

Episode 241

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Joining me today is Gwen, she's our associate editor and also the manager of volunteer services, and Nelson, our director of video content. We're going to be continuing our series and discussing the attributes of God. Today we're going to cover two more. The first is, what does it mean that God is jealous? The second, what does it mean that God is just? So evidently with the J theme for this one.

Shea Houdmann

Now the question about God's jealousy, it's an interesting one in that most people, when they think of the word jealousy, there's a negative connotation to it. And I won't name the celebrity, but there's a very well-known celebrity who actually renounced her faith in God because of the verse that said that God is a jealous God, that she couldn't understand. How could God be jealous when jealous is a negative emotion? So there are several verses in the Bible that talk about God's jealousy. The one most common, Exodus 20 verse 5, you shall not bow down to them, referring to idols, or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. You compare that with a verse like Galatians 5 20, which lists jealousy as something that's sinful.

Shea Houdmann

So what does it mean that God is jealous? In the sense that jealousy is often understood as desiring something that's not yours. You see something that someone else has, and you want it, therefore you're jealous of that person or that thing the person possesses. Well, that's not what God's jealousy is. God's jealousy is he is jealous for the things that are rightfully his, things that belong to him and to no one else. So in the context of Exodus 20 and elsewhere, it's referring to God is jealous when other things or other beings are worshipped. Why? Because God is the only one who's worthy of worship. Worship belongs to him and him alone. So when that's given to someone else, God is jealous of that. Not in a like a crybaby sense, or as a whining sense, or I want what you have even though I don't deserve it.

Shea Houdmann

No, God is the only one who's worthy of worship. So when other things or beings are worshipped, God is rightfully jealous. And perhaps the best illustration I can think of, humanly speaking of this, is that the marriage relationship, where a husband and wife, they belong to one another. There should be no romantic or sexual activity between that person and anyone other than their spouse. So when a husband or a wife sees their

spouse engaging in that, they are rightfully jealous. And the husband and wife should not be giving that to anyone other than me, therefore I am rightfully jealous.

Shea Houdmann

So that's maybe the best human illustration of what it means that God is jealous, in the sense that being jealous, biblically speaking, the positive sense is desiring what belongs to you and to you alone, not seeing that something someone else has and wanting that for yourself in a selfish sense. So Gwen, does that make sense to you? And what, as you've studied the jealousy of God, what are some of the things that you've learned or particularly stood out to you?

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think the marriage one is an interesting illustration because often in the Old Testament, actually I think exclusively in the Old Testament, when it's talking about God's jealousy, it is linked to idol worship, which is also linked to adultery, is what God compares idol worship to. But I think for us sometimes, when we think of like the jealous husband, we have this sense of someone who's very suspicious and probably deeply insecure and possessive almost in an abusive sense. And so that's not the kind of jealousy God has. And yet it is like a loving husband who would want, like someone brought up to me the example of Hosea and Gomer. So she goes away, but he goes and gets her back. So there's that sense of God calling his people back to him.

Gwen Sellers

And I really like the way that J.I. Packer explains it in his book, *Knowing God*. He wrote, 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. And that Hebrew word really does have this link with zeal. I kind of like a deep sense of these are my people and I long for them and I long for them to know me and to not run after idols. And Packer also points that out of God's causes him to punish his people when they sin, but also to restore them. So it's kind of both sides of that same coin.

Gwen Sellers

And then you can see those themes go into the New Testament as well with that link to marriage. Like Paul writes about, I've yearned for you with a godly jealousy. I betrothed you to one husband. And I think there's a place in James that talks about jealousy as well, linked with idols. So yeah, Nelson, for you, like how do you process jealousy?

Nelson Domingues

Well, same way. I think the marriage example is what the scripture uses and I think it's adequate and, you know, of what jealousy really means. I mean, who would want a spouse that didn't care that if they were flirting with someone else or if they were engaging in things that were inappropriate with someone else, the friendship, you know, whatever it might be that, you know, belongs to the spouse, to the married couple. And we don't, we don't appreciate that. We wouldn't want that in our lives. And I think we could appreciate the fact that God doesn't want that in his relationship with us.

