



# Godly and Worldly Sorrow

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## Godly Sorrow

“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner” (2 Cor. 7:9). In his former Epistle the Apostle had sharply rebuked the Corinthians for sins which had not only been committed by them but tolerated among them. Though it be far from a pleasant task, yet it is the bounden duty of the ministers of the Gospel to rebuke sin when it is found in those under their charge. “Preach the Word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). In this instance it pleased God to bless the faithful admonition of His servant, so that those to whom he wrote had been brought to mourn over and right their wrongs. It is to this repenting of theirs that Paul here alludes, in the course of which he draws an important distinction between *carnal* and *spiritual* sorrowing over sin, a distinction which it is most essential we should duly note and take to heart.

“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance.” The preacher takes no more delight when he witnesses the anguish of those who are under conviction of sin than does the surgeon when he inflicts pain on his patients. The servants of Christ experience no pleasure in looking upon the distress of their hearers: it is only because the sinner’s sorrow is a hopeful sign of his return to God and of his future happiness as the outcome, that they rejoice at such fruits of their labours. A parent, when he sees his child weeping because of his offenses, sincerely rejoices however much he sympathizes in his grief. So, too, was the Apostle made happy when he perceived that the Corinthians had

sorrowed to good effect, namely, unto repentance or reformation of conduct. Here is proof that evangelical repentance is not only a change of heart, but a transformation of life as well.

“Ye sorrowed to repentance” distinguishes two things which are often confounded. Sorrow for sin and repentance are by no means identical. Sorrow for sin may be awakened in a man, or even in an assembly, yet without any real or lasting benefit therefrom. There is a grief (from wounded pride) which produces resentment and anger against the one who reproves our wicked ways. There is a sorrow (aggravated by Satan) which results in nothing but melancholy and despair. Sorrow in itself is not repentance; neither is remorse, self-condemnation, nor external reformation. True, these are all the attendants and consequences; but repentance itself is a turning from sin to holiness. In the case here before us the Apostle rejoiced over a sorrow in the Corinthians which was followed by a putting away of those evils for which he had reproved them.

“Ye sorrowed to repentance.” Here, then, is a statement which supplies us with an invaluable criterion by means of which the quality of all real and lasting sorrow may be estimated. Grief may arise, and even reach a passionate extreme, and yet be as unproductive of any transforming effect upon its subjects as the summer dew upon the rock. Such is a self-allaying and not a self-abasing sorrow. There is a sorrowing over folly and its consequences which is nothing more than self-pity, and remorse is ever blind toward Heaven. The vital question, then, is, has our sorrow for sin issued in a genuine *repentance*? Evangelical repentance is a real change of heart, it is a radical change of views, feelings and aims, resulting in a complete and lasting change of life. Unless our sorrow causes us to put away the evils which formerly

characterized us, then it is a repentance which needs to be “repented of,” for it is fruitless and valueless.

“For ye were made sorry after a godly manner.” This is explanatory of the previous clause, making known to us how it was that the Corinthians came to sorrow “to repentance.” How it behooves us, then, to diligently inquire as to exactly what is meant by this sorrowing “after a godly manner,” or as the margin gives it, “according to God.” Godly sorrow is one which has respect wholly to God, for it is one which He demands, one which He produces, and one which leads to Himself. First, it is such a sorrow as the thrice Holy One requires from those upon whom He would bestow pardon of their sins— true alike of our first conversion and of each subsequent recovery from backsliding: “repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Though this godly sorrow to repentance is not the ground of our salvation, yet it is both a part of and a necessary condition to it. Those who repent are saved; the impenitent perish (Luke 13:5). It is that *inward* change in which salvation largely consists. Grief and humiliation for sin as sin—sin against *God*—are an essential part of those “fruits meet for repentance” (Matt. 3:8).

