire (zeeloúte)” spiritual gifts (12:31; 14:1,39). He obviously was not commanding the Corinthians to sin, but to do something that was good and worthwhile. Later, when writing to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul was even more direct in
showing how there was such a thing as “godly jealousy.” He stated:

I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it (2 Corinthians 11:2-4, emp. added).

Paul’s burning desire was for the church at Corinth to abide in the love of God. As a friend of the bridegroom (Christ), Paul used some of the strongest language possible to encourage the “bride” of Christ at Corinth to be pure and faithful.

In a similar way, Jehovah expressed His love for Israel in the Old Testament by proclaiming to be “a jealous God” (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 4:24). He was not envious of the Israelites’ accomplishments or possessions, but was communicating His strong love for them with anthropomorphic language. The Scriptures depict a spiritual marriage between Jehovah and His people. Sadly, during the period of the divided kingdom, both Israel and Judah were guilty of “playing the harlot” (Jeremiah 3:6).

God called Israel’s idolatrous practice “adultery,” and for this reason He had “put her away and given her a certificate of divorce” (3:8). This is not the “lunatic fury of a rejected or supplanted suitor,” but a “zeal to protect a love-relationship” (Packer, p. 189). Jehovah felt for Israel “as the most affectionate husband could do for his spouse, and was jealous for their fidelity, because he willed their invariable happiness” (Clarke, 1996, emp. added). Song of Solomon 8:6 is further proof that love and jealousy are not always opposed to each other. To her beloved, the Shulamite said: “Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord” (NAS). In this passage, love and jealousy actually are paralleled to convey the same basic meaning (see Tanner, 1997, p. 158)—that (aside from one’s love for God) marital love is “the strongest, most unyielding and invincible force in human experience” (NIV Study Bible, 1985, p. 1012). In this sense, being a jealous husband or wife is a good thing. As one commentator noted, married persons “who felt no jealousy at the intrusion of a lover or an adulterer into their home would surely be lacking in moral perception; for the exclusiveness of marriage is the essence of marriage” (Tasker, 1967, p. 106).

Truly, love has a jealous side. There is a sense in which one legitimately can be jealous for what rightfully belongs to him (see Numbers 25). Such is especially true in the marriage relationship. Israel was God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6). He had begun to set them apart as a special nation by blessing their “father” Abraham (Genesis 12:1ff; 17:1-27). He blessed the Israelites with much numerical growth while living in Egypt (Exodus 1:7,12,19; Deuteronomy 26:5; cf. Genesis 15:5; 46:3). He delivered them from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3-12). And, among other things, He gave them written revelation, which, if obeyed, would bring them spiritually closer to Jehovah, and even would make them physically superior to other nations, in that they would be spared from various diseases (see Exodus 15:26). Like a bird that watches over her eggs and young with jealousy, preventing other birds from entering her nest, God watched over the Israelites with “righteous” jealousy, unwilling to tolerate the presence of false gods among his people (see Exodus 20:3-6; Joshua 24:14-16,19-20). Such “godly jealousy” (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2) was not what Paul had in mind in 1 Corinthians 13:4.


Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7
Elders:
Tracy Frisinger
Bill Hyde
Roland Merz
Kelly Miller

Deacons:
Randy Banks
Stephen Estrada
John Gray
Damon Hyde
Jay Kelsey
Winston Kinser
Matt Walker
Joel Wilkinson
Brian Wilks
Robert Wright
Tim Wright

Ministers:
Steven Akin
Jacob Rutledge

Mission Works
Joshua Ankiah
South Africa
Daniel Sackey
Liberia, West Africa
Peter Chin
Far East Evangelism (Singapore)
Tom Jackson
Lancaster, New Hampshire
Life Verlooy
Rice Lake, Wisconsin
John Moore
Bible Passages
Troy Spradlin
Paraguay Mission Work
Hensel Youth Camp
Southwest School of Bible Studies
World Video Bible School

For the Record
Week of Feb 11
Sunday AM .................. 174
Contribution ............... $7,414
Week of Feb 18
Sunday AM .................. 178
Contribution ............... $7,878

February 27th
@ 6:30 pm
Ladies Bible Study
At the home of Carolyn Gully
Dinner will be provided.
Announcements

