

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

2 CORINTHIANS 7:8-12

GOOD GRIEF



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

I've twice been involved in situations where Christians tolerated abuse and did not deal with it properly. Some arguments for their inaction or covering-up were:

- "But, he's such a gifted person."
- "It's not such a big deal."
- "He won't do it again."
- "Keep it quiet or it will harm the Lord's cause."
- "What will people say if this gets out?"
- "Who hasn't sinned. Let him who has no sin cast the first stone...?"
- "We're friends with the family."
- "But I like him so much."
- "He's helped me spiritually and been a blessing to me."
- "We don't want to destroy a person's ministry."
- "We can't be 100% sure about what happened."
- "Maybe it was just a misunderstanding."
- "Let's leave it to the Lord."

There are many more examples I could give, but these are samples of the excuses and the results were disastrous for the perpetrators, for the victims, and above all for the church.

Similar excuses were being made in Corinth about why they shouldn't discipline a man in gross sexual sin. In his first letter, Paul condemned them for tolerating such sinful living in the church, and called them to repentance (1 Cor. 5:1-5). Although this made them sad, Paul was glad about their godly grief, and was now calling them to further godly grief concerning their tolerance of false teachers (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Using the previous example of their godly grief over sinful living, he calls them to godly grief over sinful teaching. **What is good or godly grief?**

BACKGROUND

Paul stirred up the Corinthians to courageously separate from the false teachers (2 Cor. 6:14-18). But he wanted this reforming zeal to come from repenting hearts.



Why should we want anything that makes us sad?



1. GOOD GRIEF PRODUCES REPENTANCE (8-10)

Repentance makes you sad

For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while (8).

Anyone who enjoys making other people sad is at least weird and probably evil. Paul made the Corinthians sad when he had previously written confronting them about their sin. As someone who loved them, he hated having to make them sad by showing them they were bad. He grieved over their grief. He felt their pain and for a short time wished he hadn't wrote the letter. But Paul's regret didn't last because he saw that their brief grief resulted in lasting repentance. He did not want to hurt them, but hurting them briefly was better than giving false comfort briefly but real hurt eternally.

Repentance makes me glad

As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance... (9-10).

Paul's regret turned to rejoicing when he heard that their grief turned to repentance, which he called 'godly grief,' that is grief toward God, grief that brought them to God, and grief that God approved of. Although they lost some days of happiness and comfort, but because their grief resulted in repentance, they gained more than they lost.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

I do not enjoy making you sad. I'm called to convict you of sin and to make you feel guilt and condemnation. You don't enjoy it, I don't enjoy it. But I must do it if I'm to be faithful to God and save you from eternal sadness.

I do enjoy when your sadness turns you from sin to God. When your sadness turns you from sin to God, God's glad, I'm glad, and you'll be glad too.

SHORT SADNESS
LONG GLADNESS



If good grief produces repentance, what does repentance produce?



2. GOOD GRIEF LEADS TO SALVATION (10)

Saving repentance

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret... (10).

Godly grief results in repentance which results in salvation. True repentance (not just remorse or regret) brings us to God pleading for mercy and forgiveness, pleading for the Holy Spirit to change us, and ultimately rejoicing in the salvation purchased by Christ. Although painful for a time, eventually it results in unmixed joy and zero regret. No one has ever regretted repenting.

J I Packer explained this kind of saving repentance as: "Discern the sin, desire forgiveness, decide to ask for help, deal with God, demonstrate change." The Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it like this: **Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.**

Killer Regret

...whereas worldly grief produces death (10).

Worldly grief is not from God or towards God. It's simply remorse that ends in blaming self, others, or God and has no hope of mercy in it. It turns us against ourselves, others, and God. Biblical examples of this are Judas (Matt. 27:5), Simon Magus (Acts 8:24), and Esau (Heb. 12:16,17). It results in anger, bitterness, despair, and ultimately suicide.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Is your grief over sin killing you or giving you life? Does it have equal parts of 'true sense of sin' and 'apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ'? If so, it's life-giving. If not, it's killing you.

This is a sadness that grows gladness. It's a sadness that generates gladness at the same time as the sadness and even more at the end of time. It's a sadness that's worth it.

REPENTANCE SAVES
REMORSE KILLS



How else can I know if I have saving repentance?



3. GOOD GRIEF RESULTS IN TRANSFORMATION (11-12)

The Fruits of Repentance

For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you... (11-12).

- **Earnestness:** Indifference about sin is replaced with seriousness and speed about sin.
- **Eagerness to clear yourselves:** They were constantly asking, "What can we do to prove we've changed?"
- **Indignation:** Against the offender and even themselves for getting this so wrong in the past.
- **Fear:** Fear of God's judgment for their inaction.
- **Longing:** They really wanted to put things right.
- **Zeal:** A passion for justice that reflected God's justice.
- **Punishment:** The offender was properly dealt with.
- **At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter:** They can no longer be accused of wrong.

Crisis repentance produces the tiny fruit of a few prayers until the danger is over. Manipulative repentance produces the impressive but rotten fruit of impressing people or getting their sympathy. Ritual repentance produces the common but contaminated fruit of slightly increased church attendance and other religious activities.

The Encouragement of Repentance

So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. Therefore we are comforted (12-13).

When Paul called them to repent of their ungodly toleration of sin in the church, his primary purpose was not to change things on a human level but before God. He wanted to give them an opportunity to prove their love for God, his truth, and his Apostles by dealing with the sin in the church. As they did so, Paul was no longer depressed but encouraged.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

What are the fruits of repentance in your life? Would your fruits of repentance prove that the tree and roots of repentance exist? If so, be encouraged. If not, ask for the roots and tree, and the fruit will grow.

Multiplying of repentance fruit is as encouraging as numerical growth. We often look to numerical growth for comfort, but Paul and God look for fruit growth. Not so much about multiplying trees, but multiplying the fruits of repentance on them. Are you that kind of fruitful Christian?

A FEW FRUITFUL TREES ARE BETTER
THAN FORESTS OF FRUITLESS TREES



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others stories



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

- **Gospel:** Repentance is one of the two indispensable arms by which we receive the Gospel.
- **Worship:** Thank God for repentance (John 16:8; Acts 5:31).
- **Prayer:** Write out a prayer that reflects this sermon, or use this one: "Holy Lord God, give me good grief that will save and change me."
- **Church:** Pray for individual repentance and church repentance to look like this happy sadness
- **Monday:** Cultivate good grief throughout the week. Look for and take opportunities to repent.
- **Hell:** There's no repentance in hell. Worse, there's no opportunity to repent in hell.
- **Heaven:** No more tears = no more tears of repentance. Sorrow and sighing will flee away.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has your view of repentance changed as a result of this sermon?
2. In what ways have you, like Paul, made others sad in order to make them and you glad?
3. How would you help someone distinguish between repentance and remorse?
4. Which of the fruits of repentance are in your life?
5. Whose repentance has been a comfort and joy to you recently?
6. How has this message encouraged you to be more fruitful?

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