

“The Sorrow That Secures Salvation”
II Corinthians 7:4-16

To say, “I am sorry” is not enough. Yet every person who has secured God’s salvation has been sorry for their sin. It is important that we know the kind of sorrow that secures salvation since there is so much at stake.

Paul’s experience with the Corinthians provides us some very helpful insights into the nature of this sorrow. Open sin had found its way into the fellowship of the Corinthian church. One man had openly taken his father’s wife to live with her. This was in defiance of clear teachings of the Holy Scriptures as well as the moral standards of the community. Paul was their spiritual father and teacher. When he heard of the transgression, he wrote a stern letter calling for action to be taken. Evidently, to the surprise of Paul, the letter was received as a word from the Lord. It produces in the church a deep sorrow, the kind that secures salvation from the Lord.

When Paul received word through Titus of this true sorrow for their sin, he wrote this paragraph to them. In the paragraph we can see the clear marks of the sorrow that secures God's salvation and forgiveness. When you say, "I am sorry" in this way, great benefits will follow. Is this the way you have been saying, "I am sorry"?

I. THE SORROW THAT SECURES SALVATION IS A GODLY SORROW.

"Godly sorrow is in contrast to the sorrow "of the world". It is important that we know the difference.

The sorrow of the world is a very natural sorrow over the consequences of one's actions. It is a deep remorse that things turned out the way they did. The center of the concern of this sorrow is "self". The person is concerned about what has happened to "me". Judas is the classic example of this kind of sorrow. When he realized what he had done in betraying the Lord Jesus, he went into deep remorse. He became aware that he acted very foolishly, that he had been used by the Evil One. But his concern focused on what the consequences would be for him, and what it would mean to himself, and not open the very nature of his crime against the Lord Jesus himself.

The pastor often encounters this kind of sorrow in the counseling room. A man comes with bitter tears over the consequences of his affair, He is broken-hearted over the shame that has come upon him as others have found out about the affair. He is really sorry that he has lost his wife and children as a consequence of the affair. He will weep until he wets the carpet of the pastor's study, but this does mean that he will secure God's forgiveness for the affair. This may be nothing more than the sorrow after the world.

"Godly sorrow" has a different focus. The focus is not upon self, but upon God and others. This sorrow is directed toward God. It involves a deep sorrow over what the deed has done to God. The Corinthians were grieved over the manner in

which they had offended Holy God. The knowledge that they had violated the clear teachings of His word, and brought sorrow to His heart, broke their hearts. You find an example of this in the experience of King David. When confronted with the nature of his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah, David said to God, "Against thee, and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight." Contrast this to the sorrow of the man who weeps over the outcome of his affair in the pastor's study. He is sorry that he has lost his family, not that he has offended God. He is sorry that he has hurt his own reputation, not that he has hurt God's reputation. Godly sorrow goes a lot deeper than this.

So when you are looking for the sorrow that leads to salvation, you must look a lot deeper. You must look for more than tears. Esau shed many tears over his foolish blunder in selling his birthright, but he never recovered the birthright. His tears were only an expression of his sorrow over the consequences of his act, not over the way his sin had been an offence to Holy God. It was only remorse not true sorrow for sin.

II. THE SORROW THAT SECURES SALVATION LEADS TO REPENTANCE

This is the thrust of this passage. The only sorrow that leads to salvation is that which produces genuine repentance in the life. This sorrow is contrasted with the sorrow of the world at this point.

The sorrow of the world leads to death. "But the sorrow of the world worketh death." "Worketh" is an intensive word. It indicates that the result is achieved or worked out. The result in this case is death. Paul may have had Judas in mind when he wrote this. Judas knew great remorse over his crime against Jesus, but it did not produce repentance. He did not seek the Lord Jesus to seek His forgiveness, rather he went to the priests to cast the money down in shame, and then he went out to destroy his own life. It was remorse that led to death. This kind of sorrow is destructive to everything that is good and worthwhile. It never secures the salvation of the Lord.

