

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2017 Links Players International. *Only here in the fine print will we let the uneducated know that golfers almost always refuse to say the word "shank" out loud. A s---- is a horrible miss, hit with the most unforgiving part of the club.

A MOST UNCOMFORTABLE TOPIC

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (Romans 2:5, NIV)

I KNOW GOLFERS HAVE A REPUTATION FOR SO-CALLED "COLORFUL LANGUAGE." Cussing. Swearing. Letting it fly. So I know I'm going to confuse our non-golfing readers when I refer to the golfers' S-word.* The S-word labels the unmentionable and sends the creepy-crawlies down a golfer's spine. One such shot wouldn't bother us more than any other kind of miss. But that's not the way these creatures attack. They come in bunches, one after another, until you succumb to their power and try to run the ball onto the green with a hybrid from 95 yards.

OK, that's enough of that.

When it comes to the Scriptures, though, we also find topics we'd rather not discuss—at least not in mixed company between believers and unbelievers. The love of Jesus? That's something we can all agree on. But it can be dangerous to dive into the warmongering of the Old Testament, and everyone wishes Jesus himself hadn't made mention of hell and money. It would be a lot easier to talk about faith and the church without these bugaboos. But they're there, and so is the very hard topic of God's wrath.

Most casual readers would suggest that the wrath of God is one of those Old Testament matters that show a side of God we've left behind since Jesus came to save. The difficulty in that argument is that the wrath continues in the Gospels and the letters of the apostles. So sooner or later, we're going to have to take it on. Let's shape our understanding around two important pieces of the topic today.

First, the wrath of God nearly always refers to God's judgment unto eternity. Bad things happening to people on earth serve a different purpose, sometimes for discipline unto salvation (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) and sometimes to reveal the glory of God when he intervenes (John 9:1-7).

Second, the wrath God delivers to us, as we read in our passage from Romans today, the very thing we have stored up for ourselves. If I say to God all my life, "I want nothing to do with you," he will give me that very thing in eternity—and it will look like the final, wrathful judgment that it is. To gnash teeth is to admit, "I shouldn't have." To weep is to say, "But I did." Tragically, the wrath of God leads to both.

Opening questions Have you ever had an unruly case of the s----s? What did you do to get rid of them? • What topics of faith, church, or the Scriptures do you find hardest to talk about?

READING Romans 2:4-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10

Kindness and wrath (Romans 2)

What aspects of God's character did Paul highlight as leading to repentance? How is this contrasted with the wrath God must dispense if we choose to store up that wrath for ourselves?

What are the characteristics of those who gain eternal life versus those who receive wrath and anger?

To the rescue (1 Thessalonians 1)

What do you find beautiful in the words Paul wrote to the Thessalonians? What did Jesus accomplish in their lives?