Nelson Domingues

When I think about jealousy on his part, it's not this negative connotation. It doesn't mean that he's demanding in the sense where he's insecure. I think jealousy can come across to some people like, oh, that's an insecure trait. And it's not. I think it's a very loving trait to appreciate something so much that you want it to keep its purity and its goodness. We see that in that passage you talk about with Paul, talks about in 2 Corinthians where he kind of betrothed the church to Christ. And, you know, in ancient times, the betrothal time was a time where the father had to, the engagement was a very long time. It could be up to a year or much longer than that. And it was the father's duty then after the betrothal for him to continue to protect his daughter, in a sense, to keep her safe, to keep her secure, to keep her prepared to meet her husband whenever that time would come. And so Paul likens his relationship with the church to Christ in that way. You know, it's his duty to prepare them, to keep them safe, to keep them pure, to keep them worshipping the one and only true God. And so we see that jealousy work out there well.

Nelson Domingues

I mean, we can see it, you know, I don't know if there's any examples. Like if I was a jeweler and if I had a piece of gold that was all dull, I could say I'm jealous for this gold's appearance to shine. And I would take my time to polish it, to really show what this can be because I know in my mind that this piece of gold that perhaps was unpolished or blemished or found in the dirt, that's not how it should be. That's not the way that true beauty shines. In fact, once I take it and once I use my skill and remove the impurities and polish it up, and you have this beautiful shining piece of metal showing its true beauty. And I think when God is jealous for us, he is simply wanting our beauty, our goodness, purely shown. And I think he is demanding in the sense where he rightfully so wants an exclusive relationship with his people. And I don't think that's a lot to ask. I don't think it's a lot to ask for a husband, from his wife or a wife to her husband, that their relationship is exclusive.

Nelson Domingues

You know, in scripture it says in Deuteronomy 5, 6:5, you shall love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. The idea is not just some of it or just on certain days or in certain situations. It's all the time. And God desires that type of relationship with us. And he is the only one worthy to receive that type of affection from us.

Nelson Domingues

And so when I think about his jealousy, I know some people have a difficult time because they do see jealousy in the sinful definition, right, where I'm jealous for something that's not mine. Because what does that say when I'm jealous for something that's not mine? That means I'm displeased in what God has given me. That's basically what jealousy is. I am displeased with my current situation, and I want what someone else has, what God has given them or whatever means that they've achieved it. And I'm unhappy with what God has given and put in my life. That's jealousy.

Nelson Domingues

In fact, it flies in the face of God saying you're not good enough. And again, you break the exclusive relationship with God. He wants us to glorify in him wholly. And that means to accept everything that we have from him in a loving way and accept the situations, accept things we have in our life and be thankful for them, not yearning for a different relationship or a different thing. Again, kind of plays together, right? So we should love the Lord God with all our heart, our soul, our mind and strength and might. And we should be thankful that he wants to maintain that exclusive relationship with us.

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think you bring out some great points there. One, like the Got Questions article does point out, this is an anthropomorphism. So of course, it's difficult for us because we're describing God in human terms. We do naturally go to the bad kind of jealousy. But yeah, but this is good jealousy when I love your example of like wanting the jewelry to be as pure and as shiny as possible. And it's we were created in God's image and for relationship with God. So yeah, we definitely want him to be jealous for that and for us to function according to our design and to keep us from going ways that would be against that. So it really is. It's a good thing.

Gwen Sellers

And I think Packer also pointed out that God even says in Deuteronomy, like his name is jealous. So this is very core to who he is. And I think that's linked with his holiness and his love. Sometimes we think, OK, these attributes of God, are they in conflict with each other? But they aren't. So I think when we recognize, OK, the whole picture of God and know that this jealousy is something different than we often see and experience with humanity and that

it is something good and it's something that holy, like God is worthy of our complete worship. So he has every right to demand it. But then he is so gracious and loving that that's actually also for our best. So Jen Wilkin defines God's jealousy as that he refuses to share his glory with anyone else. And aren't we ultimately thankful for that? I mean, that's not a prideful thing. It's we want God to be God. So we're grateful that he won't kind of share that godness with other things.

