

READ Romans 11:13-16

It is known as the “green-eyed monster.” It can turn the nicest of men and women into people who are willing to do the most awful of deeds. It takes sweet and joyful children who have just opened up their Christmas morning gifts and turns them into ungrateful fiends. As one wrote, *“It’s one of the rawest human emotions, and if left unchecked, it will most likely result in devastating consequences.”* (Ann Casano) Jealousy has certainly has its impact upon humankind and even upon history itself. It is an emotional flame of which the evil one would love to make grow hotter and hotter, and thus it is necessary for us to be well aware of our propensity to fall into its destructive grasp.

For most of us, the issue of jealousy is a pretty open and shut, cut and dry sort of topic because we usually understand it purely in a negative context. We teach our children to not act out jealously against their siblings or friends when they receive a shiny new gift, and we ourselves work hard to not have feelings of jealousy when our own friends achieve great goals in their lives. We recognize the damage these feelings can have. We know the verses that speak against jealousy and envy, so we try to steer entirely clear of them. Yet, we come to a text such as the one we just read together and we realize we have a slight problem.

Here we have an inspired Apostle of Jesus speaking of actively trying to make his own people jealous! How does that make any sense? Surely a new disciple to the faith or even a skeptic might. Look at these two seemingly contradictory ideas and wonder how they can both be true. How can Paul speak here in **Romans 11:14** of trying to make his fellow Jews jealous, but then turn around in **Romans 13:13** and writes, *“Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy.”*? This seems to be a pretty clear contradiction just a couple chapters apart, and this is the type of occasion in Scripture that can cause great difficulty for the novice or Biblical skeptic.

This morning, I do want to explore a bit of this curious case of jealousy as it is discussed within Scripture, and I willingly admit that such a topic is a bit complicated to discuss because the same English word is used in seemingly contradictory ways. Again, we see jealousy rebuked in Scripture, but then we can turn around and see in other places in Scripture where it is spoken of in a totally different light. As with many such issues within Scripture, the resolution often comes down to context or the weaknesses of translation. We’re going to discuss the contextual and translation variables surrounding this issue of jealousy, and I hope we will come away with even just a slightly better and more nuanced understanding of the roles it should not and might even should play within our lives.

Jealousy: It’s Complicated**A. Jealousy Rebuked****1. Definitions of Jealousy & Envy**

- a) **Jealous:** feeling or showing envy of someone or their achievements and advantages.
- b) **Envy:** a feeling of discontented or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or luck.
- c) We’ll begin with what is probably the most familiar understanding we have of the word jealousy. This understanding of jealousy is often closely associated with the word envy or envious. Both of these words within Scripture can be translated from the same word *zēlos* which is actually the same word from which we get the word zeal, which we often perceive in positive terms. This Greek word has its roots in something being made hot which is why we often speak of zeal, jealousy, and envy as passionate emotions. This word can be found translated as either zeal, jealousy, or envy across the spectrum of Bible translations. Paul uses the same word in **I & II Corinthians**, but it is found translated all three ways.

2. Negative Context

- a) The church in Corinth actually serves as a great case study for the problems that come with jealousy and envy. In **I Corinthians 3:1-3**, Paul speaks of his disappointment in having to speak to these disciples as if they are babies in Christ because of the childish characteristics they are showing. He judges them as still being of the world and fleshly because there is envy and strife among them in many different respects. *“For my part, brothers and sisters, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, since you were not yet ready for it. In fact, you are still not ready, because you are still worldly. For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not worldly and behaving like mere humans?”*
- b) The Apostle also writes in **II Corinthians 12:20** that he fears in coming to them because he believes he will find them in a way that he does not want and a way in which they do not want to be found. *“Perhaps there will be quarreling, jealousy, angry outbursts, selfish ambitions, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder.”*

