

8. Godly sorrow that leads to joy

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Two friends opened a butcher shop and their business was booming. Then an evangelist came to town, and one of the butchers was saved. From then on, he tried to persuade his partner to accept salvation of Jesus also, but to no avail. "Why won't you, Charlie?" asked the born-again partner.

"Listen, Fred," the other butcher said. "If I become a Christian, too, who's going to weigh the meat?"

A good relationship with God starts from repentance and making thing right.

Two kinds of repentance are possible in human experience. One is "the sorrow of the world," a feeling induced by the fear of getting caught. Many people recognize the unpleasant consequences of their sin and are persuaded that they are guilty. This results in a superficial sorrow that may lead to a temporary reformation. But godly sorrow, on the other hand, is accompanied by conviction of sin, the work of the Holy Spirit. This stems from the realization of offending a holy God. It leads to genuine repentance. Then that genuine repentance leads us to the true joy that only comes from Lord Jesus.

There is a radical distinction between natural remorse and God-given repentance. Out of a list of 10 men in the Bible who said, "I have sinned," we believe only five actually repented. They were David, Nehemiah, Job, Micah, and the prodigal son.

The flesh can feel remorse, acknowledge its evil deeds, and be ashamed of itself. However, this sort of remorse with past actions can be quickly shrugged off, and the individual can soon go back to his old wicked ways. We are going to learn about the true repentance which brings wonderful side effects to us.

A. KEEPING OURSELVES CLEANSED

2 Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

This is one of those unfortunate bad chapter breaks that happened in the Bible. This verse should have been at the end of the chapter 6.

Paul is writing about a cleansing that isn't only something God does for us as we sit passively. This is a self-cleansing for intimacy with God that goes beyond a general cleansing for sin.

There is a main aspect of cleansing which comes to us as we trust in Jesus and His work on our behalf. This work of cleansing is really God's work in us, and not our work.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But not that it is our work apart from God, but it is a work that awaits our will and effort. This aspect of cleansing is mostly connected with intimacy with God, and usefulness for service. It requires daily cleansing.

So how can we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and perfecting holiness in the fear of God? There is only one way.

We find a great illustration from the 5th chapter of 2 Kings:

In the Old Testament, leprosy is a very appropriate picture of sin, because it begins seemingly insignificantly, but spreads like a wild fire. When Naaman, a prominent Syrian general who had contracted this terrible disease, was told by his Jewish servant girl that there was a prophet in Israel who could cure him. He sent a message to the king of Israel, who, in turn, sent him to Elisha. Naaman was expecting Elisha to cast some sort of magical spell over him, he was really ticked when Elisha told him to wash in the Jordan River seven times. After all, Naaman thought the Jordan nothing more than a muddy creek compared to the rivers of his own country. The Scripture says he “turned and went away in a rage.”

But his servants didn’t give up so easily. He talked his master to obey what Elisha told him. So Naaman did, indeed, dip himself into the Jordan seven times – the number of completion – and he came out healed and whole.

Likewise, we who are eaten by the leprosy of sin must dip in the water over and over and over again. What kind of water? The psalmist said in Psalm 119 that a young man shall cleanse his way by taking heed according to the Word. Jesus said in John 15 that we are clean through the Word He has spoken unto us. Paul declared in Ephesians 5 that we are washed by the Living Water which is the Word of God.

Let the Word of God cleanse us through our devotion each and every day.

B. HEART TO HEART TALK

2 Corinthians 7:2-4 Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. 4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.

Now, Paul returns to idea he left off with in 2 Corinthians 6:11-13.

Paul has been completely honest with the Corinthian Christians. He tells them they must be honest with Paul, and open to seeing the truth about Paul and his ministry. Because the Corinthian Christians believed many bad things about Paul but their problem was not an information problem. Their problem was with their hearts. Their hearts had been open to the world, but not to Paul. In the “unequally yoked” passage in chapter 6, Paul told them to close their hearts to the world, but open their hearts to him.

Paul was confronting the Corinthian Christians, but he did not want to condemn them. It is possible to confront without condemning, though those who are being confronted rarely think so.

C. FROM FEAR TO JOY

2 Corinthians 7:5-7 For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. 6 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with

which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

Most people including myself would love to avoid pain and difficulty as much as they can. But with Christ and the earthly relationships we are blessed with, we can face trials with peace, knowing that they only bring us closer to Him and closer to one another.

In chapter 6, we studied some of the troubles Paul faced in his ministry – beatings, imprisonment, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, and hunger. But let's not forget the fears – the internal struggles he endured, too.

