

## What Makes God Angry?

There are about as many views on what good parenting is in the world as there are parents. And if you want it to be true, whatever the question and answer is related to your children, you will undoubtedly be able to find somebody who supports your opinion, either in a book, or a magazine, or an article online, or a blog. So I hesitate to ask this question, but I think it's a good entry point to thinking about our Scripture today. Is there room in good parenting for both love and consequences? Is it ever appropriate for parents to be angry with their children? Can it really be called love and caring if there is only grace without responsibility and penalties for actions?

Aesop wrote a short fable that addresses this question titled "The Thief and His Mother," and it goes something like this:

"A schoolboy stole a horn-book from one of his schoolfellows and brought it home to his Mother. Instead of chastising him, she rather encouraged him in the deed. In the course of time, the boy, now grown into a man, began to steal things of greater value, until, at last, being caught in the very act, he was brought before a judge and sentenced to be hung. As he was being led to the scaffold, the mother bowed herself to the ground with grief. A neighbor seeing her thus, said to her: It is too late for you to moan and sob now. If you had been as much grieved when he committed his first theft, you would have corrected him in time, and thus saved yourself this sorrowful day."

I don't believe that love without limitations is real love. It may be easier to never say no, to never chastise, criticize, or call out, whether with your children, your spouse, your friends, or your fellow churchgoers. But without limitations or consequences in relationships, we risk letting the other person run amok and develop bad habits, which could turn into a bad lifestyle, which might lead them into serious trouble.

It is the same way in our relationships with God. In the church today, we don't talk much, if at all, about the consequences for making God angry. I think that this is for several reasons. First, the church has tried to intentionally make a radical shift away from the days of scaring people out of Hell by only preaching the anger of God. Instead, we preach the love and grace of God, without much talk of anger or sin. After all, 1 John 4:8 does say that "God is love."

Secondly, I think that the church is losing ground in America, and so there is a thought that if the Gospel was watered down and made easy, then maybe more people would come to faith. This means only talking about God being angry in the Old Testament, or only talking about God being angry with the serious sinners, the ones who don't go to church, or at least who go to a different church than ours.

The Gospel message of Jesus Christ absolutely includes grace, mercy, and love. But if there is no anger from God against our sin and therefore no consequences for sin, then there is no need for Jesus and no need for the Gospel. The full Gospel is a coin, with one side being mercy and grace as a result of God's love and the other side being

consequences as a result of God's anger against sin. This **FULL GOSPEL** is best captured in Jesus' words in John 3:16-18:

“<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Or even more simply put, Paul writes in Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So, how do we as a church hold these two sides of the Gospel in tension? And how do we rightly understand and respond to God's anger against our sin,

This is the question that Paul is dealing with in our passage for today. In the book of Romans, Paul is writing to a multicultural church comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, and he attempts to the best of his ability to address what it means to be a faithful follower of this two-sided Gospel for each group. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul is mostly addressing the Roman Gentiles and the culture of sin that they were coming out of in order to follow Jesus.

He begins this section by telling them that God's wrath is coming against “all the godlessness and wickedness of people.” Paul was never one to sugar-coat anything. And why was God's wrath coming against them? What makes God angry? Paul reminds them that even though they may not have been following after the one true God, since creation God has revealed himself to humanity through creation. We know this even now. It should be impossible to look up in the night sky and see the endless expanse of the universe or think about how a single cell can develop into a living, breathing human being in nine months and deny that there must be a God who set all of those things in motion. But somehow, we are able to deny this today and people were able to deny this in Rome. And because they “suppressed” the truth about God, Paul says in v. 21 that “they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.” Instead, Paul tells us in v. 25 that “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.”

When people worship the created rather than the creator, God is angry. This is the essence of sin, making an idol of something God created to worship rather than worshipping God.

John E. Toews writes in his commentary on Romans: “The sin of humanity is that men and women did not glorify God or give thanks. Humanity knew God, but did not recognize or honor God. The fundamental human perversion is rejection of God.”

Paul tells the Romans that they rejected God and exchanged Him for the things he made, even going so far as making statues of these false gods to worship. Their

rejection caused God to be angry with them, and God laid out two significant consequences for this.

- 1) They were no longer able to think straight: vv. 21-22 says “<sup>21</sup> their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.” Because they rejected the truth of God, their minds became confused and they were no longer able to tell right from wrong. This then led to their second consequence.
- 2) They were given over to their sins: v. 24 says “Therefore God gave them over in the sin sinful desires of their hearts” and v. 28 says “just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind.”

Putting it all together, the people rejected the truth of God for a lie, so their minds were made unable to see truth any longer and they were allowed to go hog-wild in their sinning, only digging themselves deeper and deeper into their wickedness.