Second, this “godly sorrow” is produced by Divine power. It is essentially a supernatural grace. No man is born with godly sorrow in his heart as he is born with a tongue in his head. No, it is a seed of God’s own setting, a flower of His planting. It is a heavenly offspring. “God maketh my heart soft” said holy Job (23:16), for none but He can make the heart tender under a sight and sense of sin. Nature can easily make one weep over worldly crosses and losses, but only Divine grace can move us to mourn over *sin*. That godly sorrow to repentance is produced by the immediate operations of the Lord is clear from the order in “Surely after

that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh” (Jer. 31:19): note well it is not “after I turned,” but “after *I was* turned.” That is the language of one who has just been renewed, quickened afresh by the Word, and who now sees light in God’s light.

Third, it is such a sorrow as leads to God. All sin is a departing from God, and while the guilt of it remains upon the conscience we cannot be easy in His presence—witness Adam, who as soon as he heard the voice of the Lord God, sought to hide himself (Gen. 3:8). But when godly sorrow is wrought in the heart by God it is the means of recovery to Him, for it makes us conscious of our distance from God and of our having dishonoured and displeased Him. Necessarily so, for godly sorrow is “to repentance,” and repentance is a forsaking of sin so as to walk in newness of life. A contrite heart instinctively turns unto God, for it is the only one which possesses any title to His mercy: “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise” (Psa. 51:17). Indeed He will not, for His promise is, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word” (Isa. 66:2). Such a sorrowing to repentance is approved by God, for it is the product of His own grace and accomplishes its end by restoring to Himself.

It is by carefully noting the contrasts pointed by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures that we learn to distinguish between things that radically differ. Sometimes these contrasts are implied by a qualifying term, at other times they are more expressly stated. Thus we read of “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), a disinterested faith, that springs from a spiritual affection, which is in contrast from a self-seeking faith that proceeds from the flesh. Romans 5:5 tells of a hope that “maketh not ashamed,” which is the opposite of the hypocrite’s hope that “shall perish” (Job 8:13). Another

discriminating expression is “love unfeigned” (2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Peter 1:22), which denotes there is a fictitious love, such as was displayed by Judas when he betrayed the Saviour with a kiss. In like manner the Apostle speaks of the Corinthian saints being “made sorry after a godly manner” (2 Cor. 7:9), which suggests there is a mourning over sin that has its roots in nothing higher than mere nature.

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10). Here the contrast implied in the former verse is definitely stated, “godly sorrow” being placed over against the “sorrow of the world.” Before we consider the latter, let us offer a few more remarks upon the former. Earlier we pointed out that this “godly sorrow” is such an one as is required by the thrice holy God, which He produces, and which leads the soul to Him. Godly sorrow, then, is the badge of all the heirs of Heaven, and God Himself produces it in the hearts of His people. It needs to be pointed out that He uses means in bringing it to pass—means suited to employ with moral agents, for so far from treating with us as stocks and stones, He ever draws with the “cords of a man” (Hosea 11:4).

First, “godly sorrow” issues from a broken and contrite heart, which is something that no man possesses by nature. On the contrary, the heart of the unregenerate is like “the nether millstone.” A miracle of grace has to be wrought before “a heart of flesh” is imparted. This is accomplished by means of the Word, under the immediate operations of the Holy Spirit. “Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29). That speaks of an humbling and painful experience—the travail preceding the birth. Every genuine conversion is one in which the Word is received “in much affliction” (1

Thess. 1:6). That “affliction” is caused by the Truth enabling the soul to view sin as God sees it—its true nature, its heinousness, its infinite ill-desert. As sin is viewed in God’s light, the soul is overwhelmed with sorrow and shame for having offended against the Divine Majesty: “against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned” (Psa. 51:4). An illustration of this is found in Acts 2: under the faithful preaching of Peter, applied by the power of the Spirit, his hearers were “pricked in their heart” and said “what shall we do?” (v. 37).

Second, “godly sorrow” issues from spiritual considerations. As the Spirit applies the Truth to the conscience and understanding, the soul is brought under the power of due apprehensions of God’s perfections, and of his relation to Him. Horror and grief fill the heart when there is the recognition that a gracious God has been offended, a righteous Law violated, a precious Christ dishonoured, the Holy Spirit grieved. This it is which overwhelms the soul with shame and bows it into the dust. This it is which causes the renewed to be “pricked in their heart”—the realization that they have displeased Him whose favour they account more than life. Therefore when it is said, “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom. 2:4), it means not only that it is His gracious operations that produce the repentance, but also that it is the heart’s piercing consciousness of having sinned against *such goodness* that results in a radical reformation of our ways: David and Manasseh, Peter and Paul are examples of those possessed of godly sorrow.

