

# THE JEALOUSY OF GOD

## JEALOUSY AN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD?

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- Jealousy is not an attribute that we quickly attribute to God, due mostly to the negative connotation associated with human jealousy
- We have been taught, rightly, that jealousy is a vice to be avoided...a powerful human emotion that can do a great deal of harm unless harnessed and kept under control
- It has been defined as a “feeling of resentment against someone because of that person’s rivalry, success, or advantages. It is characterized by or proceeds from suspicious fears or envious resentment”<sup>1</sup>
- Another definition speaks of “a feeling or showing an envious resentment to someone or their achievements, possessions, or perceived advantages”<sup>2</sup>
- It is “a feeling of unhappiness and anger because someone has something or someone that you want”<sup>3</sup>
- In the heart of a jealous person, hate arises because they don’t have what another does have
- Shakespeare called it “the green-eyed monster” in *Othello*
- The word “jealousy” is almost always a bad one...it usually involves selfishness, suspicion, and distrust, and implies a hideous resentment or hostility toward other people because they enjoy some advantage
- It is possessive, demanding, and overbearing...it stifles freedom and individuality...it degrades and demeans...it breeds tension and discord...it destroys friendships and marriages
- “The sin of jealousy does not usually involve an isolated incident. It often has far-reaching effects. It has been the cause of broken relationships in families, resulting in loved ones not speaking to each other for weeks, months, even years. It has also led to loss of warm fellowship in churches and has even caused divisions in local assemblies.”<sup>4</sup>
- Such jealousy springs from a deep-seated covetousness which expresses itself in malice and unkindness
- It is a potent vice, being fed by pride which is the root of all sin
- No wonder Scripture repeatedly associates jealousy with sin and selfish ambition

**Romans 13:13** ~ Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

**1 Corinthians 3:3** ~ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

**1 Corinthians 13:4** ~ Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant

**2 Corinthians 12:20** ~ For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances

**Galatians 5:19-21** ~ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...

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<sup>1</sup> [www.Dictionary.com](http://www.Dictionary.com)

<sup>2</sup> Oxford Dictionary of English, Second Edition, 929.

<sup>3</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/jealousy>

<sup>4</sup> <https://israelmyglory.org/article/moses-jealousy-in-the-camp/>

**James 3:14-16; 4:1-2** ~ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing... 1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

- Numerous examples of sinful human jealousy in Scripture reveal the danger of it:
  - Cain was jealous of Abel's offering (Gen 4:1-16)
  - Rachel was jealous of her sister Leah in their ongoing battle for the affections of their husband Jacob (Gen 30:1)
  - Joseph's brothers were jealous of the way their father Jacob favored his favorite wife's first son (Gen 37:11)
  - Aaron and Miriam were jealous of Moses' leadership (Num 12:1-3)
  - Korah was jealous of Aaron's and Moses' leadership (Num 16:3)
  - Saul was jealous of David's successes in battle (1 Sam 18:7-9)
  - The Jewish leaders were jealous of the apostles' powerful preaching and miracles (Acts 5:17)
- Scripture roundly condemns sinful human jealousy
- This reality makes the fact that God is called a jealous God all the more stunning
- People naturally wonder how a perfect, loving, patient God could call himself "jealous"...the idea of a jealous God is repugnant and offensive to many
- They wonder if God is insecure...or perhaps it represents a primitive, OT idea of God that is thankfully done away with by the NT
- They wonder how jealousy can be a virtue in God when it is a vice in humans
- However, despite confusion and aversion to this attribute of God, we must not reject or neglect this important aspect of God's character
- The jealousy of God is an attribute that pervades the pages of Scripture and is a necessary part of God's covenant love
- "Rightly understood, the idea of jealousy is central to any true concept of God."<sup>5</sup>
- This means that there is a godly jealousy...a kind that, like anger, is not evil in itself (notice the similarity in the words "jealous" and "zealous")
- Paul evidenced this virtuous jealousy:

**2 Corinthians 11:2** ~ For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

- Paul had an earnest concern for the Corinthians' holiness, that the Lord Jesus might be honored in their lives
- Similarly, the virtuous side of jealousy can be seen in the marital relationship...where a married person shouldn't allow a third person into that inner relationship
- Such jealousy is the fruit of marital affection, demonstrating the true meaning of the husband-wife relationship and the proper zeal to keep it intact
- Nowhere does Scripture hint that a wronged husband's jealousy "is morally questionable; rather, it treats his resolve to guard his marriage against attack, and to take action against anyone who violates it, as natural, normal and right, and as a proof that he values marriage as he should."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Sovereign God*, vol. 1 of *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 164.