The word 'fears' here comes from the Greek word 'phobos', from which we get our term 'phobia'. It carries the idea of dread and panic, a shrinking from courage, the desire to run. Paul and his workers struggled against internal fear.

Not only was the apostle sprinkled with fears, he was drenched with depression. Many Christians deny their depression. They may feel that if they aren't positive and sunny all the time, they are letting Christ down and not spiritual enough for others. But by denying their depression, they deny reality. We have to face the facts of darkness, long shadows and plain bad days in our lives. God is going to use those bad hair days, bad make-up days, bad days at work or home to bring us closer to Himself.

What was Titus' good news? The things in Corinth weren't as bad as Paul thought. They actually missed Paul. They were distressed by the difficulties he had experienced, and they were cheering for him.

God was working through Paul's hardships to produce something precious in the Corinthian believers, and the apostle found joy in their progress. However, even if the Corinthians hadn't softened toward him, there was something about Paul's faith that would have given him joy no matter what.

You really can say, "You cannot put a good man down," about Paul.

D. GODLY SORROW PRODUCES REPENTANCE

2 Corinthians 7:8-12 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. 12 Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.

Four of the seven churches of Asia Minor, listed in Revelation 2-3, were commanded to repent. To 'repent' simply means "to change one's mind." Disobedient Christians need to repent, not in order to be saved, but in order to restore their close fellowship with God.

Repentance is to change one's mind and turn to God, not just being sorry that they got caught.

Paul was referring to a letter he sent previously after he wrote 1 Corinthians, one that has been lost to us. This missing epistle is sometimes referred to as the "Severe Letter" because in it Paul rebuked the Corinthians for continuing in sexual sin. After sending it, Paul had second thoughts about the pain he inflicted – much like some parents feel after spanking their errant child. Thankfully, after delivering the Severe Letter, Timothy returned to report the Corinthians' repentant spirit, which brought great relief to Paul.

The difference between the sorrow inflicted by God and the sorrow inflicted by the world is that one is purposeful while the other is pointless. Sorrow according to the will of God is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. It is redemptive – nothing is lost, only gained.

Sorrow alone accomplishes nothing. Peter was sorry that he denied Christ, and he repented. Judas was sorry that he betrayed Christ but, instead of repenting, he killed himself. Godly sorrow cannot be measured by feelings or tears, but by what it produces.

Repentance sounds like a harsh word to many. But it is an essential aspect of the Gospel, and has been called "the first word of the Gospel." When John the Baptist preached, he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" in Matthew 3:2. When Jesus began to preach, He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" in Matthew 4:17. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he told his listeners to repent in Acts 2:38.

Repentance is bitter sweet. It is bitter, because we have to admit that we were wrong again. But it is sweet, because the fellowship between God and us that was suffered because of our sins have been restored with repentance.

When repentance is marked by the preceding characteristics, we are clear of guilt and sin. The stain of sin is gone! We can feel it, and others can see it!

E. THE COMFORT THAT LEADS TO JOY

2 Corinthians 7:13-16 Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 14 For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. 15 And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. 16 Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.

The experience of Titus in Corinth, and his report from there, are sure evidence that the Corinthians have had a change of mind.

Is Paul being sarcastic here? I don't think so. He is probably simply trying to encourage the Corinthians, showing them that he is convinced their repentance was genuine.

As a fellow Christian, I'd love hear from those who were backslidden or were in sin to say, "I have sinned and I am asking God's forgiveness for my sins." What a joy I get to have by simply hearing the words from a repented sinner like any one of us!

Even all the trouble Paul faced in his personal life, his relationship with God and with the Corinthians gave him down-deep comfort, full-to-the-brim joy. Good relationships will do that for you. They make you feel you can face anything.

For an example, when husband is going through tough times in business, the last thing he needs is his wife grills him at home. He doesn't need nagging, nor raking him over the coal for what she doesn't like. He needs his wife's faithful support. When wife is going through difficulties, the wife doesn't need her husband's "Deal-with-it-woman" attitude. What she need most is her husband's "I-am-right-here-for-you" signal from him and stands with her.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) We need our daily cleansing through the Word of God.

Without that, our spiritual bodies are going to start to bring serious stench to God's nostril.

2) A broken fellowship with God can be fixed with true repentance.

Nothing will happen without our repentance.

3) Comforting one another with words of encouragement is essential in a relationship between Christian brothers and sisters.

By our sinful nature, it is easier for us to say bad things before good ones to one another. But God expects us to do better than that.