

Godly Sorrow

An American minister, Gardiner Spring, once said regarding godly sorrow, “It is one thing to mourn for sin because it exposes us to Hell, and another to mourn for it because it is an infinite evil; one thing to mourn for it because it is injurious to ourselves, and another thing to mourn for it because it is wrong and offensive to God. It is one thing to be terrified; another, to be humbled.” Self-centered focus makes it difficult for us to feel godly sorrow, and so it becomes difficult to repent of our sins in any lasting way. By definition, godly sorrow is a remorse that grieves what our sins have cost God, but if the things we meditate on have to do mostly with our own victories and losses, then whatever mourning we do will be worldly, not godly. To turn away from sin decisively, we have to concentrate on things higher than ourselves.

Undoubtedly, godly sorrow is an incredibly stronger force than worldly sorrow. In 2 Corinthians 7:11, Paul describes how it had affected the church at Corinth: “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.” A sorrow that is powerful enough to produce these things is much more than a mood. It is a deep-down disturbance that recognizes what is really wrong with sin, and this recognition continues to govern our conduct long after the pain of sin has withered away from our lives. Paul is an example of this by what he says in 1 Corinthians 15:9-10, years after he had repented of the actions of his former self: “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

The quality of one’s character is indicated by what affects that person. As long as their own situations are comfortable, most people are not disturbed by anything at all. Some people, however, have a character that upholds a higher standard. While their own situations may still be comfortable, these people are disturbed by the wrong that is in the world, and they try to make the world a better place by standing up to social injustice and so forth. But beyond that, an even higher character is possessed by those who are bothered most of all by the evil of their own sins. These types of people are the unselfish, God-centered people who, once they realize they have done wrong, will grieve at how wrong they were, not the pain of the sin. The self-pitying sorrow that is produced from a worldly mindset will lead to death, but the sorrow that comes from above will lead us to God Himself. Strive to embody this type of character. As Christians, we should always attempt to have a heart that is sensitive to the matters of our salvation.

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