Prayer List
Church Family:
Opaline Bonner, Ryan & Nichole Bonnett, Paul Brown, Marvin & Mary Crumley, Nalawyn Dalley, Peggy Hinsley, Eric Holloway, Betty Starling, Tracy Wright

Family & Friends of Church Family
Cyndi & Kelly Arbuckle, Pat Balderas, Judy Barthel, Donald Ferguson Family, Ray Frisinger, Gary & Carol Hiennman, Lura (Lyles) Stovall, Monty & Linda McNair, Gary & Sandra Montgomery, Alyssa Moore, Mary Moore, Edward O’Daniel, Avis Yates Rivers, Andrew Sanchez, Regina Sanchez, Mary Sharp, Wade Thomson, Dennis Tilley, Don Walker, Gary Williamson, Tommy Williamson

Shut-ins & Other Needs
Loretta Knox, Alene McNair

HCC Resident
Nancy Wallace

Announcements
We are happy to announce that Lynn & Sandra Johnson placed membership with us this past Sunday, so join us in welcoming them to our Dripping Springs Family.

There will be a VBS Planning Meeting this Sunday, February 25th at 5:00pm in the auditorium. If you plan to be involved in any way, please plan to attend.

Ladies’ Retreat sign-up sheet is on the back table of the auditorium. We will need a final headcount by March 4th so sign-up as soon as possible.

Spring Family Camp Out will be March 2-4 at Inks Lake State Park. There is a sign-up sheet on the back table in the auditorium so we may get a headcount.

Mark Your Calendars
TODAY - VBS Planning Meeting
Feb 27 - Ladies’ Bible Study; 6:30pm at the home of Carolyn Gully; all food provided

Privileged to Serve
Sunday, Feb 25
Morning
Announcements........ Charles Smith
Scripture Reading.....To Be Selected
Song Leader...............Brian Wilks
Opening Prayer......... Keith Mauck
Sermon.................. Jacob Rutledge
Closing Prayer........ Russell Speir

Lord’s Table
Roland Merz.......... Stephen Estrada
Robert Wright........... Matt Walker
Joe Williamson......... Russell Speir
Byron Pogue...............Nick Stoots

Evening
Song Leader ............ Wayne Mansur
Opening Prayer.......... Grady Moore
Sermon.................. Jacob Rutledge
Closing Prayer ....... Stephen Estrada

Wednesday, Feb 28
Prayers............... To Be Selected
Song Leader .......... Monthly Singing
Speaker .......................... Brian Wilks

Sunday, March 4
Morning
Announcements........ Roland Merz
Scripture Reading.....To Be Selected
Song Leader...............Brian Wilks
Opening Prayer......... Keith Mauck
Sermon.................. Jacob Rutledge
Closing Prayer ...... Maverick Walker

Evening
Song Leader ............ Bill Hyde
Opening Prayer........ Robert Wright
Sermon.................. Jacob Rutledge
Closing Prayer .......... Jay Kelsey

Ushers
Tom Pawelka..........Gerald Sherrill

Building Lockup
John Gray. ...............Kelly Miller

Communion Preparation
Lee Gully...................Damon Hyde

Ladies Room 101 Duty
February: Nichole Bonnett, Kathy Boydston, Hailey Lawrence, Christie Pogue
March: Karla Gray, Tammy Hyde, Jo Kelsey, Karen Perrone
April: Carol Nelson, Carrie Nelson, Lori Simonetti, Mary Williams

Youth Calendar
Youth Singing Class & Dinner Every Wednesday @ 5:45 Dinner/6:15 Class
Friends in Faith Dinner Every Wednesday @ 6:15pm in Room 101
Prayer & Coffee (High School) Every Tuesday @ Starbucks 7:45-8:15am with Steven
Bible Study “Sharpen The Sword” every Monday @ the home of Steven & Catherine Akin - 6:30pm Followed by Ultimate Frisbee
TODAY - Pew Packers today following morning worship
TODAY - Bible Bowl @ 4:45pm
Mar 2-4 - Spring Family Campout at Inks Lake State Park; see Stephen Estrada for any questions
Mar 30 - Apr 1 - Lads to Leaders Convention

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