

When God Comes First

Exodus 34:14 “Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”
“Jealous” here speaks of covenant zeal, not insecurity. God’s “name” reveals His character: He is passionately committed to exclusive relationship with His people.

As we go into this new year it is important that we have a revelation of God’s jealous nature. It is important to understand that there is a righteous jealousy that is appropriate for God to have. His love and concern for us must come with a jealousy over us. He wants to be first in our lives, and He wants us to have nothing else competing with Him. He is perfect and knows that any other focus we have will take us away from what’s best for us. Often when I counsel couples, there is a common complaint: “He procrastinates when I ask him to do things for me, but the moment his mother or siblings or friends ask, he drops everything and does it. I don’t feel like I come first in his life.” This is an appropriate desire for a spouse to have. There is a type of jealousy that is appropriate. Let’s unpack what this word jealous, in reference to God, means:

קָנָה (qannā’) comes from the root **קָנָה (q-n-’)**, which means: to be **zealous**, to burn with **ardent devotion**, to be passionately committed to what is rightfully one’s own. **The imagery is emotional heat, not insecurity. It is closer to holy zeal than to petty envy.**

For us to function in the fulness that God has called us to, we need to put Him first in our lives. That’s the only way Christianity can really work.

1 Pet 3:15 AMP “But in your hearts set Christ apart [as holy], acknowledging Him [giving Him first place in your lives] as Lord.”

(NLT) “Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life.”

(NIV) “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.”

(ESV) “But in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy,”

(NKJV) “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts,”

ἀγιάζω (hagiazō)—“to sanctify / set apart as holy”. This is a command, not a suggestion. It is a decisive, intentional act. It means:

- **to set apart, to treat as holy, to acknowledge as uniquely sacred, to consecrate for exclusive devotion, to assign supreme worth, authority, and uniqueness**

καρδίας (kardiaiς)—“in your hearts”

In biblical thought, the heart is: the control centre of life, the seat of will, allegiance, worldview, and identity, and where decisions, fears, loyalties, and convictions are formed.

So Peter is saying: **Christ must be enthroned at the level of worldview and ultimate loyalty.** This precedes speech, defence, explanation and apologetics. In the rest of the verse, he goes on to talk about our readiness to explain our hope and beliefs to others.

Sadly, in our consumerist Christian society Christ is often not first. He has been displaced in our hearts by a unique form of idolatry. This idol tends to be personal breakthroughs and comfort. Believers have become so desperate for this that it becomes their primary idol. The secondary idols are those they perceive to be the solution. This is why men of God are idolized and when they fail to be a solution

people move on to their next source. All of this is idolatry. For many people, God is a means to an end. They don't really worship God, they just want to be on His right side to make sure He gives them what they want. It's the same mindset behind appeasing ancestors.

κύριος (kyrios) — “Lord”. κύριος can mean: owner, master, supreme authority or sovereign ruler.

But context determines weight. Theological weight here. In the Septuagint (Greek OT):

- **κύριος** is the standard translation for **YHWH** (the divine name)

So when Peter says: “sanctify Christ as Lord” he is not merely calling Jesus a respected teacher, a spiritual guide, or a moral authority. **He is affirming Jesus as the supreme, covenantal Lord — the rightful object of reverence once reserved for YHWH.** This again reinforces Jesus’ divine status.

To “hagiazō Christ as kyrios” is to consciously enthroned Jesus as the supreme, holy authority in one’s inner life, replacing fear of people with reverent allegiance to Him — a posture that makes faithful witness possible.

Acknowledging His Lordship is central to salvation.

Rom 10:9 “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

What would your life look like if the Lordship of Christ was central in everything you say and do?

John 1:11-12 “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—”

God’s dealings with His children are not the same as how He deals with the world. If I see a neighbour’s child misbehaving, do I go and discipline them? No, they are not my child. Although God describes His creation as His own, He differentiates between us His children and His creation.

What are the implications of this in the life of a believer?

1. God hedges our way to stop destructive pursuits

Hosea 2:6–7 (NIV) “Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.’”

 **God actively interferes with unfaithful paths so the heart can return.**

2. God disciplines because He loves, not because He is harsh

Hebrews 12:5–6 (NIV) “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

 **God’s discipline is relational, not punitive.** How do you typically respond to God’s rebukes? A person with an orphan spirit often struggles with rebuke.

Unfortunately, many of us don’t learn so we keep going round the same mountain over and over again.

3. There is always a reward for delighting in God first

Ps 37:4 “Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

Could it be that God is waiting for you to put Him first before He can give you the desires of your heart, lest they destroy you? Can God really trust you with more money, a bigger business etc?

“Delight” (Hebrew ‘ānag) means to *take exquisite pleasure in, to find deep enjoyment.*

The verse does not promise the fulfilment of every wish, but the reshaping of desires as God becomes our joy. **When you put God first, some of your desires may change.** Think of some of the things that used to be important to you that are no longer of any interest. Perhaps it was a team you used to passionately support or an organisation you placed on a pedestal as your dream place of employment. Maybe it was someone whose approval you were addicted to but today you could care less what they think about you.

Desire flows from delight; when God is first, desires align.

Matthew 6:33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

4. There must be a significant difference between God’s position and other things in your life

Is Christ the ultimate treasure in your life?

Philippians 3:8 “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...”

5. Money must always be your servant and never your master

Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money.”

Conclusion

To put God and Christ first is to reorder love, loyalty, identity, and ambition around His lordship—allowing nothing and no one to rival His rightful place.

Reflection Questions

1. **What currently competes with Christ for first place in your heart—your time, affections, trust, or sense of security—and how has that competition subtly shaped your decisions?**
2. **Where might God be “hedging your way” right now—blocking certain paths, frustrating outcomes, or withholding things—in order to draw your heart back to Him?**
3. **When you examine your prayers and pursuits, are you seeking God Himself or primarily the breakthroughs and comforts you want Him to provide? How can you tell the difference?**
4. **If Jesus is truly Lord (*kyrios*) in your heart, what would need to change in how you relate to money, relationships, ambitions, or sources of validation?**
5. **What is one practical, concrete step you can take this week to deliberately put Christ first—not symbolically, but tangibly—in your priorities, choices, or habits?**