

THE TEMPERED ANGER OF GOD

The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. (Nahum 1:3, NIV)

THE PROPOSAL TO MAKE GOLF “EASIER” FOR NEWBIES by enlarging the size of the hole is gaining traction. It’s not that competitive golf will change; you’ll still putt to 4.25-inch holes for that. But the progressive thought here is that a larger hole will produce less frustration for those just trying out the game—as if it’s putting that most confounds the beginner! We won’t go so far as to argue that this new leniency in golf depicts the permissive trend in society, but it’s to this greater moral latitude that we turn our attention today.

As people grow older, we might say that we find them taking one of two common paths: increasingly harsh or increasingly lenient. The first view says, “The world is going to hell in a handbasket and I won’t stand for it!” The second says, “It’s time to back off and start ‘loving’ my family rather than pushing them.” Age seems to rob us of our circumspection and send us down one adamant course or another.

But as followers of Jesus, we are called to “walk circumspectly” (Ephesians 5:15, KJV) and to exhibit “patient endurance” (Revelation 14:12). That is, our circumspection—the act of looking around to see what God is doing in the midst of the world’s happenings—must go with us to the end of life. We can neither clamp down without mercy, nor throw aside all fetters and allow any way of living.

God himself has demonstrated such a balance, both as the Father in heaven and as the Son on earth. The prophet Nahum noted that God is both “slow to anger” but ready to punish the guilty. God will never give in to sin, but he will give men and women every chance to turn from their sin and place their trust in him. Sometimes friends don’t like to read that “the Old Testament God” demonstrated wrath at all. They say Jesus wasn’t like this and that he was ever-forgiving with those he encountered. But this Jesus who gently called people to faith also made it abundantly clear what would become of those who did not believe in him: “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come” (John 8:21).

A holy God cannot allow for unholy sin, so he has established judgment for those who choose sin above him. But he waits patiently so that we (and those we love) might yet turn to him. Following this pattern, we can be both urgent and long-suffering with the message of the Gospel.

Opening questions What do you think of making golf easier? Does this send a “wrong message” about the challenge of the game? How about in life—when does leniency send the wrong message?

READING Nahum 1:1-8, John 8:12-30, Nahum 1:15

Just who is God?

Reading Nahum’s preface to God’s words of judgment toward the sin of Nineveh, what balance do we find in the character of God?

Jesus and his detractors

In Jesus’ exchange with his critics in John 8, how did he demonstrate the balance between addressing sin and offering life? What did his words produce in verse 30?

Bearers of Good News

Reflecting on Nahum 1:15, in what ways are God’s people to be bearers of good news? Do people celebrate when you speak of Jesus?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2014 Links Players International.