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The Jealousy of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" Ex. 20:5.

"For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" Ex. 34:14.

"For Jehovah thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God" Deut. 4:24.

"So the angel that talked with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy" Zech. 1:14.

"And he said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" 1 Kings 19:10,14.

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame" Song of Songs 8:6.

"His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for thy house shall eat me up" John 2:17.

"For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ" 2 Cor. 11:2.

The Nature of the Jealousy

You will see from these passages that there is something of a paradox in relation to jealousy. On the one hand the very worst things are said about it. Jealousy is as cruel as the grave, and we know that the very worst things recorded in the Scriptures were done through jealousy. We are even informed that the Lord Jesus Himself was put to death through jealousy; that is, on the human side. And yet, on the other hand, it is shown to be a Divine attribute, one of the outstanding features of God: "*The Lord thy God is a jealous God*"; "*the Lord, whose name is Jealous*".

The only way in which to reconcile the two things is to understand what jealousy is. We only need to be quiet with the word for a few moments and we shall soon arrive at the nature of jealousy. Jealousy is the desire to be in absolute and undivided possession of an object, whether that object be a person, or a place, or a position. It is the desire that, in relation to that object, no one else shall have any part, but there shall be an unreserved monopoly. It may be as to the affections; it may be as to the esteem, the recognition, the adoration. It may be in any one of a great many directions that there is this desire to have everything and no one else to share. That is behind jealousy, so that if that object is shared, that position is shared, that recognition is shared, those affections are shared, that attention is shared, that consideration is shared, then jealousy arises, because someone else is receiving what the individual concerned desires to have all for himself or herself. That is the nature of jealousy.

On the Human Side No Individual has a Right to Monopoly

Now we can come immediately to the point, and, so far as men and women are concerned, so far as human beings are concerned in this creation, no individual has a right to a monopoly. The person does not exist who has unreserved and undivided rights as to objects, places, positions or any kind of interest. God did not create men for that purpose. The whole principle of the creation is that of fellowship, communion, intercourse, interchange, mutual participation, mutual recognition, and everything that spreads interest over the company rather than concentrates them upon the individual. That on the human side.

On the Divine Side

God is the only Being Who has absolute right to undivided recognition and position.

God is the only one of Whom it can ever be said properly and rightly that He is a jealous God. His Name is Jealous; He is a jealous God! Why? Because all things are His by absolute right, and that distinguishes Him from all the rest of the creation, because He has the right to the absolute place of adoration, affection, consideration, and every other kind of attention and interest. Therefore, at root, jealousy is a tendency, at least, to take God's place. He is the only One Who has a right to be jealous.

We are not dealing with jealousy as a thing. We are for the moment defining it, in order to get to something that is more important than our talking about human faults and failings.

God's Place of Absoluteness in this Universe and in Our Lives

He created all things for Himself. Everything has its very being and existence by Him. Nothing would ever be, but for Him. Everything and everyone owes its very being to Him, and He stands, therefore, in the position of having *the* right, the *absolute* right, to pre-eminent place - to have everything, to

have undivided, unreserved place. The first sin in this universe was the sin of jealousy. From the first sin all the havoc in this universe has proceeded, and it is not just an objective thing. It is something which, like a poison, has entered into the very being of man, so that man's natural tendency is to draw to himself, to have for himself, to be an object of interest, of importance, of consideration, sometimes of adoration. All that is the working of an evil which takes away from God, draws away from God, puts God out of His place. And inasmuch as you or I seek place, position, reputation, or consideration, it may be just the working of that sinister thing.

The cross of the Lord Jesus is the scene of the blazing forth of the Divine jealousy. Divine jealousy is represented as a fire: "*Our God is a consuming fire.*" Divine jealousy is not passive; it is a mighty burning; it must have; it will be; it will devour. The cross of the Lord Jesus is the scene of the work of that jealousy in its intense heat. It reveals how God must, and will, have everything. In the Old Testament it is defined by the whole burnt offering. The fire devours everything. The Lord Jesus is that matchless, universal, representative Person in which there is gathered up everything in this universe. That is saying a tremendous thing, a thing which we have not yet ranged or fathomed; that the whole universe is gathered up and centred in the Person of Jesus Christ. Heaven and earth and all therein bring back to God in the Person of Christ everything which has been taken away from God, everything which has challenged God's supreme position, God's utterness of right. It is all laid hold of in the Person of Jesus Christ; by Him and brought back to Him, in the cross. So that in the Person of the Lord Jesus, representatively, actually, and yet potentially, all things are restored to God. God, through the cross, possesses in Christ the place which has from eternity been His by absolute right. The battle of Calvary was the battle for God's rights in His universe, and those rights were secured through the cross in Christ.

Then what does the cross mean? We speak much about the cross. We say that we stand upon the ground of the cross. We proclaim the cross. Ours is the message of the cross. Do we really understand and recognise that the cross is the place where the Divine jealousy is at white heat, and to come to the cross means that there is nothing left to ourselves? Nothing whatever remains for us; no place, no position, no personal interests. The cross says: God is everything. To the very last ounce it is God's. Every kind of personal direction, desire for self is finished in the cross. Do we recognise then, that having taken the position with Christ crucified, two things must follow.

