

AGGRAVATED IMPENITENCE, A PRELUDE TO SEVERE JUDGMENT (Amos 4.11-12)

Read Amos 4.1-5.2 NKJV. Consider 3 intro points:

1. The true God **is capable** of punishing severely. “God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (11a; cf. Gen 19.24-25). This actually happened. They suffered severe punishment because they were especially wicked and in this they are an example for us (Jude 7). People say, “I don’t believe in hell; I believe in a God of love.” They just announced that they reject the God of the Bible. Some wrongly imagine that God has changed from the NT onward to be merciful only, but He rather has an even greater justification for wrath now (Heb 10.28-29).
2. The true God **is justified** when punishing severely.
 - o He has an inherent right to do whatever He wishes with His creatures (Rom 9.21-22).
 - o He is righteous, hating wickedness (Psa 11.5-6).
 - o Great sins merit great punishment (Luke 12.47-48). As God is exalted, then sin against Him is enormous. It is in keeping with His righteous nature to measure out a proportionately-severe punishment. Denying hell reflects amounts to irreverence, a failure to value His majesty and holiness.
3. **Knowing this** about God before it is too late is **a great mercy**. You want a weatherman who anticipates and announces a life-threatening hurricane, and a doctor who levels with you about cancer. You should welcome divine warnings because they tend to your safety.

WHAT IS IMPENITENCE?

1. “**Not feeling shame** or regret” (OED). Prov 30.20 portrays the harlot in . . .

such a course of abomination, wickedness, and hypocrisy, as is scarcely to be conceived; indulging her sin as the sweet morsel under her tongue; feasting greedily upon her “stolen waters and secret bread;” yet keeping up the semblance of innocence and purity; wiping her mouth, to prevent all suspicion, allowing no sign of the action to remain. A woman must be advanced very far in the way of sin, before she can present such an unblushing front (Charles Bridges, in loc.).
- 2a. **Continuing in sin without “repentance,”**

whereby, out of sight and sense, not only of danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness [detestable nature] of his sins, and upon apprehension of God’s mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with Him in all the ways of new obedience (WLC #76).

Repentance is to leave / The sins we loved before / And show that we in earnest grieve / By doing so no more.
- 2b. We continue without repentance **naturally**. This is just to maintain the spiritual status quo, drifting from one

day to the next without any determined pursuit of holiness. You can coast into the lowest hell but not into heaven above. If you have to wonder whether you are living the Christian life, then how could you be? It is deliberate and difficult. You KNOW if you are serving in an army, training for the Olympics, or striving to enter the narrow gate of God’s kingdom. Are you fighting the good fight, running the good race, pressing into the kingdom? Or are you thinking your own thoughts, doing your own thing, just acting naturally?

3. **Not returning to God** (repeated 4x in 6c, 8c, 10d, 11c). God **takes this personally**. Every sin is against God, and to continue in sin without repentance is to live in alienation from God (Eph 4.17-19). Illustration: a man may think flirting with a woman at the office is just a peccadillo, but a good wife would be crushed. To “return to God” in this sense is to repent of sin and practice true obedience to Him (Deut 30.2).

WHEN IS IMPENITENCE AGGRAVATED?

God complains in Amos 4 of **aggravated impenitence**. “Aggravated” = “**increased seriousness** of an offense.” Any impenitence is bad, but some is worse and calls for especially severe punishment. “**YET** you have not returned to me, saith the Lord”—despite My long patience, repeated calls, faithful discipline, gracious blessings, etc. I have done everything that might be expected of Me to win you back, and yet you continue impenitent (Isa 5.3-4). Two particulars here in 4.11:

1. **When sinners ignore severe judgments upon others** (11a). Former generations of Israel had suffered severe judgments comparable to Sodom and Gomorrah, even if in a different form. The God of wrath had killed many more Jews through the years than Sodomites in the conflagration of that one awful day. This should have been an effective warning to the survivors. They should have remembered:
 - o At Kadesh-Barnea, God sentenced nearly everyone over 20 years old to die in the wilderness.
 - o God killed 23,000 in 1 day for fornication (1 Cor 10.8).
 - o God killed 14,700 in 1 day with a plague for murmuring (Num 16.49).
 - o God killed 70,000 after David’s census (2 Sam 24.15).
 - o Israel’s history contains many other examples.

Jesus taught us to take warning from seemingly random catastrophes and crimes of violence suffered by others (Luke 13.1-5). Every time you learn of such calamities (historically, on the news, even in your own family), you should consciously interpret it as God’s call for your repentance. When you continue carelessly, it is **aggravated impenitence**.