Shea Houdmann

I think you both raise excellent points. Nelson, I love your illustration, like Gwyn said, of God wanting the gold jewelry to shine in such a way. And a question I saw recently was understanding that God's jealousy is only he deserves it. But the question was along the lines of why does God care so much that he's the only one who's worshiped? I mean, why is it such a big deal for him? And since this person thought it was like a selfish thing, clearly that's not it. But the more I thought and prayed about and studied this, there's a reason that God doesn't want anyone else, anyone worshiping anyone or anything else but him.

Shea Houdmann

It's not a biblical quote, but I think it's a very true quote that you become like the you worship. So when false idols, false gods are worshipped, you begin to become like them. Maybe the example of the golden calf in Exodus. So God had taken the Israelites out of Egypt, leading them to the promised land. And first opportunity, Moses up on the mountain a little too long. So they throw all the jewelry and out pops his calf and they all start worshiping the calf. Well, what did the Israelites start doing? Well, basically it turned into a giant orgy because they started acting like animals. Why? Because they were worshiping an animal. So it's not just that God, it's not that God is selfish. I want all the worship for me. It's like, no, if you worship anyone else but me, it has negative impacts on who you are. You're creating the image and likeness of God and only worshiping God can that likeness be built up in the right way. So anytime you're worshiping or prioritizing the wrong thing, that impacts you in a negative way.

Shea Houdmann

So yes, God is jealous in the sense that he desires all the worship for himself because he's the only one who deserves it. But it's not entirely just about him. It's about he knows what happens when we worship false gods. I think that's a helpful added reminder about this aspect of the jealousy of God. Because again, as Gwen said throughout scripture, the only time that talks about God's jealousy, us worshiping idols. So I think there's two aspects to this question of what does it mean that God's jealous and why is God so jealous for?

Shea Houdmann

But again, all three of us have mentioned struggling with the word jealous. So I wonder, is there a better word we could use? I mean, I can think of zealous for what is rightfully his, but obviously that's not one word. Because again, it's really hard with English language, jealous has such a negative connotation to use that in a term that describes God. But I have searched and looked and I can't find any one word that I think better encapsulates what scripture is talking about when it refers to God is jealous. Either of you think of a better word or are we just stuck with jealous for now?

Gwen Sellers

I mean, I think zealous does do it. And especially like that's part of the Greek root and part of the definition of the Hebrew word is zealous. So when we think of, okay, God's a zealous God, that does come with passion and that sense of intensity that we get with jealousy and anger. And actually I even looked this up in English. I think the two words used to be pretty interchangeable, but obviously now they aren't. So yeah, I think zealous conveys what it needs to be.

Nelson Domingues

I can't think of anything better. I mean, zealous works well. I know some people really have a problem with the word jealous. That's something I never struggled with. I'm thankful that God cares about me so much that he wants to have me all to himself. And he doesn't want my affections to go other places or towards any other worship. He doesn't want me seeking true happiness, true joy, true contentment from anyone or anything else. And he does that because only he can provide the best for me. And I know that, and he knows that. And so were he not jealous for me, he would be content with me having second rate at best of anything. And the fact that he doesn't want me to have the second best or much worse, he's jealous for my affections and for my time and my love and might. And so I don't have a problem with the word jealous. And I love scripture, clearly calls him out, and he declares himself as jealous in scripture. And he knew full well, God knows full well that some people would really struggle with that term. At the end of the day, he is jealous for our affections, for our worship, because he wants that exclusive relationship between us and him.

Gwen Sellers

And I think that's, what's really helpful for me is that link to idolatry and then, and also to purity. And so thinking, yeah, this is a jealous for me, not God is not jealous of me, but he's jealous for me. And that kind of changes the perspective of how we view like jealousy culturally versus who God is. And yeah, I agree with you. Like, I think it is a good thing.

Shea Houdmann

For sure. Like similar to the last episode, where a lot of people, the attribute of sovereignty is a problem because they have negative associations with that word and God is jealous for us. And that is a good thing. So despite any hangups we have about the word itself, we need to remember to understand the attributes biblically, not by a modern English definition or a practical usage of the term.