Firstly, or on the one hand, it is all of the Lord; and we shall be tested, tried, on that one single issue at every point of our lives. The Lord will touch us with the meaning of the cross at every point of these lives of ours, every position, every relationship, everything. No matter what has a place in our lives, He will touch that with the cross, and say: "Am I all there, or do *you* have some place there?" The cross means that. Those who accept the utter or even the fuller meaning of Calvary as a living reality will be brought into the sphere where the Divine jealousy operates and touches everything. God says: "Do I have absolute place?" That will be His interrogation on all matters. There is no place for anything or anyone (when the cross has been established) which divides with the Lord. The Lord has taken that position all along. His grace may make the operation of that position progressive, so that it does not apply practically all at once, but the Lord's position is that from the beginning. In the long run we shall be brought back to the utterness of God. God does not accept the partiality of our surrender, the dividedness of our consecration. He does not accept it. He never has. He never will. He may be bearing with it, so that we progressively come to the recognition of it and voluntarily accept it, but His position is utter from the beginning.

Secondly, or on the other hand, Divine jealousy is the very nature of hell. That is, the everlasting burnings are the activities of that jealousy, that consuming fire which is against us when, having been presented with the meaning of the cross, we do not accept it. If we come into the realm of

Calvary, into the realm of the meaning of the cross, where the cross is not merely a doctrine, a theme, a teaching; not merely something objective, external, but where the cross is a living reality, where the cross is in the hands of the Holy Ghost, and not in the hands of man for application; when we come within the compass of the *living* activity of the cross and we are not yielding to that Divine jealousy so that God *is* having all, that Divine jealousy works as a fire against us and consumes. It is a terrible thing, as well as a glorious thing, to come within the compass of Holy Ghost activity in relation to the cross of the Lord Jesus.

Ananias and Sapphira are early illustrations of how terrible a thing it is. What was the principle? Why, that of God having everything! Calvary was an accomplished thing, the Holy Ghost had come on the ground of that utterness of God having everything in the cross. The Holy Spirit having His way in the hearts of those people simply meant that they were letting go all to the Lord, and then there came along a man and a woman who kept something back from the Lord; and thus, right in the presence of an activity in relation to the deepest meaning of Calvary, they held something for themselves, and they therefore denied the cross and came into collision with the Divine jealousy. The Divine jealousy was, on the one hand, bringing these into joy, into gladness, because of God having His place (and there is no more joyous life than when God has His full place - the Divine jealousy works out to great joy, great rest, great peace when it has its way), but to withstand it meant to be consumed. The Divine jealousy works for and it works against.

Go through the Scriptures with that thought. "*I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion*" (Zech. 1:14); "*My jealousy shall burn as a fire.*" Let Babylon, let Chaldea, let anybody get in the way of that fire, and see what happens. God is for His people with a burning jealousy, and when His people are wholly for Him, that jealousy will stand at nothing for their defence, for their preservation. It is a great thing to stand with the burnings, where the burnings have you utterly. You have all the fury of His jealousy on your side when you are with Him on the ground of the cross. But you see, if that is not operating to have full, utter, complete place, then the burnings are against and not for.

The whole purpose of this little word is to seek to constrain to a recognition of the fact that the Holy Spirit is still as jealous for God's full rights, for God's full place. In other words, He is still as jealous for the practical operation of the meaning of the cross of the Lord Jesus as ever He was. The cross gathers up all that history: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me*". "Nothing, no one, in My place, or to divide My place with Me!" The cross gathers up all that, and settles it as an issue, and now we have to reckon with the cross of the Lord Jesus as in the hands of no lesser Person than the Holy Ghost Himself.

There are two sides to that. It works both ways in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament it worked historically. In the New Testament it worked spiritually: "*For this cause many among you are sick and not a few die.*" Why? Because they violated the meaning of the cross! The Holy Spirit is looking after Christ's cross. That cross of Calvary is a thing of infinite regard in the eyes and the hands of the Holy Spirit. To come into touch with it is not to come into touch with a teaching. It is to come into touch with the burnings of God, the consuming fire.

I was very much impressed in reading through Hebrews 12 in the section of the chapter which says: "*We are not come unto a mount... that burned with fire* (and then all that terrible description of the voice and the thunder, and the stoning should even a beast touch the mount; a scene of terror, of destruction, of judgment and reproach) ...*But ye are come unto mount Zion*", and then all the superior blessedness of coming to what we do come to, and yet, the close of that is: "*ye are come unto the heavenly Jerusalem... to the... church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*". And it concludes: "*Wherefore... let us have grace whereby we may offer service, well-pleasing to God with reverence and*

awe: for our God is a consuming fire". It does not change the position. It only lifts it into a realm where it says that coming to Christ, and coming to Calvary, is even more than coming to Sinai, and it means greater responsibility, and not less. Grace does not put away responsibility: "*Our God is a consuming fire.*"

We can rejoice while we are working with the jealousy of God, because the jealousy of God is working for us. We can leave our case in the hands of Divine jealousy. He will look after our interests if we are wholly His. On the other hand, it does behoove us to remember that a touch with Calvary, a touch with the cross, involves us in the utterest abandonment to the Lord, with nothing whatever that separates us from Him. We must not hold back, for to hold back is to find the jealousy, which would work for us, working against us. The Lord preserve us from that.