

# GODLY SORROW

## 2 Corinthians 7:10

### INTRODUCTION

- In the 1980s the “self-esteem” movement postulated the idea that man’s emotional problems could be solved by developing a high view of one’s self, and repeating affirmations such as “I love me” and “I am special”
- This cult of self-love has since grown and developed to the point where now every sinful and perverse lifestyle must be “affirmed”, and such people must be given “safe spaces” to shield them from anything that may trigger negative feelings about themselves
- Many modern-day churches have adopted the world’s philosophy and preach a positive-only message that “God wants you to be happy”
- But God’s will for us is not so much *happiness*, but *holiness*
- We are called to self-denial, not self-fulfilment
- We ought not to be happy in our sins, but rather mourn over them (James 4:9)
- The Lord came to “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21)
- When God brings salvation to a sinner, it involves deliverance and liberation from sin
- Jesus Christ came to save us *judicially* from sin, in making atonement for us by his blood
- But he came also to save us *practically* from sin, that we might be holy in all our lives
- The work of repentance is necessary in bringing about this transformation in our relationship to sin
- The repentant no longer loves sin, but hates it and desires to be free from it entirely
- Last week we considered conviction of sin – the God-given understanding that we are guilty sinners before God
- Though most sinners stifle conviction, some will take to heart this new-found understanding of sin, and as the reality sinks in, godly sorrow begins to work in them
- While conviction and godly sorrow do not in themselves constitute repentance, they are necessary elements in bringing repentance to the heart and life
- Paul had written a severe letter to the Corinthians, rebuking them for their sin
- After writing it, he was very anxious as to how the church would receive his letter, but when eventually Titus reached Paul to tell him of the church’s positive response, Paul was comforted, and wrote this letter of 2 Corinthians to them
- This description of the Corinthians’ grief for their sin and their wholehearted turning from it provides us with a picture of what godly sorrow is and how it leads to repentance and salvation

## I. IT IS A SORROW OF THE LORD'S SPIRIT

- A. It has God as its author
  - 1. "Godly sorrow" here is literally "sorrow according to God"
  - 2. It cannot be produced by the efforts of man, but only by the grace of God
  - 3. The Holy Spirit, by means of the word of God (v.8), awakens and reproves the sinner (John 16:8)
- B. It has God as its object
  - 1. The chief focus of the sinner who feels this grief is not his fellow man, or his present circumstances, but *God* (Psalm 51:4)
  - 2. The sinner sorrows for sin because he is convinced of the great evil which is in it, and how hateful and contrary it is to the pure nature of God
- C. It is approved by God
  - 1. It conforms to his will and mind, concerning the means of reconciling sinners to himself
  - 2. It is the proper and intended effect of God's truth upon the heart of sinners
  - 3. It is the result of our views of sin agreeing with God's views of sin
- D. It leads to God
  - 1. Other types of sorrow lead sinners away from God, and finally to death and destruction
  - 2. But godly sorrow leads us to the foot of the cross, as broken, helpless offenders, with no other recourse than to cast ourselves upon the mercy of God in Christ

## II. IT IS A SORROW THAT LAMENTS SIN

- A. Throughout the Scripture, repentance is associated with deep grief and mourning over sin
  - 1. Job said, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:6)
  - 2. Ahab "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly" (1 Kings 21:27)
  - 3. Christ said of Tyre and Sidon, "they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matthew 11:21)
  - 4. When Israel in repentance receives their Messiah, they will "mourn" and be in "bitterness" (Zechariah 12:10)
  - 5. The repentant is described as having a "broken heart" and "contrite spirit" (Psalm 34:18; 51:17)
- B. Godly sorrow flows from being confronted with the horror of our sin

1. The world exhorts us not to be sorry for our sin, but to be proud of them
  - a. The ungodly impudently broadcast their sin before the world without any shame
  - b. "The unjust knoweth no shame" (Zephaniah 3:5; cf. Jeremiah 6:15)
2. But this pride is shattered when God brings conviction and godly sorrow to our hearts
3. It is a sorrow not only for the sins I have committed, but the sinner I am
4. It is to confess not merely, "I have done wickedly," but, "I am wicked"
5. It cries out not, "O wretched things I have done," but, "O wretched man that I am!"
6. Consider these biblical terms that describe each of us in our natural state, without God's grace:
  - a. Vile (Job 40:4)
  - b. Wicked (Isaiah 55:7)
  - c. Unrighteous (Isaiah 55:7)
  - d. Evil (Matthew 12:34)
  - e. Corrupt (Psalm 14:1)
7. The heresy of Pelagianism (named after Pelagius, a fifth century British monk), denies original sin and teaches that man has the ability to choose good over evil without God's grace
8. But the Scriptures teach that we are not *partially* depraved, or even *mostly* depraved, we are *totally* depraved sinners (Romans 3:10–18)
9. *"It has often appeared to me, that if God should mark iniquity against me, I should appear the very worst of all mankind, of all that have been, since the beginning of the world to this time, and that I should have by far the lowest place in hell. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite. When I look into my heart and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss, infinitely deeper than hell."* (Jonathan Edwards)

### III. IT IS A SORROW THAT LEADS TO SALVATION

- A. There is a worldly sorrow that works death
  1. It sorrows over the consequences of sin – sorry for getting caught
  2. It looks to *self* and pities *self* rather than looking to God and grieving over offending him
  3. It seeks deliverance from the present suffering, rather than the polluting sin
  4. It may display outward signs of contrition, but does not reach the heart (Joel 2:13)

5. It does not bring about a lasting change in behaviour
6. It is distinguished by how people deal with it – drugs, alcohol, anti-depressants, self-help, hypnotherapy, suicide – anything and everything except yielding to God
7. Biblical examples include Esau (Hebrews 12:17), Pharaoh (Exodus 9:27), the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:22), Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:3-5)

**B. But godly sorrow brings life**

1. Just as the pain receptors in our body alerts us to a physical problem that requires treatment, so the emotional pain of godly sorrow alerts us to the problem in our soul that only Christ can heal
2. Godly sorrow leads to “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18), where the sinner turns from his sin in disgust and flees to Christ for forgiveness and cleansing
3. Biblical examples include David (Psalm 51), Peter (Matthew 26:75) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:21)

**IV. IT IS A SORROW THAT IS LARGELY SEEN**

**A. This divinely-wrought grief for sin can be observed in its effects (2 Corinthians 5:11)**

1. Carefulness – a diligence, earnestness and haste to leave those evils that offend God
2. Clearing of yourselves – anxiety to show disapproval of sin
3. Indignation – a new hatred of the sin that was formerly cherished
4. Fear – a watchful concern that the sin may no longer be given place in the heart and life, and thereby invoke the chastisement of God (2 Corinthians 7:1)
5. Vehement desire – an earnest longing to be preserved and freed from all sin
6. Zeal – a divine fervour to go to war against sin (cf. Revelation 3:19)
7. Revenge – self-castigation, crucifying the flesh and its lusts

**CONCLUSION**

1. Have you ever fallen on your face in grief and desolation before God and wept bitterly for your sins against him?
2. As the Corinthians demonstrated their sorrow for sin and repentance by changed lives, is there clear evidence of a change in your life as a result of loathing and leaving your sin?
3. As God generally uses human means to provoke conviction and godly sorrow in the heart, we must be willing to cause godly sorrow in others by helping them to recognize their sin
4. And we must also be willing to humbly receive the rebuke of others when we sin, allowing that godly sorrow to perform its good work of repentance in our lives