Shea Houdmann

So let's go ahead and jump to the second J of today. God is just, God is justice. So Nelson, in your study, what are some of the key points of why it's important to know that God is a just God?

Nelson Domingues

When I think about that fact that scripture declares God to be a just God, it says that he is aware of the wrong and of the right. And I think scripture promises through his justice that God will punish the wrong ultimately, and he will reward the righteous ultimately. And we desire that in our lives. We wouldn't want to have crime and harm and evil to go on unpunished or unrecognized. And we also wouldn't want good deeds. We wouldn't want faithfulness and love and kindness for those things to go overlooked. And so God's justice declares to us that he sees everything. He sees both the good and the bad, and he promises to handle them both impartially, and that he will lovingly but firmly dole out whichever is the consequence of your actions.

Nelson Domingues

And so Colossians 3, verse 25 says, For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done. And there is no partiality. Romans 12, 19 says, Vengeance is mine. I will pay, declares the Lord. And so for someone suffering because of an evil done to them, the fact that God is just is a promise and a reminder to them that ultimately, whatever evil happened or is happening, it's being noticed and hasn't gone unnoticed. And God will, in the end, or maybe even before, dole out proper impartial justice, which that means you'll get the exact reward or punishment that it deserves. And no better can do that than an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-sovereign God. And so God's justice to me is, again, another comforting attribute of God, knowing that he is in control and that he punishes the wicked, rewards the righteous. I don't know. Gwen, what do you think about it?

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think what's comforting to me in justice is recognizing, like people often talk about God's justice and mercy met at the cross, because I think it is sobering and fearful to think, oh, God is just and like, I deserve punishment. But then thinking, oh, but Jesus paid it. So, and aren't I so glad

that he did for me, but also that there had to be payment. I mean, that God doesn't just sweep it aside, like, oh, this stuff doesn't really matter. It's like, no, it really does matter, but God is also merciful. And so to me, that just recognizing God's justice makes me more deeply amazed at his grace for me.

Gwen Sellers

I think also just in terms of thinking, okay, so how does that apply to us? Like we should be people who seek justice, you know, Micah 6, 8, the Lord has told you what is good, but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God. So we should be people who seek justice. And that is, like you said, Nelson, it's both rewarding the good and the penalty for the bad. Like it's both sides. It's not all just about punishment, but it is that people be treated rightly and fairly. And that should be something that we seek.

Gwen Sellers

One thing that was interesting to me, an article on Compelling Truth actually points out that that law eye for eye, tooth for tooth is really a law of limitation in some ways of you can't, like, there's not supposed to be over-retribution. And so, like you pointed out, God doesn't over-punish somebody. There is, it's supposed to be like fair and, Shea, what does God's justice do for you?

Shea Houdmann

You know, it's one of those attributes where my first reaction is that, yes, God is just. Therefore, I know there's a saying that this person is getting away with murder, which doesn't only apply to murder, but that's saying that seems like in this life, in this world, a lot of people get away with some pretty heinous crimes. So God's justice reminds me that no, God is just and he will make sure justice rules in that situation, that eventually that person will be held account for what he or she did.

Shea Houdmann

But then I forget about it, it also applies to me, in that both in salvation and daily Christian life in salvation sense that my just penalty was poured out on Christ. That justice, if on me, would result in the eternal separation from God and hell. But God, Jesus, died on the cross for our sins, taking that penalty, delivering me from justice by absorbing God's justice in himself. But in the day-to-day Christian life, I often do things, say things, think things that if God were to pour out justice on me, the punishment could be pretty severe. And so that reminds me again to be grateful for God's mercy, God's grace, in that sense that even in my daily life, God disciplines those who love. And Hebrews talks a lot about that, and we're to be grateful for that, that shows God's loving discipline of us as his children is another act of his justice and his kindness at the same time, as Hebrews talks about.

Shea Houdmann

So there's that sense that it comforts me, in the sense that I know no sin goes unpunished. At the same time, I'm grateful that God punished Christ for my sins rather than me. There's no way I could pay that punishment myself. So it's the both and sense that God's justice is not just about God making sure everyone else is punished. It's also what Christ did for us to save us from being punished, because that punishment would be literally an eternal separation from God, because we could not pay the just penalty in and of ourselves.

