

Godly Sorrow

Scripture Reading: II Corinthians 7:8-11

The Thanksgiving season is approaching. So, this may seem inappropriate to discuss at this time. But really, it is not. With God, joy and sorrow work together. Godly sorrow cuts a path that allows a spirit of joy and thanksgiving to move and operate in us. The goal is to separate “*the sorrow of the world*” from “*godly sorrow.*”

The portion of Paul’s letter that serves as our Scripture reading is referencing something that Paul dealt with in his first letter to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 5:1-13 cp. II Corinthians 1:21 – 2:11; 7:2-16). A brother in the church was living intimately with his father’s wife. The church was doing nothing about it – no correction, no intervention. The church teaches by what it tolerates. So, Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for teaching that it was okay to commit sexual sin like this. He told them what to do and they did it. In the second letter Paul commended them for their obedience. He also gave them instruction on how to forgive and restore the erring brother, who repented after the church corrected him. In that discussion Paul revealed two kinds of sorrows: godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world. Godly sorrow leads to repentance. The sorrow of the world is deadly (II Corinthians 7:10).

With godly sorrow, people sorrow towards God. They run to God, not from God. This kind of sorrow (II Corinthians 7:11) will bring positive action:

- Carefulness, diligence, earnestness
- Eagerness to clear yourselves – to vindicate yourselves
- Indignation and fear / alarm
- Strong desire, concern, zeal
- Revenge, vindication, punishment – readiness to see justice done

With the sorrow of the world, the above qualities are lacking. The sorrow of the world can express itself by the following feelings:

- Sorry for yourself, depression
- Shame and embarrassment before others
- Hating yourself, destructive and suicidal thoughts
- Hating the consequences of wrong that has been done – not necessarily hating the wrong itself

The sorrow of the world can also produce these actions:

- Withdrawal from others
- Hardening of the heart – self-excusing, self-justification, blaming others (including God), and anger towards others (including God)
- Distracting activities – doing other things to take attention away from the problem, trying to forget about what has been done, trying to make up for the wrong that has been done
- Self-punishment and / or suicide

Examples which illustrate the contrast between godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world:

- Peter (godly) – Matthew 26:69-75; John 21:1-19
- Judas (worldly) - Matthew 27:1-5; Acts 1:12-20
- King David (godly) – II Samuel 11:1 – 12:23 cp. Psalm 51
- King Saul (worldly) – I Samuel 15:1-31 (note vs. 30)
- Pharaoh (worldly) – Exodus 9:27-30,34

What to do when you are in a sinful situation:

- Don't lie to yourself. Be honest with yourself.
- Change your mind about what is wrong. – Repent before God.
- Agree with God – Confess to Him.
- Believe in God's forgiveness and cleansing – walk closely with Him.
- Strive to change thoughts, attitudes, and behavior that leads to such sin.
- Confess to anyone that you have wronged – apologize.
- If it is possible, make things right with others – make restitution.

Helpful Scripture:

- Psalm 10:1-13
- Psalm 36:1-4
- Psalm 38:1-18
- Psalm 51 cp. Psalm 34:18
- Isaiah 55:6-7
- Romans 3:19-26; 10:9-13; Acts 3:19 (for salvation)
- I John 1:5 – 2:1 (for the erring child of God)
- James 4:6-10; 5:16
- Another aspect of godly sorrow: grieving for the sins of others – sins that grieve God's Spirit. See Matthew 5:4; Ezekiel 9:4; Malachi 3:16-18.