

Godly Sorrow and Biblical Repentance

(2 Corinthians 7:8-11)

INTRODUCTION:

1. In the Corinthian letter Paul conveys God's standard of true holiness He desires for His people (2 Cor. 6:16-7:1 – "...For you are the **temple of the living God**. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." ¹⁷ Therefore "**Come out from among them and be separate**, says the Lord. **Do not touch what is unclean**, and I will receive you." ¹⁸ "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." ¹ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**").
 - A. We are God's temple and His purpose of salvation is to dwell among us.
 - B. To avoid profaning God's temple and shutting Him out of our lives, we must:
 - i. *Separate* ourselves from the world's wickedness, *refusing to touch* what is morally unclean.
 - ii. *Cleanse our lives* from the filthiness of flesh and spirit with the purpose being *PERFECTING holiness* in the fear of God!
 - a. This is a purification that is both external (flesh) and internal (spirit). There is no purity without both.
 - b. This purification must be done in fear, true reverence and awe for the holiness of God, that causes even the Seraphim to veil their faces when they praise His holiness.
 - C. God doesn't want us to *cleaner* than we were in the world. God wants his people to strive with all their being to be perfectly, completely, wholly clean from all sin and its filthiness.
2. This amazing goal, which is now possible for us to pursue because of God's grace through Jesus, will never be achieved in us until the gospel brings us to godly sorrow for our sins and that sorrow leads to true repentance.
 - A. With this understood we should be glad that one of the best descriptions of biblical sorrow and its effect on repentance soon followed (2 Corinthians 7:8-11 – "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. ⁹ Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. ¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹ For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter."").
 - B. This description presents both the type of sorrow needed to achieve biblical holiness, but also the results this sorrow should bring in the form of true repentance.
3. What I want to do today is to consider Paul's words in this passage and how it challenges us to look at our own lives to see if we have godly sorrow for our sin resulting in true repentance before God.

BODY:

I. Biblical repentance begins with godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:8-10):

- A. When sin is exposed and rebuked, there are two kinds of sorrow that can follow.
 1. These two sorrows are in fact, sorrow. But they have different traits and results!
 2. Paul, however, would not be fooled, showing us that not all sorrow is the same.
 - a. There is *worldly* sorrow that leads to *death*.
 - b. There is *godly* sorrow that leads to *repentance*.
 - c. What is the difference? How can we be sure we have one or the other?
- B. Worldly sorrow (7:10 – "...the sorrow of the world produces death."):
 1. Worldly sorrow is genuine sorrow that produces genuine tears.
 - a. What we see so often in the news is people's sins/scandal are brought to public light and the sorrow and tears pictured may very well be genuine.
 - b. The problem is not the sorrow, but why they are sorrowing, whether it is godly.

2. Worldly sorrow comes from the anguish of losing worldly things, or the fear of losing them.
 - a. So often it is their loss of public reputation, or power, or financial standing, or family, sexual fulfillment, or simply doing what they want to do.
 - b. They sorrow because they have lost the worldly things that bring security, comfort, or pleasure, whether these things are good or sinful, honorable or dishonorable.
 3. What I finally understand is this sorrow leads to death because it flows from the same kind of heart that desired the sin in the first place. This person sorrows because the fulfillment of their selfish desires is either lost or are in jeopardy of being lost!
- C. Godly sorrow (7:10 – “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation”):
1. This sorrow may look the same as worldly sorrow, but it differs in what is happening in the heart and its results (2 Cor. 7:9-10 – “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. ¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted...”).
 2. Godly sorrow...
 - a. May also feel the pain of worldly loss, but that is not its focus.
 - b. Is God-focused and is pained over the loss of relationship with Him.
 - c. Is focused on God being offended and grieved by our transgression of his holy law.
 3. Only godly sorrow produces true repentance leading to salvation without regret...
 - a. Because it marks a change in the self-centered heart that seeks its own to a heart that is concerned for God and His glory!
 - b. Because this heart fully desires to please God, which motivates real and lasting change.
 4. These distinctions have everything to do with the heart and whether you truly want to be free from sin and its destruction in your life. *So, which sorrow do you have for your sin?*

II. Biblical marks of godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:11):

- A. Godly sorrow produces diligence, or earnestness in one’s heart to deal with one’s sin completely.
1. Worldly sorrow cringes at the pain of sin and conviction, responds in prayer, and determines to fight against sin—*for a while*.
 - a. Worldly sorrow and repentance are much like the short-lived life of the seed in the thorny soil where one “hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (Matt. 13:22).
 - b. This newfound conviction, mournful prayers, and determination quickly fade away with the fading of the pain of the loss and/or the realization of an easy replacement!
 2. Godly sorrow is diligent, earnest, lasting in its...
 - a. Remorse for sin, extending beyond the momentary guilt and grimaces.
 - b. Commitment to fight in the trenches and continue the battle against sin, long after worldly sorrow has given up!
 3. I think Peter summoned up the this distinction (2 Pet. 1:5-9 – “But also for this very reason, **giving all diligence**, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸ For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For he who lacks these things is **shortsighted**, even to **blindness**, and **has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins**.”).
- B. Godly sorrow produces eagerness to clear, or vindicate, oneself:
1. Worldly sorrow seeks to justify one’s action and minimize the crime, leaving one vulnerable for a quick retreat into sin.
 2. Godly sorrow produces an eagerness of heart to clear oneself of all charges that God’s word has leveled against us, willingly pursuing godly ways to eradicate the sin from one’s life.
 3. It involves a willingness to choose accountability for one’s actions and take whatever corrective actions that are needed.