Nelson Domingues

Now, some people, they get the human aspect of justice. They get that God is a judge, that he will rightly rule over people as he sees fit for their lives. I think that's not so hard to grasp, but I think a lot of times, I'm sure as you both can attest, there's a lot of questioners who say, if God is just, why did he allow this to happen or that to happen? Or they might think of, if God is just, why was there a hurricane that killed a bunch of people? And so how do you go about answering a question like that now when it has less to do with human responsibility and more just to do with ultimate justice in the world?

Gwen Sellers

I think for me, that's kind of a different issue. So I tend to think of natural disasters as just a result of the general entrance of sin into the world. We live in a broken, fallen world. And so I guess in terms of justice, some of that justice is delayed. But it is coming when God destroys the current earth and creates new heaven and new earth and casts death and Hades into the lake of fire and finds up Satan. So I feel like this is one of those judgment is coming, but kind of that Second Peter 3:8 thing, but God is patient and not wanting any to perish, but longing for all to come to repentance.

Gwen Sellers

And so in the meantime, we do experience the results of sin, whether that be just in general, living in a broken world or because other people do bad things to us. And we suffer because of their sin. And we don't necessarily always see justice. It's not always restored in our lifetime. And actually, Nelson, what you brought up of Romans 12, you know, vengeance is mine, says the Lord, so leave it to him. And Peter brings up that Jesus didn't revile in return. So it's when you suffer as a Christian, you're bringing glory to God and you don't have to demand justice and make the other person pay for it. So it's interesting to me that God is the God of justice. And yet there are times when we don't necessarily seek it and trust that it will ultimately all work out. Shea how do you see it?

Shea Houdmann

Nelson, that question is so cool in the sense that the problem of evil, why does God allow evil? I know natural disaster isn't necessarily evil, but why does God allow suffering? Last time we discussed that as related to God's sovereignty, how several of God's attributes, or honestly, all of God's attributes play into a question like that, because why does God allow something like, well, he's sovereign and he's in control and he has a plan and will use it. God is merciful. Could have been much worse than it actually is. God is just. That doesn't mean not every natural disaster is a judgment from God. Sometimes, like Gwen said, it just happens because we're living in a sinful, broken world.

Shea Houdmann

So understanding the attributes of God helps us to deal with the reality of pain and suffering in this world where sometimes this side of eternity, I don't know that there is an explanation. Obviously, in the Old Testament, God used natural disasters as forms of judgment. That doesn't mean every natural disaster is judgment from God. So it's that whole balance, so to speak, of yes, this could be a message from God. And for some people, perhaps it is. Other people, it was just a natural disaster. So not presuming to know why God allows something is very important, but also trusting God's sovereignty, the fact that he's in control no matter what, all plays into a difficult philosophical and theological and biblical question, like why would God allow a natural disaster? But it's cool to see how you can't just narrow it down to one attribute. They all come into account when you're discussing an issue like this.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah. God's justice will present itself, I think, in all these cases, of course, just like we're talking. And in Genesis 3, it talked about that he will stamp out sin eventually, but the curse was that the dirt was cursed and that the earth was cursed. And we learn in Scripture that it yearns to be made new again. And so we know that even the world is suffering through an injustice, the injustice of having the consequence of sin. And that makes the tectonic plates the way they are, and there's earthquakes in different places. That's not the way it was. The world isn't the way it's supposed to be. Even the very ground we stand on isn't as it should be. God will, in his justice, make all things new. That's what the promise of heaven is. And so we wait patiently to do our part, right? And for most people to hear the gospel and to learn who Jesus is and to have an opportunity to experience a relationship with Jesus as God sees fit. And until then, we wait patiently, just as the earth is yearning as well, waiting patiently for God's ultimate justice to come, whether it be a new heaven, a new earth, and where we ourselves aren't attacked by viruses and flus and all sorts of different things. Again, all just aspects of the curse and of

sin. That's very unfair to us. But God's justice demands, not demands, but in a sense demands, but God's justice promises to us. In the end, we won't deal with any of those things. Even that will be made new. And they're reminders all around us, things like hurricanes and viruses and sickness and all that, that the world isn't as it should be, but God is coming in his justice to bring about the world that he created initially without sin. And we will enjoy that all eternity with him in heaven. And I think that's, again, an amazing promise. He is just to restore those things.