2. **When sinners persist in sin despite temporal mercies** (11b). “Those of you who survived were like a burning stick saved from a fire. This was a proverbial saying for a

person saved from great danger” (UBS Handbook). This “brand snatched from the burning” metaphor has often been applied to believers, but here it clearly describes the unconverted as those given more time to repent. They have been on the brink of ruin, narrowly escaping the full force of the wrath of God by his temporal mercy.

The fire had already kindled upon you; and yet you hate sin never the more for the danger it has brought you to, nor love God ever the more for the deliverance he wrought for you (M. Henry, in loc.).

The fact is that you have survived until now and are still hearing the gospel preached. This in itself is a great mercy to you all (Lam 3.22). It is also a great incentive for your thorough repentance (Rom 2.4). When you respond otherwise, **you are guilty of aggravated impenitence.**

WHAT FOLLOWS AGGRAVATED IMPENITENCE?

“Therefore” (12a) indicates God’s “reluctant yielding” to this extreme measure after their aggravated impenitence.

1. **Severe punishment from God Himself** (12a). “Thus will I do unto thee, O Israel.” If you will be so grossly blind and stupid and stubborn, then I (who made real threats and am committed to my own Word and holy standards) am constrained to punish you severely as you deserve. Cf. Isa 5.3-6.
2. **Severe punishment commensurate with the aggravated impenitence and God’s greatness.** “Lo” (4.13) means “for look, the one who,” as in, “Prepare to meet your God, Israel! For here He is! He formed the mountains and created the wind,” etc. (NET Bible and notes). God is reminding us of His greatness in several descriptive phrases (ponder them). What is coming, then, is “a God-kind of judgment,” one that exhibits the fierceness of His wrath, the strength of His might, the loftiness of His offended dignity.
3. **Irrevocable judgment worse than anything that has come before.** It is bad enough to make God, or, perhaps, His prophet Amos, take up a lamentation (5.1-2; cf. Luke 13.34-35a). This carries out the principle announced before (Prov 29.1), which Matthew Henry explains thus.

Those that go on in sin, in spite of admonition, *shall be destroyed*; those that will not be reformed must expect to be ruined; if the rods answer not the end, expect the axes. They *shall be suddenly destroyed*, in the midst of their security, *and without remedy*; they have sinned against the preventing remedy, and therefore let them not expect any recovering remedy. Hell is remediless destruction. They *shall be destroyed, and no healing*, so the word is. If God wounds, who can heal?

WHAT MUST THE GUILTY DO?

1. **Prepare to meet your God one way or the other.** This God of the Bible is the only real, true and living God, and

you are His creature, accountable to Him. Even atheists will eventually become painfully aware of this.

2. **Prepare by anticipation to meet Him full of wrath toward you** (12b-c). Contextually, the sense is dire, not hopeful. This is not first of all counsel to repent but to brace yourself for the coming catastrophe from God. It is like telling the man on death row, “Tomorrow, you die.”
And now “prepare” yourself “to meet the Lord your God” (Amos 4.12). Summon all the resolution of your mind to endure such a sentence, such an execution as this; for “He will not meet you as a man” (Isa 47.3) whose heart may sometimes fail him when about to exert a needful act of severity, so that compassion may prevail against reason and justice. No, He will meet you as a God, whose schemes and purposes are all immovable as His throne. I therefore testify to you in His name this day, that since God is true, He will speak this way; and that since He is able, He will act this way. And on supposition of your continuance in your impenitence and unbelief, you are brought into this miserable situation, that since God is not either false or weak, you are undone, you are eternally undone! (Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, VI.11).
3. And yet there is hope, if you will sensibly **prepare by repentance and pleas for mercy to meet a God reconciled to you through Christ** (Amos 5.4; Luke 14.31-32).

Do you count your own strength great enough for a match for God? Do you want to run the risk of an encounter with Him? Do you imagine that your hands can be strong, or your heart can endure? Do you think that you will be able to defend yourself, or to escape out of His hand? Do you think that you will be able to remain strong when God acts as an enemy towards you? If so, then prepare for battle, and see what the outcome will be. Therefore thus will I do unto thee—”and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4.12). Isn’t it useless to set the briers and thorns in battle array against devouring flames; which though they seemed to be armed with natural weapons, yet the fire will pass through them, and burn them all? And if you try to support yourself under God’s wrath, cannot God put you in such misery that will completely take away your courage, so that you will find no strength to resist Him, or to uphold yourself? Why should a worm think of supporting himself against an omnipotent adversary? Consider, God has made your soul; and He can fill it with misery: He made your body, and can bring whatever torments He wants upon it. God who made you, has given you a capacity to bear torment; and He has that capacity in His hands. How dreadful must it be to fall into the hands of such an enemy! Surely, “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Jonathan Edwards, “Men Naturally God’s Enemies”).