

Godly Grief ... Leads to Salvation

Small Group Follow-up Study for 2 Corinthians 7:8-13a

RE-READ

[8] For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. [9] As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. [10] For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. [11] For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. [12] So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. [13] Therefore we are comforted.

RECAP

Paul is comforted because his severe letter—his confrontational letter—hit its target. It produced a godly grief leading to repentance, fresh earnestness in the Corinthians' relationship with him. Of course, this outcome was by no means certain when Paul sent out his letter. Indeed, anytime someone's sin is made plain to their eyes, you don't know where that's going to go. They could get angry, they could shrug their shoulders in complete indifference or they could shed tears. And if they shed tears, the question is, "Is that a godly grief or is it only a worldly grief and how do you know?" How do you know?

According to Paul, "[W]orldly grief produces death." As Philip Edgcumbe Hughes notes, Paul makes use of a similar concept in Romans 7:13 where he speaks of sin as producing death. The point?

[Worldly grief] is not something distinct from sin; on the contrary, it partakes of the very essence of sin. It is not sorrow because of the heinousness of sin as rebellion against God, but sorrow because of the painful and unwelcome consequences of sin. Self is its central point; and self is also the central point of sin. Thus the sorrow of the world manifests itself in self-pity rather than in contrition and turning to God for mercy. The sorrow of the world may be very bitter and intense, like that of Esau who sorrowed with many tears over his lost birthright but found no place of repentance (Heb. 12:16f.).

Godly grief, on the other hand, produces a repentance that lead to salvation. That phrase "godly grief" can more literally be rendered "grief according to God." And *it is* according to God insofar as the sin that one is grieving was committed *against* God. When you or I begin to grieve over our sin for *God's* sake, that's when repentance is born and it is repentance (a full and complete change of mind regarding our sin) that leads to salvation. It leads to salvation: it leads to justification, it leads to sanctification and it leads to glorification. This is why the first of Martin Luther's *95 Theses* read: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance."

RESPOND

1. What caught your attention from Sunday's sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over? What questions did Sunday's sermon raise that remain unanswered in your mind?
2. Succinctly, then, how may we distinguish between a *godly* sorrow for sin and a *worldly* sorrow?
3. How do you tend to respond when your sin is made plain to your eyes? Do you get angry and blow up at the person confronting you? Do you shrug your shoulders in indifference? Or do you grieve over your sin? And, if you grieve over your sin, do you grieve over it because it was *against* God?
4. What can we do on our end to push toward a godly grief? What sort of considerations might we entertain to move an otherwise worldly grief in the right direction (i.e. toward a godly grief)?
5. Consider the seven characteristics of true repentance found in verse 11. Which of these do you struggle with the most? Why? How can we help one another in the difficult task of repenting?
6. How does this text relate to the idea of potentially wasting your pain?
7. Given our discussion tonight, how can we be praying for ourselves and for our church?