

## 2Cor. 7:1-11

### The Good Effects of Godly Sorrow

*For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort – v. 11*

In the course of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles there were many anxious moments that Paul had to endure.

#### Examples:

The Thessalonians (Acts 17) – Paul had to flee the city prematurely – would their faith hold?

*1Thess. 3:6-8 But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

The Corinthians – different scenario but the same anxiousness. Paul had written a straightforward and stern letter to them. How would they respond? – {2Cor. 7:5-8}.

What had Paul done in that previous epistle to make them sorry? Basically what he had done was to apply the gospel of Christ to the problems they were confronting.

- With regard to divisions: *1Co 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and [that] there be no divisions among you; but [that] ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*
- With regard to grotesque immorality in the church (even by Gentile standards): *1Co 5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:*
- With regard to fornication: *1Co 6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

Lesson to be learned: Where the seed of God's word has taken root in the heart of sinners and brought forth true conversion – a right response of faith inevitably follows. Paul's dealings, you see, with the Corinthians in his first epistle had not been merely cordial dealings – they had been straight forward dealings regarding the corrections that were needed among them.

Had the gospel not taken root in their hearts it would have been easy for them to have responded carnally from feelings that were hurt and they might have had occasion to align themselves with the enemies of Paul by rejecting Paul's preaching of the gospel.

But as Prov. 9:9 tells us: *Give [instruction] to a wise [man], and he will be yet wiser: teach a just [man], and he will increase in learning.*

Or as the Psalmist says in Ps 141:5 *Let the righteous smite me; [it shall be] a kindness: and let him reprove me; [it shall be] an excellent oil, [which] shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also [shall be] in their calamities.*

The effect of Paul's first epistle, you see, is given to us v. 9 where he writes *for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.* V. 10 – *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

I like the way Young's Literal translation translates the phrase *godly sorrow*. The phrase reads: *sorrow toward God*.

- *For ye were made sorry toward God – v. 9*
- *For sorrow toward God – v. 10 worketh repentance etc.*

This can be noted as a mark of grace, then – the word of God or to make the application broader – the means of grace works sorrow toward God. The Lord's table is designed to create the same thing – sorrow toward God. And just as this sorrow, in the case of the Corinthians in 2Cor. 7 worked repentance to salvation not to be repented of – so in the words of institution that we read in 1Cor. 11 we make the application that godly sorrow should lead us to judge ourselves.

This was one of the problems at Corinth. They were not applying the means of grace toward their sin. They had become altogether careless toward sin. And that carelessness had reached such a point to where Paul informs them that many were weak and sickly and that many slept – the meaning being that God's chastisement had been upon the church of Corinth leading to weakness and sickness and even death.

The remedy for this chastisement from God is given in 1Cor. 11:31 – *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.* This is where godly sorrow leads a godly man – to judge himself – to deal with his own sin – to take it seriously enough to make corrections to his own life.

Our text reveals to us just how fervent the Corinthians became in their godly sorrow or their self-judgment. Look at how Paul describes their practice in v. 11 *For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*

There is not a trace of half-heartedness or cold indifference in this verse. Quite the contrary – Paul multiplies expressions of earnest zeal as he describes the effect of godly sorrow upon them. I would like, therefore, to look closer at this text this morning around the Lord's table and I want to be able to draw from this text:

**The Good Effects of Godly Sorrow and How those Effects are Produced by the Lord's Table.**

## I. The Effect Upon Our Understanding

*For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves... (v.11). At the end of v. 11 note also *In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.**

We are, by such language, brought into the courtroom – or more precisely brought before the judgment bar of God. In the first instance the word *clearing* makes reference to our defense. It's the word in the Greek from which we get the word *apologetics* which is that branch of theology that defends what we believe. One lexicon assigns this meaning to the word: *a reasoned statement or argument.*

This is why I say the term is making reference to our understanding or to our reason. In the case of the Corinthians I think the term would make reference to the action they carried out through Paul's instructions of excommunicating the man that had been guilty of grotesque sin.

But what I want to do this morning is to broaden the application and make it apply to the sin that we discover and judge in our own lives. The question that naturally arises is *how can we possibly defend or clear ourselves before God?* What hope do we have of making a reasoned statement or argument that could defend our sin?

And the answer is, of course, that we cannot frame such an argument. There is no defense for sin. The effect of the law of God upon every man whether he be Jew or Gentile according to Paul in Romans 3:19 is *that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

Every attempt to justify sin before God becomes futile. Adam may blame his wife, Eve, and Eve may blame the serpent, but at the end of the day God finds them both guilty of rebellion against God's word. Now it's true that sinners between themselves can become very shrewd and skillful when it comes to the matter of justifying sin. It seems that in our culture lawyers may pride themselves in their skills of manipulation that enable them to set guilty men free.

