

A missionary we supported at Dayspring told me about a conversation he had in Paris recently. The taxi driver learned he was a Christian who was helping plant churches in France. Then Matteo began peppering Joel with questions.

Matteo said, "I don't believe in God, and sometimes I drive Muslims who tell me I'll go to hell if I don't believe like they do. Do *you* believe I'm going to hell if I don't believe in God like you do?"

"Good question," Joel answered thoughtfully. "The Bible says that God will judge us according to his law: do not murder, hate, commit adultery, steal..."

"Yes, but I'm a decent person," Matteo responded. "I've never killed anyone, cheated on my wife, or done anything bad like that."

Well," Joel added, "in the book of Romans, it says that those who are without God will be judged by their own consciences. For instance, do I see someone doing something, and condemn them in my heart, only to later find myself doing the exact same thing? If so, I'm guilty. I don't even live up to my own standard."

Matteo was silent.

"That's why we need Jesus," Joel continued. "Without Jesus, all of us—including me—deserve hell. None of us measures up."

They talked all the way to the airport, and Joel left Matteo with an encouragement to read Romans 1-2 for himself.

The wise young missionary Joel left his unbelieving taxi cab driver to read the text that we read today.

Does that seem wise to you? Does it seem extreme that we would be so straightforward and tell people that they are going to be judged by God? In today's modern world, in France? France?

Don't you have to ease people into it, tell them all the nice things about Christianity, get them baptized, get Matteo married to a nice Christian woman, and then introduce him to these hard parts of the faith?

In every sermon in the Bible, the threats of God upon those who disregard God's offer of salvation are either stated explicitly or are so implicit that only a pastor could overlook them.

I believe that Joel did the right thing by leaving Matteo to meditate upon the Gospel and the wrath of God against sinners. Because the wrath of God is how God gets to be both just and the justifier of the ungodly, ungodly people like you and me.

*But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*

*So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies.<sup>25</sup> They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.<sup>26</sup> That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other.<sup>27</sup> And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.*

*<sup>28</sup> Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done.<sup>29</sup> Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip.<sup>30</sup> They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents.<sup>31</sup> They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy.<sup>32</sup> They know God's justice requires that those who do*

*these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.*

We see a similar pattern here in the last part of the chapter as we did in 18-23. We see God judging those who suppress the truth of God's existence and the implications of that for daily living by allowing their sin to grow, by removing his merciful protection of their mind, their morals, and their religion, their relationships, thus allowing their sin to corrupt them and even cause their idols to crumble into dust. So as they keep searching for something to give them ultimate joy and peace and hope they get more and more desperate. And God will do the same for us, not just the homosexuals. He will allow our idols and sins to wreck our lives, and therefore show himself as righteous and his Son as the only thing in the universe that's safe to trust your salvation to. Both in the destruction of idols and idolaters, and in the salvation of all who flee to him for rescue from their evil addictions and horrible habits—God is revealed as good and right and holy and merciful.

Is that the point? Or is there more to this presentation of God's wrath?

As Steve Lawson said in an article in *Tabletalk Magazine*, "The preaching of divine wrath serves as a black velvet backdrop that causes the diamond of God's mercy to shine brighter than ten thousand suns. It is upon the dark canvas of divine wrath that the splendor of His saving grace most fully radiates."

Another good reason to talk about God's wrath is that preachers must proclaim the full counsel of God. Those who stand in pulpits must preach the whole body of truth in the Scriptures, which includes both sovereign wrath and supreme love. They cannot pick and choose what they want to preach.

Why is preaching divine wrath so necessary? First, the holy character of God demands it. An essential part of God's moral perfection is His hatred of sin. A.W. Pink asserts, "The wrath of God is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin." God is "a consuming fire" ([Heb. 12:29](#)) who "feels indignation every day" ([Ps. 7:11](#)) toward the wicked.

Every preacher must declare the wrath of God or marginalize His holiness, love, and righteousness. And that's why Paul is bringing up God's wrath against ungodliness in Romans 1—because it establishes his righteousness.

Second, the preaching of Christ demands it. Ironically, Jesus had more to say about divine wrath than anyone else in the Bible. Our Lord spoke about God's wrath more than He spoke of God's love. Jesus warned about "fiery hell" ([Matt. 5:22](#)) and eternal "destruction" (7:13) where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (8:12).

Let's step to the side for just a moment and address something that may be bothering you—because it bothers me. Someone asked RC Sproul if he believed in a hell with fire in it. RC said, no not necessarily, that Jesus may have been saying the worst thing he could but that hell itself may be worse than heated eternal torment.

But one thing we can be sure of is that hell will have levels or variations that reflect sin. We know this logically and from Scripture.

First from Scripture, in Luke 12:48, the section ending in vs 48. Jesus tells the story of servants who disobeyed their master. Then he says this:

*That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded" (Luke 12:48).*

He is saying that the more a person knows about Christ and still refuses to do anything about it, the more they will be held accountable. More so than the Muslim in Egypt who has never heard the Gospel. To hear the gospel time and time again and not respond to it will be to deeply regret it forever. The more light a person has been given the more they will be

held accountable. So I can say with authority that there are levels of suffering in hell.

The logic behind that flows from God being perfect, and God being a judge, therefore, God would never do anything unjust. He might give mercy to some, and justice to others, but he would never give anyone injustice. And it would be an act of cosmic injustice for God to torment someone ignorant of the Gospel in the same way he'd punish a Catholic or Presbyterian who turned their back on him. To whom much is given, much is required.

Back to our topic, why do we need to consider God's wrath today?

Third, the glory of the cross demands it. Christ suffered the wrath of God for all who would call upon Him. If there is no divine wrath, there is no need for the cross, much less for the salvation of lost souls. From what would sinners need to be saved? It is only when we recognize the reality of God's wrath against those deserving of judgment that we find the cross to be such glorious, shocking news.

Preachers and parents must not shrink away from proclaiming the righteous anger of God toward hell-deserving sinners. God has set a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness ([Acts 17:31](#)). "He has fixed <sup>m</sup>a day on which <sup>n</sup>he will judge the world <sup>o</sup>in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and <sup>p</sup>of this he has given assurance to all <sup>q</sup>by raising him from the dead."

That day is looming on the horizon. Like the prophets and Apostles, and even Christ Himself, we too must warn everyone of this coming dreadful day and compel them to flee to Christ, who alone is mighty to save.

God's love saves us—for God so loved the world, he sent his son. But so does God's wrath. Because it's in his righteous anger against sin that his church is rescued from the ones who would torment us and persecute us. It's in his righteous wrath that God was able to be both just and the

justifier of the ungodly—he could save us without simply overlooking our sin by placing the punishment for our sins on Jesus.

It is not an overstatement to say that if you hate God's wrath, you cannot love his gospel.

Let's stop and pray for Matteo and Joel and all those who are wrestling with the gospel and how it applies to our daily lives.