

# Is God...Jealous? **TOUGH QUESTIONS**

Pt. 4

So far in this series we've looked at a couple of accusations that people make against God and His people. But God Himself makes some claims that can be tough to understand. The Ten Commandments are widely hailed as one of the greatest legal codes of all time. They are emblazoned on monuments around the country and people work themselves into a fury to protect these monuments. Most Christians believe that most of the Ten Commandments are still vital for today.<sup>1</sup> Yet have you ever gotten to the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment and, and nervously felt like just skipping a few inconvenient words?

It would be a lot easier for us if the commandment said, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;<sup>5</sup> you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God,... [show] mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." But there's more to it, isn't there?

**Exodus 20:4-6**—These days we don't often make carved images to worship but it is just as wrong to try to make God into an image that fits our ideas and desires. Yet within this commandment we are challenged by what appears to be a difficult and conflicting description of God's character; and often we are tempted to ignore the part we don't like and allow God to remain in our desired image, which violates the commandment. Within the second commandment is seemingly a temptation to break it.

**Galatians 5:19-21**—Why would God describe Himself as a jealous God, when "jealousies" is listed as a sin that will keep someone out of Heaven? The jealousy that is condemned in the Bible has to do with coveting someone else's property, abilities, position, etc. God is not jealous in that sense, you will never have a car so nice that God will be jealous of it and want it. This is a different kind of jealousy.

**Isaiah 54:5**—God regularly compares His relationship with His people in terms of a marriage relationship.<sup>2</sup> God's jealousy is directly related to idolatry (Ex 20:4-5a) which brings a stranger into the relationship between God and people. Far from petty envy or distrust, such jealousy shows a deep love and devotion to His relationship with us. If a man sees another man flirting with his wife and is not jealous, then there's probably something seriously wrong with the relationship!<sup>3</sup> God's jealousy is for our protection, because any other god we accept into our lives will end up abusing us.

**Exodus 20:5**—This jealousy leads to the part of the passage that makes so many people uncomfortable. People ask, "Does God really punish children for their parent's sins? How can that be fair?" Notice that the children referred to here are not innocent victims of their parent's sin. God is not visiting iniquity on all of the third and fourth generations but only on those who hate Him. In other words, on those who follow in their parent's path. You've probably observed parents expose their child to a sin which hurts them; then the child grows up and exposes their child to it, etc. These are often called generational sins. But generational sins are not inevitable. Many people are intentional about breaking the cycle and turn out to be wonderful parents. That is best done through reliance on God's power to transform. That's why idolatry is an especially insidious generational sin. If you want to turn from sin you must turn to God, but if your children are taught that God is an inanimate object, where does their strength to overcome come from?

**Ezekiel 18:19-20**—Ezekiel 18 addresses the belief people are innocent victims being punished for their parent's sins. God clearly stated that, while the parents sins could set a course for their children's wickedness, they have a choice in the matter, and God will not hold people liable for the sins of their parents or children.

**Romans 1:24-25**—Yes, God does sometimes inflict punishment for sin, but most of the time that takes the form of allowing people to realize the consequences of what they have chosen. This passage is specifically about idolatry (see vs. 22-23).

**Exodus 20:5-6**—Notice the contrast, while the suffering for idolatry can last to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> generation for those who hate God, His mercy is given to thousands who love God and turn from their parent's wickedness. God's emphasis is on redemption. Yes, there is a strong warning, but such a warning is sometimes necessary when grave danger is involved.<sup>4</sup> He gives a strong warning that He will jealously protect His relationship with you from idols. He warns that there will be consequences to idolatry. But then He promises mercy to anyone who turns from idolatry. The ratio is 3-4:1000s. That's the kind of God that you can love and trust! The kind of God you could commit to.

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<sup>1</sup> Although they sometimes choose to ignore certain ones, such as the 4<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Some examples are in Jer 3:20; 31:32; Eze 16:32-34; Eph 5:25-33; John 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; and Rev 19:7-9.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately a distrustful or suspicious, or controlling spouse is often thought of as jealous, but God's jealousy is not based on these sinful characteristics but rather a determination not to share in His relationship with you with some powerless or damaging, object of human affection.

<sup>4</sup> You wouldn't casually tell your toddler, "Well, I'd rather you do not play in the busy street." Or, "Perhaps you shouldn't play with matches very often." No, you'd warn her/him strongly and if s/he showed a likelihood to disobey you would take strong protective action. Because you love her/him.