3. The Issue With Jealousy?

- a) Even a cursory reading will reveal the issues that were a manifestation of the jealous and envious hearts that were present among the brothers and sisters in Corinth. Maybe the issue that stands out the most were the issues surrounding the possession and use of miraculous spiritual gifts. Judging by what Paul has to say within these two letters, there were some within this church who were jealous and envious of the abilities that some had within the church that they didn't have. Paul feels the need to explain (**I Corinthians 12**) the truth of these gifts all coming from the same God for the same result...ministering for the glory of the Lord and the building up of one another. Instead, we see people valuing and desiring certain gifts over others which developed into jealousy and envy towards those who had what they did not.
- b) What did this result in? It resulted in a deeply divided and dysfunctional group of God's people. They were not able to work together in harmony for the greater good. Those who had the “lesser” gifts were seen as being less valuable and they often felt as if they were less valuable to the body. They were not able to suffer when a brother or a sister suffered, and they were not even able to rejoice when a brother or sister rejoiced. The bond of faith in Christ and working together for His glory was absent because the hearts of these brethren were cold and calloused on account of jealousy and envy. When we talk about jealousy and envy, I would say the vast majority of us would think along these lines. However, let's notice that this emotion we often think of as being something to avoid is actually a divine characteristic of God Himself.

B. Jealousy of God

1. Definitions of God's Jealousy

- a) **Qana'**: to envy, be jealous, be envious, zealous; to provoke to jealous anger, cause jealousy
- b) **Qanna'**: jealous (only of God)
- c) As with our first Hebrew word for jealousy we considered, there are a number of different ways these two words are translated across English translations. The first word *qana'* (kaw-naw) is used to describe the jealousy of both men and God. You can find instances in the Old Testament where both men and God are described as being made jealous (**Deuteronomy 32:16,21**), but this second word *qanna'* (kan-naw) is only used in reference to God. Here are some examples from the Old Testament of these words being used to describe the character and emotion of God. See if you can spot the consistent theme of these verses.

2. Divine Context

a) Qana'

- (1) *"They provoked His **jealousy** with different gods; they enraged Him with detestable practices."* (Deuteronomy 32:16)
- (2) *"Judah did what was evil in the Lord's sight. They provoked him to jealous anger more than all that their ancestors had done with the sins they committed."* (I Kings 14:22)
- (3) *"But they rebelliously tested the Most High God, for they did not keep His decrees. They treacherously turned away like their ancestors; they became warped like a faulty bow. They enraged Him with their high places and provoked His **jealousy** with their carved images."* (Psalm 78:56-58)
- (4) *"So the angel who was speaking with me said, "Proclaim: The Lord of Armies says: I am **extremely jealous** for Jerusalem and Zion."* (Zechariah 1:14)
- (5) *"The Lord of Armies says this: "I am **extremely jealous** for Zion; I am **jealous** for her with great wrath."* (Zechariah 8:2)

b) Qanna'

- (1) *"Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a **jealous** God, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me..."* (Exodus 20:5)
- (2) *"Because the Lord is **jealous** for His reputation, you are never to bow down to another god. He is a **jealous** God."* (Exodus 34:14)
- (3) *"For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a **jealous** God."* (Deuteronomy 4:24)
- (4) *"Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them, because I, the Lord your God, am a **jealous** God, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me..."* (Deuteronomy 5:9)
- (5) *"for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a **jealous** God. Otherwise, the Lord your God will become angry with you and obliterate you from the face of the earth."* (Deuteronomy 6:15)

3. What arouses God's jealousy?

- a) When we think about our typical understanding of our own jealousy, we think about our poor feelings towards others for what they have and what we wished we had. However, when it comes to God's jealousy, we must recognize this jealousy as only being aroused when that which rightfully belongs to Him as been taken or given away to something else. The consistent instigator throughout these verses of God's jealousy is that of idolatry.
- b) It was Yahweh God who sent Moses down into Egypt to free His people to bring them up to the promised land. It was God who showed His power in overwhelming the Egyptians. It was God who made a covenant with the people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham. It was God who brought them into the land of Canaan and delivered the strong people of the land into their hands in war. Israel was God's people and Yahweh alone was to be their God. It was their unfaithfulness and spiritual adultery that led God to feel such righteous jealousy for them. Evil jealousy is looking towards that which doesn't belong to us, but the jealousy of God is always directed towards that which is His. It is in this way that God can be jealous in a holy way while we still need to guard against jealousy and envy towards our fellow man. However, there is still that issue that we began with from **Romans 11**. Let's look at that text again in order to bring these thoughts full circle.