Children can be very cunning at times in defending their sin before their parents. Workers can be very cunning in defending their ways before their employers. It seems that politicians, in particular, are masters of the art of defending the indefensible. But none of this can apply toward God.

In the parable of the marriage feast (Mt. 22), the man who attempts to enter the feast without a wedding garment is found in the end to be speechless – i.e. there's no possible excuse that he can present to the host of the feast that could possibly justify his action of being present without a wedding garment.

So is this the case with sinners before God. There is no excuse for sin – for any sin. There are no excuses for our failures to measure up to God's law and there are no excuses for any transgression against God's law.

And yet – in His condescending grace God nevertheless invites us to reason with Him. Following one of the most vivid descriptions of man’s depravity in Isaiah 1 where sinful man is described as the whole head being sick and the whole heart faint – Isa 1:6 *From the sole of the foot even unto the head [there is] no soundness in it; [but] wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*

Following this description of man’s spiritual condition, however, a few verses later God invites man to reason with Him – Isa 1:18 *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: Can this be? Would God extend an invitation to totally depraved sinners to reason with Him? He does extend such an invitation but it’s important to know that the reasoning process has nothing to do with defending sin – it has, rather, everything to do with God’s gracious provision for our sin. And so the invitation continues *though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.**

What defense do we bring before God, then? We certainly do not attempt to excuse our sin but the way we reason with God is through the reasoning of the broken body and shed blood of Christ. This is the grounds, you see, for our sins being washed away and leaving us white as snow. That hymn that’s been sadly misused in our day expresses it well – *Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou biddest me come to Thee, O Lamb of God I come.*

Our plea is not based then upon the defense of our sin but rather it’s based on the confession of our sin and it’s based on God’s faithfulness to His own name and attributes so that on account of Christ’s broken body and shed blood *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

You see, then, how godly sorrow leads us to reason from the vantage point of God’s grace and the provision in that grace of God’s Son who gave Himself for us. Godly sorrow for sin addressed our understanding, then, and compels us to reason with God on the basis of the broken body and shed blood of His Son. Consider next:

## II. The Effect of Godly Sorrow Upon Our Attitude

Note the word from our text *indignation*. *For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed, after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation.*

I think it would be true to say that the argument presented by the broken body and shed blood of Christ should effect our attitude toward sin in such a way that we view sin with indignation which means displeasure.

Unfortunately such an attitude toward sin has become a rare thing in our day. We find it much more common to downplay sin or to sport with sin deceiving ourselves into thinking that the consequences for sin are not really all that serious.

And when the world seems to run after sin and the church seems to run after the world it makes it all the more easy for us to regard sin lightly. We tend to view it relatively in other words. In comparison to terrorist murderers and gang members who wreak havoc – what does my little sin amount to? – we reason. In comparison to greedy profit mongering corporations who bring in money hand over fist – what does my petty theft really amount to?

And all it takes in our culture to treat sin lightly is to find others that you feel are much worse than you. I drew from Lot's reasoning with the angels of the Lord last week when we did our study on beatitude about mourning for sin. You remember from Genesis 19 Lot's request to the angel who told him to flee to the mountains? Lot, instead, sought to negotiate with the angel in order to flee instead to the city of Zoar. Ge 19:20 *Behold now, this city [is] near to flee unto, and it [is] a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, ([is] it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.*

Can we not borrow from Lot's language in order to describe what our attitude often is toward sin? – *it is a little one: is it not a little one?*

The argument, however, from the broken body and shed blood of Christ puts sin into a different perspective. That so called little sin, you see, brought the fury of God's wrath upon His Son. That sin that you may regard as being a thing of little consequence brought the lashes of the Roman whip to Christ's back and pressed a crown of thorns into His brow and drove nails into Christ's hands and feet. That insignificant sin planted the cross of Christ in the ground and left the Son of God suspended between heaven and earth.

Here is where we learn God's attitude toward sin – see what He subjected His Son to. Here is where we learn Christ's attitude toward sin – see from His head, His hands, His feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down. And when the veil of darkness is drawn over the scene from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> hour and we hear Christ's cry – *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* – then you should know and appreciate that God had forsaken His Son because our iniquities had been imputed to His Son and God would not spare His only begotten Son in spite of who He was when once He stood in our place condemned as our covenant head.