Third, “godly sorrow” issues from an evangelical faith. It proceeds from faith as the stream from the fountain, as the branch from the root. Proof of this is found in “they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son” (Zech. 12:10). All

gracious mourning proceeds from evangelical repentance, from believing. Nothing breaks the heart of a sinner like trustful looking to the Cross. The tears of godly sorrow ever drop from the eyes of faith. The more we are enabled to look by faith upon a pierced Christ, the more shall we mourn over our sins for having nailed Him to the tree. No one can stand under the shinings of dying Love with a frozen heart. Well did Luther ask, “What are all the palaces of the world to a contrite heart?” in the former reside the princes of the earth, in the latter dwells the Prince of peace.

This spiritual mourning for sin is evidenced by its product: “godly sorrow *worketh repentance* to salvation.” In this verse “repentance” signifies reformation or walking in newness of life. Godly sorrow humbles the mind, meekens the heart, bends the will, causing the soul to turn from sin with horror and hatred thereof unto God. Unlawful imaginations and wrongful actions are unsparingly judged in the light of God’s countenance, and there is a consequent turning from the paths of folly to walk in the ways of righteousness. Thus the outcome is conversion in the case of an alien sinner, restoration for a wandering saint. “Godly sorrow” is not only one that is concerned for the Divine glory and is grieved where God is dishonoured, but it is also one which has a dependence upon His mercy, counting upon His pardoning grace, and therefore does it humbly but trustfully plead such a promise as, “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

“For godly sorrow *worketh repentance* to salvation not to be repented of.” This last clause “not to be repented of” tells of the durability of that which issues from this spiritual mourning, and as no effect can be greater than its cause it announces the *lastingness* of “godly sorrow.” It is a



permanent grace. So long as a real Christian continues sinning he cannot but continue grieving: “my sin is ever before me” (Psa. 51:3) must be the language of one with a quickened conscience. Not until he reaches Heaven shall all tears be removed from the saint’s eyes. Nor does any believer ever regret repenting, no matter what anguish of soul may occasion and accompany it, for it is a turning from sin—the cause of all disquietude—to our true Resting-place. The sorrow of a worldling is of short duration, but the streams of spiritual contrition last as long as sin indwells the believer.

### **Worldly Sorrow.**

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10). We previously considered the nature of “godly sorrow” and by what it is evidenced, namely, by a saving “repentance” or a forsaking of sin and turning unto God. It now remains for us to enquire wherein it differs from the “sorrow of the world.” This brings us to a vitally-important distinction, for all sorrow over sin is not a “godly” one, neither does it lead to evangelical repentance: evangelical repentance we say, for there is sometimes a repentance or remorse—as was displayed in the tragic case of Judas—which does not terminate in “salvation.” Such is “the sorrow of the world,” that is, the sorrow of the unregenerate, of those who are strangers unto the Lord. So far from their sorrow leading to life, it ends in death.

The sorrow of the world is the grief and mortification of disappointed worldlings, of those who know not God but whose trust is in themselves or in some arm of flesh. They have relied for prosperity from the world, and the world has sadly failed them. They have sought satisfaction from its broken cisterns, only to have their hopes dashed. The bitter

springs from which their ambitions have proceeded are pride and carnal self-respect, and their motives and occasions for indulging the same are as manifold as the deceitful lusts of the flesh. But frustrated plans and defeated expectations sour and enrage, and nature's greenness is turned into the drought of unrepentant grief. So far from leading the soul to God, it fills with wrath and enmity against Him. Its miserable subjects seek consolation from the world, endeavouring to drive away serious reflections by drowning themselves in its pleasures.