C. Jealousy Desired

1. Definitions of Encouraged Jealousy in **Romans 10:19 & 11:11,13,14**

- a) *Parazēloō*: (Greek) to stimulate alongside, to excite to rivalry, to provoke to emulation
- b) Out of the words translated as jealous, this one surely causes us the most problems because this sort of jealousy seems to be a jealousy that God desires for people to have both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. I mentioned earlier that the word *qana'* could be used in reference to both men and God, and Paul is actually quoting **Deuteronomy 32:21** in **Romans 10:19** as he speaks of the interplay between the salvation of the Jews and Gentiles. That conversation actually spans the length of **Romans 9-11**, and it is within these three chapters that we find this desired jealousy, which our understanding of the definition of the original word will help us to understand more clearly.

2. Desired Context

- (1) *"But I ask, "Did Israel not understand?" First, Moses said, I will make you **jealous** of those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that lacks understanding."* (**Romans 10:19**)
- (2) *"I ask, then, have they stumbled so as to fall? Absolutely not! On the contrary, by their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel **jealous**."* (**Romans 11:11**)
- (3) *"Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Insofar as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if I might somehow make my own people **jealous** and save some of them."* (**Romans 11:13,14**)

3. Why does Paul (by extension God) desire this type of jealousy from the Jews?

- a) We simply do not have time to fully dissect this extremely deep portion of Paul's letter to the Romans, but to simplify what is going on...Paul is anticipating some push back from the Jews concerning him speaking of the Jewish rejection of Christ. He speaks of God's election of Israel as the nation through which the promised Seed would come into the world, but they were not going to be found righteous just because they were a part of that nation as Paul speaks of in **Romans 9**.
- b) **Romans 10** clearly states that righteousness was going to come as result of faithfulness towards God. Sadly, the faithlessness of the Jews was evidence in their rejection and obstinate disposition towards Jesus and the Gospel. This, of course, was not the first time the Jews had rejected God for they had done so throughout the Old Testament through their breaking of the covenant and pursuit of other gods. This is precisely what Moses is alluding to in **Deuteronomy 32:21** as he speaks of a coming time when Israel's rebellion against God would move Him to use a foreign nation to arouse their own jealousy towards God. I believe in context He is speaking of the use of foreign nations as a tool of punishment against Israel, but here I believe Paul is using the text to speak of the Gentiles as a tool to motivate the Jews to return in righteousness to God through faith in Jesus Christ.
- c) How would this take place? It seems Paul is wanting Israel to recognize that if God will offer salvation to those who have historically not been His chosen people, then how much more is He ready and willing to offer that same salvation to those through whom the whole process of bringing about salvation took place?! This seems to be exactly Paul's point when we consider what he says in **Romans 11:11-14**. Many of the Jewish people were holding out in accepting Christ as the Messiah and coming to Him by faith, but Paul is stating there was still hope for them! He even hoped that the Gentiles coming to faith would motivate them even more towards "jealousy" which we should understand as stimulation and provocation to emulate the faith of the Gentiles.

- d) The Jews should have been desiring to have that which belonged to them all along! Whereas the jealousy that is often rebuked is directed at those desiring that which didn't belong to them, this jealousy that is desired by Paul is for the Jews to desire, reach out, and take hold of that which God was so graciously offering to them! It is in this way that Paul can tell the Roman Jewish brothers and sisters he desired for their jealousy while at the same time rebuking the Corinthian brothers and sisters for the jealousy and envy that existed amongst them. Salvation through faith in Christ Jesus has been made available to all men!