<sup>6</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 170.

- “Perhaps a practical example will help us understand the difference. If a husband sees another man flirting with his wife, he is right to be jealous, for only he has the right to flirt with his wife. This type of jealousy is not sinful. Rather, it is entirely appropriate. Being jealous for something that God declares to belong to you is good and appropriate. Jealousy is a sin when it is a desire for something that does not belong to you. Worship, praise, honor, and adoration belong to God alone, for only He is truly worthy of it. Therefore, God is rightly jealous when worship, praise, honor, or adoration is given to idols.”<sup>7</sup>
- Thus, it should not be hard to understand that God’s jealousy is not the sinful, human kind, but the virtuous, holy kind which is pure and unmixed with selfish motives

## THE EXPLANATION OF THE JEALOUSY OF GOD

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- The jealousy of God is that “tender regard which [He] has for His own Deity, honor, and supremacy, and the holy indignation which he feels towards those who violate his laws, offend his majesty, or impeach his character”<sup>8</sup>
- It is how God responds when his throne is occupied by false gods, his dignity is insulted, and his glory is usurped by others
- “God’s jealousy is his zealous protectiveness of all that belongs to him (himself, his name, his glory, his people, his sole right to receive worship and ultimate obedience, his land, and his city).”<sup>9</sup>
- “God’s jealousy means that God continually seeks to protect his own honor.”<sup>10</sup>
- “God’s jealousy is not a compound of frustration, envy and spite, as human jealousy so often is, but appears instead as a (literally) praiseworthy zeal to preserve something supremely precious.”<sup>11</sup>
- God does not rightly allow any attack on his sole rights as Lord of his creation as an expression of his covenant love for his own people
- “The Old Testament regards God’s covenant as his marriage with Israel, carrying with it a demand for unqualified love and loyalty. The worship of idols, and all compromising relations with non-Israelite idolaters, constituted disobedience and unfaithfulness, which God saw as spiritual adultery, provoking him to jealousy and vengeance.”<sup>12</sup>
- The first reference to God’s jealousy comes in Exodus 20, showing that God is jealous when someone gives to another something that rightly belongs to Him

**Exodus 20:5-6** ~ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- This shows that God is possessive of the worship and service that belong to Him
- What He is jealous of belongs to Him... worship and service belong to Him alone, and are to be given to Him alone
- The second reference to God’s jealousy comes in the covenant renewal in Exodus 34, after Israel worshipped the golden calf and Moses interceded for God to go with them into the Promised Land

**Exodus 34:12-16** ~ Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. 13 But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/jealous-God.html>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/spurgeon\\_charles/sermons/0502.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/spurgeon_charles/sermons/0502.cfm)

<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 185.

<sup>10</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 205.

<sup>11</sup> Packing, *Knowing God*, 170.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

Asherim 14—for you shall not worship any other god, **for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God**— 15 otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods.

- Moses frequently reminded the people of God’s jealousy in Deuteronomy as he prepared a new generation of Israelites to enter the Promised Land after his death

**Deuteronomy 4:24** ~ For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

**Deuteronomy 6:14-15** ~ You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, 15 for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.

**Deuteronomy 29:20** ~ The LORD shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven.

**Deuteronomy 32:16, 21** ~ They made Him jealous with strange gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger...21 They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

- Numerous other OT texts reveal the fact that God is a jealous God

**1 Kings 14:22** ~ Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked Him to jealousy more than all that their fathers had done, with the sins which they committed.

**Psalms 78:58** ~ For they provoked Him with their high places And aroused His jealousy with their graven images.

**Psalms 79:5** ~ How long, O LORD? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

**Joel 2:18** ~ Then the LORD will be zealous for His land And will have pity on His people.

**Nahum 1:2** ~ A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies.

**Zephaniah 1:18** ~ Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the LORD’S wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth.

**Zechariah 1:14** ~ So the angel who was speaking with me said to me, “Proclaim, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.