The broken body and shed blood of Christ, then, teach us what our attitude toward sin should be. We should be indignant against it – when we discover it in any form in our own minds and hearts and words and action. We'll see this more vividly as we progress in our studies on the sermon on the mount. Christ says later in Mt. 5 that it's better to pluck out your eye than to have that eye offend thee. It's better to cut off your right hand than to have that hand commit sin. I don't believe Christ is speaking literally in those verses but what He is calling for is a holy indignation against sin.

Sin, after all, is what condemns us to hell. Sin is what cost us paradise originally. Sin is what brings guilt and misery to a lost world today and sin is what brought all the sufferings of Christ upon Him. May the memory of Christ's broken body and shed blood stir our hearts to great indignation toward the sins that we too readily excuse.

But not only does the broken body and shed blood of Christ effect our attitude toward sin but it should also effect our attitude toward Christ Himself. Would you note that after indignation, Paul makes reference in our text to *fear*.

I would take this fear to refer to the fear of God which is the beginning of all knowledge and wisdom – so we're told in Proverbs and in the Psalms. It is that fear that contains an element of fright – for it is frightful to contemplate the condemnation of sin. It is frightful to contemplate the judgment that we deserved. But this fright is tempered into reverence when we behold Christ dying in our place.

Godly sorrow for sin, then, moves us to bow our hearts at the foot of the cross. Notice the word from our text *revenge*. *Yea what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea what revenge*. The word means full punishment and has the sense of vindication or acquittal. The broken body and shed blood of Christ, you see, communicates to us that full punishment has taken place. This is something that you and I could never meet ourselves. Punishment, you see, will never be full to those who are condemned forever for sin.

The condemned sinner might wish that it were so and there are Christians, I'm sure, that even wonder why hell is for ever. And one of the reasons that hell is for ever is that sin is for ever. Sin does not stop in hell, you see. In hell God's restraining grace is lifted from the sinner and in hell he reaches the full potential of his depravity. Part of the punishment for sin is to be given over to sin.

But in Christ we find full punishment. In Christ we find One who could not only endure such punishment but in His power and love could prevail through the wrath of God to announce that His atonement was finished. Does this not move your heart to bow before Him in reverence? Do you not find your attitude toward sin and toward Christ effected by the godly sorrow that the means of grace produces?

And so we find our understanding effected by the godly sorrow wrought within us. We find our attitude effected by that same godly sorrow – an attitude that moves us to great indignation toward sin and great reverence toward Christ who died for our sins. Consider finally:

### III. The Effect of Godly Sorrow on Our Walk

This brings me to the term that I passed over in the beginning of the verse. *For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you.*

I dare say that following this episode in which the Corinthians had failed to discipline a member who was guilty of great sin the Corinthians undoubtedly exercised greater care and scrutiny when it came to dealing with sin in the church.

And so it follows that the broken body and shed blood of Christ should lead us to greater care when it comes to our walk with Christ. *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise* – Paul writes in Eph. 5:15.

I can never forget the illustration given by our brethren in Ulster that describes such a circumspect walk. They tell how in Northern Ireland it's not an unusual thing to see high stone fences running along people's property. The tops of these stone fences are very jagged, being made up of sharp stone edges.

It's not uncommon to see cats walking along the tops of these stone walls but because of the jagged edges along the top of the wall one might see a cat that takes each step very gingerly – testing the step he's about to take with his paw to see if he's able to plant his paw in each particular place before he puts his weight behind his step.

So should the Christian take great care to make sure that each step he takes will be pleasing to His Lord. If his understanding has been effected by the gospel of Christ and he knows and appreciates the high price that was paid for his redemption then he will not take a step in his walk without first gaining the confidence that his next step will be in keeping with what is pleasing to God.

After all he desires to please Christ. His vehement desire now is to walk with the One who loved him and shed His own blood for his soul. He sees and appreciates what sin would have done to him and what it did do to Christ so now he walks circumspectly – being careful about what he allows or disallows with an aim in both to glorify his Redeemer.

I think verse 1 in the chapter we've been studying summarizes this entire process. *2Co 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

This is what we ought to accomplish around the Lord's table today. We come for cleansing and we come to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. There is a sorrowful element to our practice. The broken body and shed blood, you see, do bring sorrow to our hearts. Thankfully it's godly sorrow and godly sorrow is beneficial sorrow. It effects our understanding, our attitude, and our actions. It works in us in such a way that our indignation toward our own sins increases as well as our vehement desire and reverence toward Christ.

May these elements accomplish in us, then, all that they are designed to accomplish.