The right kind of sorrow over sin leads to repentance. This gives us some helpful insight into the nature of repentance. Some have wrongfully equated repentance with sorrow. While there will never be true repentance without sorrow, sorrow by itself is not repentance. Repentance means to change the mind. We might understand it as a basic change of attitude. In this case it is a basic change of attitude toward God and toward sin that has been committed. In the case that is before us, the Corinthians sorrowfully accepted the judgment of God upon their actions. They readily admitted that they had been guilty of violating his moral law. They readily admitted that they deserved to be the objects of his judgment upon their sin. They, however, turned to God to seek his mercy. In doing this they turned their back upon their shameful behavior to forsake it. This is true repentance.

We must be careful at this point. We must not be deceived. We Must have more than just sorrow if we are to be assured of God's salvation. This sorrow must be

allowed to work itself out into true repentance. it must be allowed to bring us to a merciful God with contrite confession and a plea for mercy. It must prompt us to pray with repentant David, "Blot out my transgressions." We must be made to cry, "Cleanse me" with the broken-hearted king. There can be no salvation from the Lord until there has been repentance. Jesus declared, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." Paul declared that God had commanded all men everywhere to repent. Have you repented of your sin, or just been remorseful? Have you accepted responsibility for the sin, and sought the forgiveness of God? Have you abandoned the sin because it is repulsive in the eyes of Holy God, and because it is offensive to Him? This is the sorrow that secures salvation.

III. THE SORROW THAT SECURES SALVATION PRODUCES GOOD FRUIT

The experience to which the Apostle refers had transformed the Corinthian church. When he confronted them with their spiritual error, they were so grieved that it led to repentance. That the repentance was real was evident from the changes that were made in their conduct. he writes, "For behold this self same thing, that he sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you." "Carefulness" can be translated earnestness, or diligence. Instead of leading to despair, as worldly sorrow does, it leads them to become diligent in their responsibilities toward the Apostle and toward their church. "Yes, what clearing of yourselves". This indicates that they set out to make amends at once. They began to take their behavior as it affected others seriously, They were intent upon self-vindication. "Yes, what indignation." They were indignant with themselves. They were through with attempts to place blame on others for their behavior. Rather, they were hard on themselves in the matter. "Yea, what fear." This probably refers to a reverence toward God. This sorrow produced in them such a reverence for God, such a respect for him that they did not want to incur his wrath. "Yea, what vehement desire." This is doubtlessly a reference to their desire to see Paul again. The barriers between them and Paul were now removed. They sent an urgent message through Titus of their deep desire to see the Apostle again. This is a certain fruit of real repentance. "Yea, what zeal." Probably a zeal to promote the honor of Paul. Where before they were putting him down, now they are zealous in putting him in a place of honor. "Yea, what revenge." The word means a commitment to do justice. This experience produces in them such a commitment to see that everyone is fair and right. "In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." Their behavior made clear that the sorrow was the kind that secures the salvation of the Lord.

The sorrow for sin that does not bear such fruit is suspect. There is good reason to doubt that it is the kind that secures the salvation which we all desire. You can look for the fruit in the way in which the person relates to sin. There will be a new awareness of just how terrible sin really is, and new commitment. to avoid it at all cost. They will no longer be casual about anything that offends God. The fruit will be seen in their relationships that offends God. The fruit will be seen in their relationships that offends God. The fruit will be seen in their relationships with others. There will cease to be attempts to blame others for their failures,

and will be a new openness toward others, a new respect for others. So much of the sorrow that I have encountered across the years had not produced this kind of fruit.

This is the kind of fruit that John the Baptist demanded in his day. He refused baptism to those who did not have the fruit of repentance. Just tears were not enough. He wanted evidence that some changes had been made in their lives.

CONCLUSION

This indicates to us then that there is a good sorrow and that there is a bad sorrow. The sorrow over wrong that does not lead to repentance is bad. All that it produces in the life will be death. But the sorrow that is right will be a good thing. Indeed, Paul states, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." "Not to be repented of" means literally "without regret." When one looks back upon this kind of sorrow, he will be made to thank God. He will know that it made him what God wanted him to be, and drew him into a position from which he could receive God's salvation. Do you have this kind of sorrow?