Think about it like this, parents, how many of you, after your children go trick or treating, give your children free reign of the candy they’ve collected? Probably not many of you because you know if you do they will end up eating candy until they got sick. But sometimes, do you let your children do the things that they want to do, in a safe way, knowing that it won’t necessarily end well but hoping that they might learn? Well that’s what God is doing here, allowing people to follow every desire of their heart, knowing that it’s only going to lead to pain, and hoping that in that pain they might return to Him.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son. In it, the youngest son of a wealthy farmer demands his inheritance early, takes the money, and goes to the city to entertain his wildest desires, without any restraint from his father, on food, drinks, women, gambling, and anything you could probably imagine. When the money ran out, when the good times stopped rolling, the son was finally forced to evaluate himself and realize that his reckless behaviors, even though they might have seemed fun at the time, were destructive and harmful to him and to the ones that he loved. But it wasn’t until he was allowed to suffer the consequences of being let loose in his sin that he could finally learn this lesson: that following after the Father is so much better than anything our sinful minds, bodies, and hearts might lust after.

Paul not only tells the Roman Gentile Christians that God is angry with them but gives a pretty detailed list of why. Remember that Romans is a letter from Paul to a specific group of people in a specific place at a specific time, and so what he lists were illustrations of people in their culture worshipping the “created” rather than the “creator.”

Obviously, then, we cannot talk about this passage without talking about Paul’s words on homosexual behavior. These few verses are the most explicit prohibitions in all of the New Testament against homosexual behavior. And probably for many of us, this is the part of the passage that we have heard about and focused on the most. The question we need to ask is, what was going on in the church and culture that Paul dedicated so many words to this? In Roman culture at that time, homosexual behavior

was a normal part of everyday life for Gentile men. If you were a freeborn, not a slave, Gentile man, then it was likely that you were having engaging in physical, same-sex actions, either with a slave or a young boy. There is significant evidence in writings during that time that indicate that this behavior was acceptable, encouraged as healthy, and that it even did not count as adultery if you were married to a woman, nor did behaving this way affect your sexual orientation. Instead, it was just about seeking and fulfilling sexual gratification. Roman culture was extremely sexually permissive. As bad as we think America is today, they make Hollywood like the Amish. Additionally, worship of the Roman pagan gods oftentimes included homosexual sexual activity. Temples had male and female prostitutes to whom men and women could go and have hetero and homosexual engagement as an act of worship.

So then, Paul was writing to the Gentiles in the church, who without a doubt had participated in these behaviors, whether they were freeborn and committing them or a slave and being sexually molested by their masters. And he was saying that these behaviors, even though they were acceptable and encouraged in their culture, were wrong, because were worshiping sexuality rather than the God who did create human beings for relationship, love, and sexuality.

Paul believed strongly that the most God-honoring type of sexual relationship happened within a monogamous marriage between a man and woman.

But we shouldn't think that this was the only sin that Paul was talking about or even that it was the worst sin Paul was talking about. Homosexual behavior was not even the real problem; it was a symptom of the problem. The central problem that makes God angry is what Paul states in vs. 25: <sup>25</sup> "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator."

Paul includes other ways that they were "exchanging truth" in sin beyond homosexuality:

-greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, gossiping, haters of God, insolent, proud, boastful, disobedient to parents, refusing to understand, breaking promises, heartless, merciless.

He then concludes this passage by addressing the Jewish Christian's in the church, saying that many of these things listed are, according to Levitical law, deserving of death. <sup>32</sup> "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

Interestingly, though, Paul doesn't call for the Gentile Christians committing these sins to be put to death. Instead, in 2:1, he addresses the Jewish Christians, who at this point as strict law-followers were probably feeling pretty good about themselves because they surely were not then the ones God was angry with. And then Paul drops the hammer: "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at

whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.”

Both Jewish and Gentile Christians were guilty of sin before God and deserved God’s anger, wrath, and punishment. But this is where the other side of the Gospel comes in. “For God so loved the world that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Just as both the Jewish and Gentile Christians were guilty before God, both were redeemed before God too.

So how does this passage apply to us today? One of the struggles the church today faces is that because Paul spends so much time describing the same-sex behavior that the Roman Gentile Christians were committing, we have come to believe that sin is somehow worse than any others on the list. And if you read Paul’s words closely, you’ll see that it is right up there with murder and hating God. But you’ll also see sprinkled in there some other sins that we might consider to be more “minor” and spend a whole lot less time worrying about in this church.

I want to do an experiment right now; I need everyone to stand up. I’m going to start listing the sins Paul includes in the letter, and if you’ve ever committed them, even once, please sit down.

-Murder	-Felt greed
-Verbally hated God	-Spoken hatefully about somebody behind their back
-Gossiped	-disobeyed your parents
-Been Jealous	-judged someone else for their sins
-Hurt somebody on purpose	

The truth is, we are all guilty of sin before God and deserving of His anger and wrath, and it is only due to his grace and mercy that we are saved.

So I want to leave you with two things to think about this morning.

First, what untruth have you exchanged for the truth of God? What created thing are you worshipping instead of the creator? Toews says “...we become like that which we worship.” If somebody else were to take a good hard look at our life, what would it say about what we worship the most?

Secondly, recognizing our own sin, in what ways should the truth that all sin makes God angry affect the way that we view the world around us and choose or not choose to extend grace to those sinners who, like the prodigal son, are looking to return to the Father?