The sorrow of the world does not arise from just views of sin, nor does it proceed from any concern that God has been offended. It does not lead the soul to God in true penitence, nor turn to Him for consolation. The sorrow of the unregenerate is occasioned by temporal losses, which fill them with chagrin and dismay; by crimes which incur public disgrace for their perpetrators and their families; from the squandering of a goodly heritage which terminates in poverty and despair; from wandering from the path of chastity, and in consequence losing their good name among men: from intemperance and reckless living, which ends in ruined health and vain regrets for having played the fool. In all such cases there is no contrition of heart for having violated a righteous Law, offended a kind Creator, or been an occasion of stumbling to their fellows. It is only that they are incensed at the harvest which follows their evil sowing and fretful because lack of money or health prevents them from continuing such excesses.

There are some worldly men who experience religious convictions, and they are grieved because they cannot obtain Heaven in their own way. This is seen in the case of the rich young ruler who came to Christ, but who, when he learned that denying of self was required of him, "went away

sorrowful” (Matt. 19:22). There are those who have a sense of eternity, and yet are wedded to their lusts. They desire happiness hereafter, but they will not forsake their idols now, and so they are troubled. They cannot have Christ and the world—Christ for their consciences—and the world for their affections. They are unwilling to break away from the love of this world so that they might be saved in the world to come, and therefore are they grieved that they cannot have both. A pertinent case in point is that of Balaam.

Such “sorrow” as we have referred to in the above paragraph is but a superficial and transient emotion which has no lasting and spiritual effects. Alas, of its possessors it has to be said, “your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away” (Hosea 6:4). Their weeping eyes soon dry up, as we see in the cases of Esau and Ahab. Again—such sorrow is occasioned not by mourning over sin as sin, but over the retribution it brings. A solemn example of this appears in the life of Pharaoh when the Divine judgments were upon his kingdom: “Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, Entreat the LORD, that He may take away the frogs from me and from my people” (Exo. 8:8). Note well it was not, “Entreat the LORD to remove my pride, my obstinacy, my hatred of His people; but only let the plague be stayed.” Contrast the prayer of David under similar circumstances: “take away the iniquity of Thy servant” (2 Sam. 24:10)—not take away the pestilence from my land!

“The sorrow of the world worketh death” because that is the appointed and inevitable fruit of the impenitent workings of an unregenerate will. It is a great mistake to suppose that the natural tendency of trial and trouble, loss and pain, is unto good. Not so: their trend is rather to excite rebellion against God. It is only when our sufferings are Divinely sanctified to us that they are made to bring forth the peaceable fruits of

righteousness. Just as surely as happiness is the attendant of holiness, so misery is the certain entail of sin. When the worldling's dream of natural happiness has been dispelled by crime, by misfortune, or by the long-resisted Spirit of God, he feeds only on the sour bread of self-reproach and unblessed woe. He often wilfully accelerates the desire for relief which he vainly hopes to find in death—which so far from ending his sorrow only conducts him into the blackness of darkness forever.

“The sorrow of the world worketh death”—temporal and eternal. “Death” is to be taken here in its widest latitude, including all the disastrous consequences of sin. The results of godly sorrow are salutary, the effects of worldly sorrow are abortive and evil. They produce only ill health and distress, and are attended with no consolation or compensation. The sorrow of the world debilitates the body, disturbs peace, impairs the mind, and breaks the spirit. There is no contrite seeking unto God on the part of the suffering one, but only a fretting and murmuring against Him. The more miserable a man becomes the harder his heart: “they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of Heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds” (Rev. 16:10, 11). Worldly sorrow is the certain prelude to desperation unless God prevents, as witness the horrible cases of Saul, and Ahithophel.

How important it is, then, that we should seek grace to turn all our mourning unto a spiritual channel, that we may sorrow “after a godly manner”—with grief for having dishonoured God with a dependence on His mercy, with a purpose to henceforth obey Him. Sorrow over sin and exercise about our eternal interests will avail us nothing unless it works repentance, and even repentance may be counterfeited and so not be “unto salvation.” Unless sin be mourned over as the

cause of all our suffering and God be viewed as the righteous yet merciful Author of the same, grief under afflictions produces only increasing enmity unto despair. If after prayerfully pondering these articles any of our readers are brought to grieve over the hardness of their hearts and are concerned because of their lack of godly sorrow, that is sure proof they are *not* devoid of this spiritual grace.

