

God Loves Us, but He Is Jealous for His Glory, Not Ours

In the American church today, we hear so much about God's love for us that we sometimes think that the gospel centers on "me" and "my needs" and "my goals" and "my dreams" and "my destiny." Rather, the gospel centers on the Lord—on His desires and goals and plans. And while He cares deeply for us, sending His Son to die for our sins, He is working to see His name glorified, not ours. Put another way, it's not about us; it's about Him. We are replaceable; He is not. And what matters most is not our reputation but His.

That's why the first words of the Lord's prayer are "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9, NIV), meaning, "May Your name be revered as holy by the people of this world." Nothing is more important than that.

That's why, when the children of Israel were languishing in exile with their temple destroyed, God took action. But it was not first and foremost an act of mercy on their behalf. They were still in rebellion and sin. Rather, they were making Him look bad, as if to say, "The God of the Israelites has been defeated by our gods. He is not powerful enough to save His own people."

As written in Ezekiel:

I had concern for my holy name, which the people of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone. Therefore say to the Israelites, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned

among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord when I am proved holy through you before their eyes” (Ezek. 36:21–23).

God will act for His own reputation. And it is for our good when He does.

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As He said through the prophet Isaiah, “For my own name’s sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to destroy you completely. ... For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another” (Isa. 48:9, 11).

Words like this sound so foreign in our me-centered culture and our me-centered churches. But this is divine reality, and it is high time we have a reality check here in our land.

We read in Leviticus 10:1-2 that, immediately after divine fire consumed the sacrifices of Aaron as he was being installed as high priest (Lev. 9:22-24), that same divine fire consumed the sons of Aaron when they offered up unauthorized incense. Talk about ecstasy and agony! One minute you’re shouting God’s praises in awe, the next moment you’re standing in stunned silence as your two eldest sons are burned up.

Moses then said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: ‘Among those who approach me I will be proved holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored’” (Lev. 10:3b). What sobering truth.

As I wrote in “Whatever Happened to the Power of God” in 1991, “Either by sanctioning our specific obedience or by condemning our presumptuous disobedience, God will show Himself holy

before the world. He will; He shall; He must. What an awesome responsibility it is to be in the service of the Lord. He will get Himself honor *through us!*”

Yes, “When Aaron and his sons obeyed the Lord’s commands—down to the minute details and ordinances—His glory appeared among them. All Israel knew that He was holy, that He would back up His Word. When Nadab and Abihu disobeyed Him—in a seemingly minor infraction—His glory appeared again. Once more, all Israel knew that He was holy, that He would back up His Word. How much better it is for us when God shows Himself holy by what He does through us, instead of by what He does to us.

High voltage wires can electrify or electrocute. It all depends on how they’re handled. You can’t play games with 10,000 volts. And you can’t play games with the power of God. Serving Him is serious business. Our carefree attitudes must go. We must carry out His work in His way, or His fire will consume us instead of our offerings.

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And for those of us who think that we can manipulate God into working on our behalf—allegedly, for the sake of His reputation—He will have none of it. He will allow us to fail and fall, even if it makes Him look bad for the moment. Then, at the right time and in the right way, He will act for His name’s sake.

This is what happened in 1 Samuel 4-6. The Israelites, who were not in right relationship with the Lord, took His holy ark into battle against the Philistines, as if it was some kind of magic charm that would grant them victory. Instead, the Philistines crushed them and captured the ark, putting it in the temple of their idol Dagon. It looked as if Israel’s God had been defeated.

Soon thereafter He displayed His power against Dagon and in the eyes of the Philistines, getting Himself glory. But He would not be manipulated by His people.

Right now, in America, the name of Jesus is being tarnished by one devastating church scandal after another. Yet rather than covering over our sins to protect His reputation, He is allowing our unrepentant sins to be exposed and judged. And while it may seem for the moment that His name is taking a hit, He is actually at work in all this to bring glory to Himself—by cleaning house.

Of this I am 100% sure: He will act for His name's sake. He will get Himself glory. He will set the record straight.

He is God, and the entire universe, along with every created thing in it, revolves around Him, not us. Let us never forget that.

So, be glorified Lord, in us—whatever that means, whatever the cost. Your glory is what matters most.

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