

# Has God's Punishment Already Begun

I think we ought to have more amens, and they ought to be louder. Amen? Amen! Especially when the choir does that well. Amen! So, what's your problem? Because you and I are limited human beings—limited in our experiences, wisdom, comprehension, and so many other ways—we very frequently make unwarranted and erroneous assumptions about things that simply are not true. May I provide one illustration? New Christians frequently find it jarring to realize that as believers in Jesus Christ, they can simultaneously experience blissful joy and profound sorrow. On one hand, we know the joy of sins forgiven and the peace of mind and heart from the unencumbered presence of the indwelling Spirit of God, giving joy to everyone who trusts Christ as their personal Savior, working from the inside out. Yet, on the other hand, we discover we also experience the sorrow of family, friends, sometimes spouses, and others loved and cared for who are bound and determined to live their lives without regard for the will of God. They are determined to ignore the power of God, pay little attention to the holiness of God, the judgment of God, the Son of God, or the wrath of God.

Nothing you say or do seems to sway their resolute stubbornness, suggesting they regard your personal commitment to Christ as unimportant, meaningless, irrational, obnoxious, arbitrary, and unrelated to your otherwise careful consideration of facts and evidence. They'll acknowledge you give due diligence to less important matters, but they pay no attention to your commitment to Christ. They become experts at ignoring, explaining away, or dismissing out of hand the wonderful things God has done in your life, for which you rejoice, and they ignore or despise. Therefore, it's not uncommon for many precious Christians with tender, loving hearts to

react to the pain and heartache felt toward unsaved loved ones by protecting yourselves from pain, insulating yourselves from becoming distraught over the refusals of parents, children, spouses, siblings, and others. You discover ways of living with your beloved but Christ-rejecting ones to make the pain more bearable, easing the suffering associated with their rejection of the gospel, refusal of Christ, and apparent determination to go to hell.

You begin to draw back a bit, bite your tongue considerably, and round off the edges of your Christianity to avoid their harsh, unreasonable opinions, complaints, and reactions to your prayerful attempts to bring them to Christ. You're not trying to hurt them; you just don't want them dancing like spit on a hot griddle forever. May I urge upon you that such a reaction, as I've described, is the wrong reaction? It's a common, ordinary reaction—one I've experienced and observed—but it's the wrong reaction. Despite being common and predictable, it's one thing to adjust your witness with greater wisdom and grace to be more effective, but it's another to hold back from appropriate saying and doing merely to protect yourself from unpleasant feelings produced by their adverse, sometimes virulent, malicious reactions. Some of you have shut down because of fear of their reaction. After all, your feelings and mine regarding the heartache and pain we experience because of our moms, dads, siblings, and children, who are blind to the beauty of Christ, are no reason to witness to them any less earnestly. Diminishing your pain does not affect their destiny. Please open your Bible to Paul's letter to the Romans. There's something I'm compelled to show you that I sincerely hope will spark your concern for your loved ones and energize your efforts to pray for and speak to them about Christ. During this season of missions emphasis at our church, you'll see why we are a Missionary Baptist church and grasp why you're urged to give to missions. It's found in Romans chapter 1.

There are three observations I'd like to bring to your attention. To get there, I want to walk you through Paul's foundational remarks. Long story short, Paul was a missionary writing to Christians who'd heard of

him but never met him, with his letter to the Romans being a position paper so they'd know where he stood on important matters, hoping they'd agree, pray for him, and support his ministry when he came to Rome en route to Spain. In Romans 1:1-6, Paul identified himself: a servant of Jesus Christ, called an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God. He described his message, his Master—the Son of God, made of David's seed, declared Son of God with power by the resurrection—and his ministry of grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations, including Roman believers, the called of Jesus Christ. Paul addressed them as beloved of God and saints, blessed with grace and peace, praising their testimony, praying for their blessings, and seeking to journey to them. In verses 11-12, his passion was to give, establish, comfort, and be comforted by them, showing love. In verses 13-17, he expressed his desire to bear fruit among them, prompted by a moral obligation—a debt to bless others with received blessings. He declared readiness to preach, unashamed of the gospel's power to save Jews and Greeks, revealing God's righteousness by faith.

These introductory details established, we come to our text, where Paul unfolded what Roman believers were familiar with: the spiritual litany of horrors of unsaved mankind. The problem is sin, as Romans 3:23 concludes: “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” In the last half of chapter 1, I want to rehearse three vital realities about God's dealings with mankind's sins, particularly Gentiles, one of which you'll find surprising, with alarming implications. The first reality is God's revelation to man (verses 18-20): “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” God's wrath is revealed, not impulsively but as a settled response against sin, indirectly through natural consequences of violating His moral law and directly through intervention, like the

flood or Christ's cross. God's abandoning the wicked to pursue sin and its consequences is evident. His witness is unmistakable through natural revelation—creation screams a designer and maker, as Psalm 19:1-3 declares.

The second reality is man's response to God (verses 21-28). Paul describes Gentile rebellion in three ways: passively, not glorifying or thanking God, leading to vain imaginations and darkened hearts; actively, professing wisdom but becoming fools, changing God's glory into corruptible images; and changing God's truth into a lie, worshiping creatures over the Creator. They refuse to retain God in their knowledge, discarding truth despite minds created for God's glory. The third reality is God's responsive wrath (verses 24-32). In response to rebellion, God gives them up to uncleanness, vile affections, and a reprobate mind, resulting in self-destructive behaviors and sins like fornication, murder, and disobedience to parents. These are punishments in this life, not just future judgment, showing God's wrath is active now.

Three conclusions: First, no unsaved person is spiritually static; they grow more sinful daily. Second, God punishes the unsaved in this life, affecting their attitude toward sin and rational thinking. Third, Christians must not back away from witnessing due to adverse reactions but pray, live for Christ, and support missions to reach the lost.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your goodness, the Bible's clarity, and the alarm for saved and lost. Help the saved who've backed away to witness regardless of reactions, and wake the lost to their desperate need for Christ. We thank and praise You in Jesus' name. Amen.