Application Thoughts

A. Appreciation for what we have and a genuine joy for the blessings of other are the best safeguards against *jealousy* and *envy*.

1. When we think about the root causes of bad jealousy that is condemned in Scripture, we recognize it stems from others having or achieving that which we wish we had or achieved. It might be the new vehicle of the next door neighbor. It might be the new Playstation 5 our classmate received for Christmas. It could be any material possession others receive that we wish we would also have received. It could also be the achievements of others...the promotion at work, the recognition of a job well done, or the simple good fortune of others can all be the spark from which jealousy can ignite.
2. However, constant feelings of jealousy and envy for what others have or have achieved can be a telling sign of the fact that we are not appreciative for what God has blessed us with. Sure we might not have the newest or shiniest thing out there, whatever it might be, but we have that which can get the job done. While this might not seem like that big of a deal since jealous feelings are often internalized, we need to recognize that these feelings do actually cause harm to our fellow man because they prevent us from being happy for the good things that happen to others.
3. Take this back with me to Corinth. There was a great deal of jealousy and envy within that church. How do you think that affected those occasions when a fellow disciple spoke a great prophetic message or healed the ailment of someone suffering? That should have been a great moment of celebration by all, but those who were jealous and envious would certainly be hindered from rejoicing with those who were rejoicing. They had been soured by the envy and jealousy that had taken root in their hearts. The same can be true for us within our own lives. When we are jealous and envious of the good fortune of our brothers and sisters then we are hindering ourselves from being joyous with them in those moments. Those types of feelings and emotions will do nothing but hinder our relationships, and they must be defeated within our own minds by finding contentment with what we have, being appreciative for it, and being happy for others when they experience great blessings from God. May we never fail to remember and live out the words of Paul in **I Corinthians 13:4**, "*Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy...*"

B. The same *jealousy & zeal* that causes God to so greatly pursue us is the same *jealousy & zeal* that ought to cause us to greatly pursue Him.

1. God's desire, jealousy, and zeal for Israel as His people because of His promises to Abraham motivated Him to go to great lengths in order to keep His promises. Again, He provided everything that was necessary in order for His promises to be fulfilled in making Abraham's descendants a great people, giving them a promised land, and then ultimately through them bringing the Messiah into this world. It was God's jealousy that kept this all going even whenever His people became spiritual adulterers through their pursuing of other gods. Even though they rejected Him time and time again, He still gave His only Son on the cross for them and all of the people of the world.

2. We would do well to emulate that same jealousy towards God by greatly pursuing Him regardless of the cost that must be paid. We must be a people of great desire, jealousy, and zeal for our God. We must be a people who are burning up in our passion to pursue Him because there are so many influences around us who are seeking to snuff out that fiery desire. Just as God's desire for His people and for us never dims, so may we too make sure our desire for Him is ever burning brightly within ourselves. We can help make this our reality by making sure our greatest desires are for Him and His will and not the material things of this world that others around us might be constantly stockpiling to their own detriment. If we can focus on Him fully then there simply won't be any passion left for things of this world.

Main Point/Conclusion: *Jealousy* for our God should destroy any ounce of *jealousy* we have towards our fellow man.

Especially around the holiday season, it can be easy for us to find ourselves failing to appreciate the blessings that we currently have or receive because of the "better" blessings we perceive others as having all around us. However, if we are in Christ then we would do well to remember that there is nothing in this world that out-values hope of eternal life with in Christ. In fact, others would do well to look at our lives and become jealous/moved to emulate the lives we live in Christ. Even better is the reality that they too can have this life for God graciously offers it to them, as well. May God defeat us when our desires and jealousies rise for things of this world and redirect our hearts towards greater desire, jealousy, faithfulness, and trust in Him.