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Godly Grief

2 CORINTHIANS 7:8-11

Introduction

1. Those of you who are parents may remember a time in the lives of your children when you had to discipline one or more of them severely for their own good.
2. Though it was not a task that you looked forward to carrying out, still it was one which you knew needed to be done.
3. Why did you do it? Because you loved your children and you knew that if you didn't address the behavior when you did, it would only get worse.
4. This is what happened between Paul and the saints in the church at Corinth.
5. While in Ephesus, Paul received word that things had gone wrong in Corinth as a result of some false teachers.
6. He made a quick visit to Corinth hoping to improve the situation, but things went from bad to worse, because the brethren did not defend him against the false teachers — It nearly broke his heart.
7. Paul returned to Ephesus and wrote a scathing letter of correction which he then sent to Corinth by way of Titus.
8. He was so worried about the outcome that he was unable to accomplish anything at Troas, even though the Lord had opened a door for him there (2 Corinthians 2:12).
9. Paul left the work in Troas and went to Macedonia (i.e. Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) in search of Titus.
10. When he finally found Titus, he learned the trouble was over, the breach had been healed and all was well.
11. This brought Paul much relief and joy.

12. Paul then sat down and wrote this letter which we know as 2 Corinthians.
13. In it, as we will see tonight, he spoke of the sorrow he had caused, his attitude toward their sorrow and what it ultimately produced in the church there in Corinth.

Slide 2**A. PAUL'S DISTASTEFUL TASK**

“For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.” (2 Corinthians 7:8–9, NASB95)

1. Paul had mixed feelings about the sorrow which his letter had caused those in the church in Corinth.
2. On the one hand, he did “not regret it,” but on the other hand he “did regret it” (v. 8).
3. Just as we as parents did not enjoy disciplining our children, but knew that it was necessary.
4. Paul also did not enjoy the sorrow (grief) which he brought the Corinthians by his letter.
5. This letter could have backfired on Paul.
 - a. The Corinthians could have engaged in some hypocritical vindication.
 - b. They also could have attacked Paul questioning his behavior as an apostle.
6. Thankfully, the brethren in Corinth were made sorrowful . . .
 - a. “to the point of repentance”
 - b. “according to the will of God”
7. Because it had been Paul’s goal all along to bring the Corinthians to

repentance, and because his strategy had worked, he could “now rejoice.”

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B. TWO TYPES OF GRIEF (SORROW)

“For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.”
(2 Corinthians 7:10, NASB95)

1. Worldly Grief (Sorrow)

- a. Our sorrow is focused on ourselves, not God.
- b. We are more concerned with how this will hurt us, than with how we have hurt God and our relationship with Him.
- c. We are embarrassed at the fact we were caught.
- c. We are not sorrowful because of the sin we have committed, but for the consequences which we will suffer as a result.
- d. Our goal is to figure out a way not to get caught the next time.
 - 1) We do well to remember something which Moses said to the Israelites over 2,400 years ago, “be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).
 - 2) Also what Jesus said to His disciples in John 12:2, “But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.”
- e. Because there is no true repentance, “the sorrow of the world produces death.”
- f. In his letter to the saints in Rome, the apostle Paul wrote. . .
 - 1) “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).
 - 2) “For the mind set on the flesh is death” (Romans 8:6).
- g. This is the “form of grief that drains away life and joy, and brings death only very, very slowly. It is in this grief of hopelessness that the world

without Christ lives and dies.”¹

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2. Godly Grief (Sorrow)

- a. This is sorrow “according to the will of God” — sorrow directed toward God.
- b. David expressed this kind of sorrow following his sins concerning Bathsheba and her husband Uriah (Psalm 51:4).

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“Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.”

(Psalm 51:4, NASB95)

- c. In godly sorrow, we are more concerned with God than with ourselves.
- d. Godly sorrow “produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation” (v. 10).
- e. I think that the apostle John touched on this to some extent in the beginning of his first letter (1 John 1:8-9).

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“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8–9, NASB95)

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C. WHAT GODLY GRIEF (SORROW) PRODUCES WITHIN US

¹ Seifrid, Mark A. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Second Letter to the Corinthians*. Edited by D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2014.

“For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.” (2 Corinthians 7:11, NASB95)

1. “What earnestness” (diligence)
 - a. Instead of indifference, the Corinthians were eager to clear themselves of the guilt in which they were involved.
2. “What vindication”
 - a. Before, the Corinthians had been apathetic in their complicity against Paul.
 - b. Now, they sought to prove their loyalty to him.
3. “What indignation”
 - a. The Corinthians angry with the offender.
 - b. They were also angry with themselves for allowing this scandal to go unchecked within the church.
 - b. They realized that it was an affront to the holy Name of God.
4. “What fear”
 - a. They were afraid of God’s judgment because they had sinned against a holy God.
 - b. They were also fearful of Paul as God’s divinely delegated authority to come to them “with a rod” (1 Corinthians 4:21) as the messenger of God’s judgment.
5. “What longing”
 - a. They longed to make things right with Paul.
 - b. They realized that he was the one who first brought the gospel to them.
 - c. They hoped to see the restoration of their former relationship of trust and affection.

6. "What zeal"
 - a. For Paul (cf. v. 7) and the honoring of his apostolic authority.
 - b. They were eager to reject those intruders who had sought to usurp his authority.
 - c. For imitating Paul's example in giving themselves to the cause of Christ.
7. "What avenging of wrong"
 - a. They were determined to see justice done by bringing person to task for what he had done.
 - b. They wanted to put their house in order (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5, 13).

Conclusion

1. At the end of verse 11, we find Paul saying to the Corinthians, "In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter" (2 Corinthians 7:11b).
2. Godly grief had brought great repentance among the Christians in Corinth.
3. But what did this godly grief do for the apostle Paul?
4. It comforted him (v. 13).
5. You and I can only experience this comfort when we have caring hearts which are directed at others.
6. It is a comfort which joyously wells up within us when others spiritually prosper.
7. Let me encourage you tonight.
 - a. Invest your life in the lives of your brothers and sisters here in this congregation.
 - b. Then go outside this building and invest your life in the lives of those in this community — let your light shine!