**Zechariah 8:2** ~ Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her.’

- There are evidences of God’s jealousy in the NT as well

**Acts 12:23** ~ And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

**1 Corinthians 10:22** ~ Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

- “The Lord very frequently addresses us in the character of a husband...As He performs all the offices of a true and faithful husband, so He requires love and chastity from us; that is, we do not prostitute our souls to Satan...As the purer and chaster a husband is, the more grievously he is offended when he sees his wife inclining to a rival; so the Lord, who has betrothed us to Himself in truth, declares that He burns with the hottest jealousy whenever, neglecting the purity of His holy marriage, we defile ourselves with abominable

lusts, and especially when the worship of His deity, which ought to have been most carefully kept unimpaired, is transferred to another, or adulterated with some superstition; since in this way we not only violate our plighted troth, but defile the nuptial couch, by giving access to adulterers.”<sup>13</sup>

## THE NATURE OF THE JEALOUSY OF GOD

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### God is Jealous for His Name, Honor, and Glory

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- It is wrong for human beings to seek their own glory because they are created to reflect God’s glory, not their own, since he is the Creator and they are the creature

**Isaiah 43:7** ~ Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.

- But it is not sinful for God to seek his own glory, because he is infinitely glorious and alone worthy of our praise and adoration
- There is no one like God as he is completely self-sufficient, the uncreated Creator who deserves to be worshipped by all that he has made
- He is rightly jealous when we don’t worship and serve him, which is the very best thing we can do for ourselves
- To worship anything, or anyone, other than the Triune God of the Bible rightly provokes the Lord to jealousy and it cannot be any other way

**Isaiah 42:8** ~ I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.

**Isaiah 48:11** ~ For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

**Ezekiel 39:25** ~ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name.

- “Jealousy is not merely a passing mood with God. It is the essence of His person. He cannot be other than jealous. Since He is the highest and greatest being there is, infinitely holy and glorious, He must be passionately committed to preserving His honor and supremacy. He must zealously desire exclusive devotion and worship. To do less would make Him less than God.”<sup>14</sup>

### God’s Jealousy is a Reflection of His Holiness

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- It is right for God to be jealous because he does not conform to a standard outside of himself...he is the standard of what is pure and holy

**Joshua 24:19-20** ~ Then Joshua said to the people, “You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. 20 If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you.”

- He is in a class by himself...both ontologically (there is no other god) and morally (there is no god like him)
- He is undefiled by sin...so, when he encounters that which is a contradiction of his holiness, he reacts in wrath and he is jealous that what is right and good be pursued instead

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, viii, 18.

<sup>14</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/21-jealous-god>

- God's jealousy is not indicative of weakness or a character flaw on his part, but it is a part of his holy omnipotence
- He will pursue his holy purposes, and, in his zeal, he will accomplish all he set out to do

### **God's Jealousy is a Reflection of His Love**

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- Holy, righteous love without jealousy is an oxymoron in that, if God didn't hate what was contrary to his love, he wouldn't truly love
- In a human marriage, this kind of jealousy (which is a necessary by-product of love) is evoked as a way of protecting the relationship and keeping it from interlopers...it wants to preserve that which is valuable and beautiful
- This example from human marriage is merely a reflection of the relationship that exists between God and his people in the OT and Christ and his church in the NT

### **God's Jealousy Will Establish the Messianic Kingdom**

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- Although the earthly kingdom of Christ has not come yet and it awaits his return, it will happen as promised in the OT...God's jealousy is what guarantees it will come

**Isaiah 9:6-7** ~ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

### **God's Jealousy Takes Vengeance on His Enemies**

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- The day will come when all of God's enemies will be destroyed out of zeal for his name and purposes

**Isaiah 42:13** ~ The LORD will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse His **zeal** like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies.

**Isaiah 59:16-20** ~ And He saw that there was no man, And was astonished that there was no one to intercede; Then His own arm brought salvation to Him, And His righteousness upheld Him. 17 He put on righteousness like a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing And wrapped Himself with **zeal** as a mantle. 18 According to their deeds, so He will repay, Wrath to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; To the coastlands He will make recompense. 19 So they will fear the name of the LORD from the west And His glory from the rising of the sun, For He will come like a rushing stream Which the wind of the LORD drives. 20 "A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," declares the LORD.

