

Sowing the Word: Evangelize, Awake, Equip
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by Jason Butte

Question: Is it necessary to speak of God's judgment when witnessing?

Answer: Yes, the declaration of the judgment of God is a necessary component of the evangelistic witness. Here are a few reasons why it is necessary:

First, the Lord commanded us to declare God's judgment. Read Acts 10:42-43. This is when Peter went to the household of Cornelius and we find the Gospel going beyond the Jews to the gentiles. As Peter closes his message to this household he says (speaking of Jesus), "And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and the dead. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." (KJV) So, that sort of clarifies the mandate from the Lord concerning the declaration of judgment to come. The passage is very clear and we could stop there having sufficiently answered the question. But, we won't...

Second, the reality of judgment to come is the driving force behind true repentance. Consider Paul's words when he was preaching to the Athenians at Mars Hill in Acts 17:22-31. As Paul closes this message he says (having exposed their sin of idolatry), "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: BECAUSE He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained (Jesus); whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead." (KJV) *(A side note: When you consider this passage, it is an interesting note that when the world celebrates Easter, they are - unknowingly - celebrating the event that resolutely announced that they will one day be judged of God.)*

Thirdly, it is just reasonable. If you commit a crime in civil law, but there is no penalty—there is no reason to seek pardon. Likewise, it is necessary for individuals to understand that God is the Righteous Judge and He will ensure that no transgression will go unpunished. Therefore, we all need pardon. The full pardon is provided in the Lord Jesus Christ who was punished for our sins. This pardon is applied to those who trust in Jesus alone for salvation.

Fourthly, if we want people to understand the seriousness of their sin, it is vital that we declare God's judgment to them. *(Note: Only those who hear AND understand the Gospel will be saved. See Matthew 13:23. We, as Christians, have been given the responsibility to teach the vital message of reconciliation to God through Christ. cf. Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19.)*

To put it bluntly, if you want people to be genuinely saved – declare the judgment of God. If you don't, then abstain from this declaration. Let me illustrate why the declaration of judgment is vital to understanding: Consider...how do we know how serious a crime really is? Imagine you look in the newspaper and see that someone committed a crime and received a \$50 fine. How serious of a crime do you think they must have committed? Probably something petty, right? Now, imagine you see another article and find that another person committed a crime and received 50 consecutive life sentences? What would you think about the seriousness of their crime? Must have been something awful, right? How do we know the seriousness of our sin against God? Because He has pronounced His sentence (judgment): Eternal destruction in the Lake of Fire.

That is how serious God views sin. You see, if we do not declare the judgment of God (as He has commanded us to, and as the Apostles did), we are robbing people of the means that helps them to understand their utter vileness and need for the salvation found in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We may omit or minimize this and get people to make a "decision" or "say a prayer", but unless there is Holy Spirit conviction that produces a heartfelt knowledge of their sin against God (i.e. contrition) and thus a desire for the salvation that God offers in Jesus alone - there is NO Salvation. Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit of God and He works through the Word which we have been commanded to declare (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Fifth, we can't even properly share what happened on the cross without declaring the judgment of God. When we look to the cross, we see the love of God - this is true. But, how do we see the love of God? Because Jesus took the PUNISHMENT that we deserve because of our sin (Romans 5:8). The cross is the judgment of God towards sin. So, the cross is not only a picture of the love of God, it is a picture of the justice of God. On the cross we see the Lord Jesus Christ (God incarnate) satisfying the justice of a Just God (Romans 3:23-26) so that we may be declared righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we share the Gospel we declare the sinfulness of man that has separated us from Holy God. We declare the judgment of God for our sin. Then, we tell them the Gospel (i.e. the "Good News") that God's judgment has been satisfied in Christ. He bore the wrath of God for them (Isaiah 53). We, then, declare the Gospel command for them to repent and trust in Jesus. If they submit to Christ, they receive eternal (never-ending) salvation. If they refuse, the wrath of God remains upon them. (John 3:36)