

## GOD IS JEALOUS...

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Exodus 34:14 says, "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." An *idol* is basically a *lie*, a *falsehood*. God is called a "jealous" God not because He's selfishly possessive, but because He's zealously protective. He understands the true meaning and value of His glory and prohibits us from giving that glory to *lies*, to false gods, to things or people that displace Him in our devotion. Worship and devotional trust belong uniquely to the Lord. He is "jealous" for us to reflect the glory of being created in His image. The "glory due His name" is to be surrendered to no one and nothing else but Him alone.

The first Commandment is "You shall have no other gods before me,"(Ex.20:3). While we are quick to claim that our sole allegiance is to our Lord, John warned the early believers, "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols,"(1Jo.5:21). We are immersed in a self-seeking modern culture that does not honor the God we serve. Unconsciously we easily soak up many of our environment's social values. How do we prevent this? How can we *keep ourselves from idols*?

In ancient times, good things, such as things in nature or creative works of art, were made into idols. Creation and creativity are for our enjoyment, but not for our devotion. Today people devote much time and energy to houses, cars, VCRs, computers, and many other material creations. While these aren't evil in themselves, preoccupation with them, whether for reasons of status, entertainment, or even efficiency, can become idolatry. Yet there are other idols more subtle than these. Some are so closely related to the Christian walk that it seems sacrilegious even to suppose that they could ever become idols. I am talking about *work*, *marriage*, and *family*.

*Work!* Isn't work enjoined by God's commands, especially careful, diligent work? Yes, but when jobs or careers become the central focus of our lives, work can become an idol. God is a jealous God. He will not have *work* taking His place as our "provider" or as our identity. If we begin to see our job as the hope of paying the mortgage or putting groceries on the table, we have exalted it above our true Provider. Or if we find our identities in our work, that is, if we see ourselves as nurses or truck-drivers or salespeople, instead of as children and servants of the Most High God who are presently nursing or driving or selling, then our work becomes an idol. We are unwittingly making ourselves in the image of our job. Does this offer any insight as to why people sometimes lose their perspective and sense of usefulness once they retire? Work, even good work, does not define us. We do not find our true selves until we find ourselves in God.

*Marriage!* Isn't marriage close to the heart of God? He chose it as the symbol of Christ's relationship to the Church! Yes, and exactly for that reason God is jealous for all who corporately constitute Christ's Bride to remain absolutely faithful to their real Husband, while they play out their roles in the dramatic earthly performance called "marital union." On each wedded drama, whatever its combination of comedy, tragedy or melodrama, some day the final curtain will drop. Ultimately the entire cast of couples will leave this earthly stage for the great wedding party of the Lamb of God. Earthly marriage is a temporary blessing, or for some, a temporary trial. But in either case, it becomes a form of idolatry when it is placed on a pedestal

as the fountainhead of human happiness and fulfillment. Modern society has done this with marriage. It religiously preaches an expectation that spouses should meet our deepest personal, emotional and sexual needs. This false concept has proven itself bankrupt in our culture. Yet this false idea, or false *god*, remains enthroned in the minds of many, and when not being worshipped or prayed to, it is cursed and damned for not supplying what's demanded of it. Only God can meet the deepest needs of the human heart. And as the many celibate spiritual leaders of past ages proved, Christ's spousal affection as the Lover of our souls is sufficient to create personal wholeness for a lifetime of either singleness or marriage. But remember, He is a jealous Lover...

*Family!* How could the family ever become an idol? Aren't we supposed to have our focus on the family? Today God is specifically targeting the family as a major area needing revival. Yet, even the family can become a form of idolatry. One problem in evangelism, especially in foreign missions, is how an allegiance to family keeps people from accepting Christ. In our culture a false concept of the family tempts us to demand of it more than it can give. Like marriage, the family is a temporal institution where we cannot discover our identities or life's ultimate meaning. But what is closer to us than blood-ties? Yes! What? The eternal blood-tie in Christ is closer than all flesh-and-blood ties, and His blood has purchased for us a place in His family of born-again ones, the Church. "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." (Eph.3:14). Many families experience breakdown, and, as time passes, eventually all our earthly families will be separated. This is why our commitment to the Family of God, the Community of the Faithful, is so important. God's Family is the larger, eternal context in which He intends all earthly families to find their ultimate fulfillment and blessing. No human family may usurp the place of honor that belongs to the Eternal Family in whose image it was created. God jealously protects that honor and reserves it for His Family alone.

These gifts to us, our families, our marriages (or singleness), our work, and anything else that might become a form of idolatry, must all be placed properly into the safety of God's revealed will. Our primary allegiance to the Lordship of Christ from which all our earthly blessings should find their limitations and their fulfillments. We serve a loving God Who is *jealous* for our happiness and our holiness, both of which flow from His glory. He will not sanction the good things He has created becoming idols that displace Him as the true Source of our identity and our blessing. If you have sacrificed your all on the altar of work, marriage or family and have been disappointed, now you know why. Let the Word of God guide you in how to lay all these and other good things before the altar where God alone is exalted and worshipped. You will not succeed in trying to serve this God, "whose name is Jealous," in any other way.

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