**Ezekiel 5:13** ~ Thus My anger will be spent and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I will be appeased; then they will know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My **zeal** when I have spent My wrath upon them.

**Ezekiel 36:5** ~ therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Surely in the fire of My **jealousy** I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who appropriated My land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and with scorn of soul, to drive it out for a prey."

## **THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE JEALOUSY OF GOD**

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### **We Should Forsake All that is Opposed to God**

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- We should turn away from all that provokes God's jealousy

- Rather than justifying it, dismissing it, or turning a blind eye to it, we must deal severely with anything that competes for our allegiance
- We must mortify anything which elicits God’s holy indignation
- “The experience of God’s gracious redemption does not mean that we can live carelessly or in rebellion to his will for our lives. His deep love and commitment to us should continually fuel in us a desire to please him in everything.”<sup>15</sup>

## We Should Worship God Exclusively

- Because God is jealous for our affections and allegiance, we must have no other gods before us

**Exodus 20:2-3** ~ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me.

**Matthew 22:37-38** ~ And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment.

**Luke 14:26** ~ If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

- If we are serious about our relationship with God, we should exalt him above everything else in our lives, being absolutely dedicated to living for his honor
- “It is healthy for us spiritually when we settle in our hearts the fact that God deserves all honor and glory from his creation, and that it is right for him to seek this honor. He alone is infinitely worthy of being praised. To realize this fact and to delight in it is to find the secret of true worship.”<sup>16</sup>

## We Should be Zealous for God Individually

- In the same way God’s love for us compels our love for him, so too does his jealousy for his name compel our zeal for him
- As those redeemed by Christ and made to see the supremacy of God in all things, we should be passionately devoted to him, his cause, and his honor
- The primary goal of our lives should be to show the world that our God is the one true and living God...that He alone makes life meaningful and worthwhile
- This is all the more true as we witness the moral decay of the culture around us
- Throughout Scripture we see many examples of people who were zealous for God:
  - Phinehas

**Numbers 25:6-13** ~ Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, 8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. 9 Those who died by the plague were 24,000. 10 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 11 “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. 12 “Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; 13 and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.’ ”

- Elijah

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-jealousy-of-god/>

<sup>16</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 205.

**1 Kings 19:10** ~ He said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”

○ Paul

**Acts 20:24** ~ But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

○ Jesus

**John 2:17** ~ His disciples remembered that it was written, “ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.”

○ All believers

**Titus 2:14** ~ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

- “Zeal in religion is a burning desire to please God, to do His will, and to advance His glory in the world in every possible way. It is a desire which no man feels by nature — which the Spirit puts in the heart of every believer when he is converted — but which some believers feel so much more strongly than others, that they alone deserve to be called "zealous" Christians. A zealous man in religion is pre-eminently a man of one thing. It is not enough to say that he is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thorough-going, whole-hearted, fervent in spirit. He sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed-up in one thing — and that one thing is to please God. Whether he lives — or whether he dies; whether he has health — or whether he has sickness; whether he is rich — or whether he is poor; whether he pleases man — or whether he gives offence; whether he is thought wise — or whether he is thought foolish; whether he gets blame — or whether he gets praise; whether he gets honor, or whether he gets shame — for all this the zealous man cares nothing at all. He burns for one thing — and that one thing is to please God, and to advance God's glory. If he is consumed in the very burning — he is content. He feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn, and if consumed in burning — he has but done the work for which God appointed him. Such a one will always find a sphere for his zeal. If he cannot preach, and work, and give money — he will cry, and sigh, and pray... If he cannot fight in the valley with Joshua — then he will do the prayer-work of Moses, Aaron, and Hur, on the hill. (Exod. 17:9-13.) If he is cut off from working himself — he will give the Lord no rest until help is raised up from another quarter, and the work is done. This is what I mean when I speak of ‘zeal’ in religion.”<sup>17</sup>

## **We Should be Zealous for God Corporately**

- God never blesses churches that are lukewarm and lack zeal for the glory of Christ
- Jesus rebuked the complacent church of Laodicea for this very thing and exhorted them to be zealous for the Lord

**Revelation 3:15-16, 19** ~ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth...19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

- Christ’s heart for his church is that we would not be apathetic but passionate people...living fervently for his glory alone

<sup>17</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Practical Religion*, 130.