Shea Houmann

Praise God.

Gwen Sellers

Well, Shea, I think it's interesting, the connection you made of those attributes, because I'm seeing jealous and just really go together. I mean, it's sin leads to death. And so when God is jealous for you, he's wanting, wanting the best, wanting you to work according to design, wanting to be in relationship with you. And that's what God's justice does too. And Shea, you brought up discipline. And isn't it so good that God does that for believers? So that's, let me correct you so that you don't go into sin and don't fall into that death. So it's a correction for good things.

Gwen Sellers

And I think about that with justice, a lot of ways too, like how we think of it as society of, to me, that idea of restoration and restitution. And you see that in a lot of the Old Testament laws, justice wasn't just, oh, this person sinned. And so now I'm going to inflict physical harm upon them or make them go away for a while or whatever it is. Sometimes it's, oh, this person stole something. Now they have to restore that and more. So there is supposed to be kind of something for the victim of injustice is supposed to be restored. So I wonder for you guys, how do you seek to reflect God's justice in society today or just in your personal life?

Nelson Domingues

I think things simply like participating in our justice system, right? You know, if you're asked for jury duty, I mean, you are there to help hear the case and seek God's wisdom on it. And through the laws of the land, you are there to, with other people, you know, pronounce guilty or not guilty. And often times even the sentence itself, that's a way for us to, in a sense experience justice even now, for lawyers, judges, jury little things like that. But even with our own kids, right? One kid does something wrong to the other child and as a parent you might have to have a lesson in what justice looks like. Now you don't get that candy because you took her's away or whatever it might be.

Nelson Domingues

Ultimately justice is a good thing. We want that because without it again we would be in absolute turmoil and chaos if there was no fear of justice reigning down on us either from God Himself or from a police officer knocking on the door. We want justice and order in our lives. So ya, I think it's a good thing and I think we see it every day.

Gwen Sellers

Ya. A deterrent effect I think is also one of the key aspects of justice.

Shea Houdmann

Nelson, did that candy illustration come from something that recently happened due to a candy focused holiday?

Nelson Domingues

Ya. Right. I think there's candy everywhere during all the holidays, but ya. Certainly things get a little crazy when sugar gets involved, with little kids.

Shea Houdmann

Even with adults. Gwen to answer your question, I mean the justice of God is something. We're created in God's image so we also desire justice. You see it even in the most hardened Atheist when something wrong happens everyone craves, someone's got to do something and to make that right. So I like Nelson's example, we should desire justice. We should advocate for just laws and just punishments like we were saying earlier not overreacting and punishing beyond what the crimes deserve. We should this innate, God infused, desire for justice should cause us to fight for justice when we see injustice in the world we should oppose that. We should focus on, obviously we would love to focus everyone on God is the ultimate law giver, as God being the standard for right and wrong. God being the one who is ultimately perfectly just but even just on a human level crying out for justice points us to God. So we should be participaters in making this world a more just place. So that's how I see it. That's why I try to participate in it. I obviously fall short. We all have our, we tend to be selfish with where we want justice applied and not applied but hopefully as we continue our journey and walk with Christ we become more and more conformed to his image our sense of justice will be more conformed too His. I think that's something we all aim for.

Shea Houdmann

And Gwen I love how you tied jealousy and justice together. And that's like as we've studied all these attributes we keep seeing again and again how they interact with one another. And they impact one another. God's jealousy is a loving jealousy. God's justice is a sovereign justice. And you see that again and again. God's attributes are not pitted against each other. They all, who we are, in perfect harmony.

Shea Houdmann

Gwen, Nelson, thank you for a great conversation on what does it mean that God is jealous. And what does it mean that God is just. To our listeners, I hope our conversation today has helped you understand these two attributes of God better. Our goal here at Got Questions is always to point people to God's word to the answers. And especially to know what God is like. Got questions? The Bible has answers, we'll help you find them.