

## “Godly Sorrow Worketh Repentance”

“For though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret it: though I did regret it (for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though but for a season), I now rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye were made sorry unto repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly sort, that ye might suffer loss by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret, but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

Some might accuse Paul of “double talk” in this section: he was sorry, but he wasn’t sorry! Yet there is no double talk — he was sorry for the feelings they must have had when they read his letter. Yet sorry as he was for that, he wasn’t sorry because their sorrow was of the right sort; it was godly sorrow and brought about the repentance that was necessary for the Corinthians to be right with God. This progress from sin to forgiveness for the sinner should be viewed in this way: sin — God’s goodness — godly sorrow — repentance — fruits of repentance — salvation.

All sin, whether against another or ourselves, is a crime against God for sin is transgression of law (1 John 3:4). Potiphar’s wife attempted to seduce Joseph to commit adultery with her but although fornication is a sin against one’s own body (1 Cor. 6:18), Joseph recognized the act as a sin against God (Gen. 39:9).

Paul wrote, “Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). God’s goodness allows us time to repent, but more important, the goodness of God contrasted with the evil we have done, sets in motion the godly sorrow which brings repentance about.

Paul spoke of “godly sorrow” and “worldly sorrow” indicating that worldly sorrow works death. As is so commonly expressed, worldly sorrow is not sorrow for the thing that was done, it is sorrow that we were caught in the act of it. On the other hand, godly sorrow, provoked by the goodness of God, is a genuine regret for the deed we did, that we have grieved God by our lawlessness. The sins of the antediluvians caused God to repent that He had made man — it grieved Him at His heart (Gen. 6:5-6).

Godly sorrow produces repentance, a change of mind. In Jesus’ short parable of two sons, He said, “A man had two sons; and he came to the first and said, Son, go work today in the vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented and went” (Mt. 22:28f). Although not specifically stated, one may properly conclude that both the goodness of the father and godly sorrow on the part of the son brought about the son’s repentance.

Repentance sometimes is confused with its fruit. Often we identify the son’s “going to work in the vineyard” after he had said he would not as his repentance. We are mistaken to so confuse the “going” as “repentance”. The “going” was the fruit of repentance; the proof that repentance had indeed transpired. John commanded the

Jews to “bring forth fruit worthy of repentance” (Mt. 3:8) and the going into the vineyard to work was the fruit of this son’s repentance.

The Corinthians had tolerated an intolerable deed. A brother there had taken his father’s wife; a deed unheard of even among the Gentiles (1 Cor. 5:1). The brethren should have mourned and withdrawn themselves from the sinful brother, but they were rather “puffed up” and did nothing to correct him in his sin (1 Cor. 5:2). Paul’s letter jarred sensibility into them and they immediately set about to correct the evil they had beforehand tolerated. They had both repented and borne the fruit of it. So Paul rejoiced. He regretted having to use the harshness he did and the sorrow and regret it produced in them. But he rejoiced that they had a sensitive heart and could be moved by godly sorrow to repent of their neglect. Remember, if we can repent, God can forgive!

Jim McDonald