- a. That accountability begins with owning one's guilt before God and the responsibility to deal with that sin (1 Jn. 1:8-9 – "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.").
 - b. That accountability may also involve others, seeing that some sins are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to be overcome alone (Jas. 5:16 – "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.").
- C. Godly sorrow causes indignation, or anger.
1. Sorrow leads to anger; but the *reason why* will determine the value of that sorrow.
 2. Worldly sorrow leads to anger over the shame of being caught as well as the loss of worldly things—reputation, wealth, marriage relationship—anger over sin's worldly consequences.
 3. Godly sorrow produces sincere anger...
 - a. At Satan and sin—the cause of our offense against God.
 - b. At one's own willingness to become Satan's pawn and to rebel against God, hurting Him and breaking His heart! (Psa. 51:4 – "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight").
 - c. At one's willingness to walk away from God's provided freedom for the ways of slavery and death (Jn. 8:34-36 – "Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵ And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. ³⁶ Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.").
- D. Godly sorrow leads to fear, alarm, fright.
1. Worldly sorrow produces fear and alarm at the possibility of one's sin being found out and the worldly judgements, reprisals, and loss it might produce or has produced.
 - a. It was not about the harm caused by your sin that eternally matters, but temporal harm.
 - b. Far more fear is found in the possibility of getting caught. So, that is where their diligence lies as well—in not getting caught!
 - c. Hiding in darkness **never** leads to God's light or lasting change!
 2. Godly sorrow fears GOD:
 - a. It leads to alarm/fright over one's undone condition before God, for the direction away from God one's sin has taken them, for the eternal consequences one's sin leads to!
 - b. It fears because GOD knows, and has always known, and has lovingly reached out to you only to see you rebuff His efforts time and again, causing him anger!
 - c. It fears because God is completely holy, and we are not living up to our calling to be "holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:15).
 - d. It fears because continued rebellion is an affront to His grace and leads to the loss of God's forbearance and to His wrath coming upon us.
- E. Godly sorrow produces vehement desire, or great longing.
1. But, longing for what? For restoration!
 - a. Not of one's life the way we want it, the way we liked it, where we had what we want.
 - b. Worldly sorrow will lead you to walk away from what causes the pain, to end relationships with God and brethren...and to be fine with it!
 2. Godly sorrow produces a longing for restoration with God, of again knowing the deep love and grace of God that sets us free from the guilt and destruction of sin! (Psa. 32:1-5 – "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³ When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. ⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.").

- a. It is a desire to be restored to the closeness, the oneness, felt through God's presence in prayer, study, and worship.
 - b. It is a desire to have the closeness restored with those of God's family whom our sin and its consequences have hurt and caused separation.
 - c. It is a longing that leads one to take the necessary steps to assure that restoration take place, whether it be with God or one's brethren.
- F. Godly sorrow produces zeal, or fervor
- 1. The question is, again, concerning what? Zeal in one's godly response to sin!
 - 2. We see great sorrow in worldly people caught in sin, but not with true zeal.
 - a. There are seemingly canned responses for the media designed to deflect attention away so that he/she might move on.
 - b. And for most who are caught, our ungodly society is more than willing to ignore their sin if that courtesy is returned.
 - 3. Godly sorrow is different, being zealous (a legal term) to see the truth of one's transgression against God acknowledged and God's justice and holiness being upheld.
 - a. This zeal is not concerned about what is convenient or makes one feel good about him/herself. It is concerned about what pleases God.
 - b. This reminds me of Paul's words about the Hebrew readers' willingness to face shame/reproach for God's sake (Heb. 10:32-34 – "But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³ partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.").
 - c. Godly sorrow is willing to zealous address sin, no matter the embarrassment, because he/she knows there is something much greater waiting for those who do!
 - 4. Whether we have godly sorrow is answered in whether our zeal would willingly direct us to have our reputation, financial status, and honor plundered for the cause of Christ and true repentance.

CONCLUSION:

- 1. The importance of having true godly sorrow leading to repentance is found in the simple fact that without these we cannot be holy. And, without holiness "no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14)!
- 2. I hope I have encouraged you to examine your heart's attitude toward sin to see if true godly sorrow leading to repentance is in your heart. For, you need it for life, seeing the sorrow of the world lead to death!
- 3. Will you submit to Jesus today, in godly sorrow acknowledging your sin and repenting, confessing your faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?