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Godly Sorrow Versus Worldly Sorrow

Each One Reach One: The Cost and Rewards

2 Corinthians 7: 2-16

Pastor Bryan Clark

Okay, you blew it! You failed! You messed up, busted! You have sinned and your sin has been exposed. Now what? I think all of us will look back at our lives and identify certain defining moments. I'd like to suggest to you this morning that what will make many of those moments defining is not necessarily that you failed, that you sinned, that you blew it. What makes those moments defining is how you respond in that moment when your sin is exposed. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible turn with me to 2 Corinthians 7. It's been a couple weeks since we were in 2 Corinthians. In Chapter 2, Paul was telling us a story, it had a plot line, if you will. But right in the middle of the story, right in the middle of the plot, he digresses into a lengthy discussion about the Corinthians, about some theology, about some tensions and really has been on this kind of regression or whatever you want to call it now for multiple chapters and it rolls us into chapter 7 verse two.

Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. (2 Corinthians 7:2-3, *NASB)

This sounds a lot like 6:11 when Paul was saying that his team really has an open heart, a desire to reconcile with the Corinthians. We know that there are false teachers in Corinth; we know that there are critics of Paul in Corinth. I think Paul is still trying to figure out what has been the effect on the Corinthian believers. He feels this tension and he really wants to reconcile the relationship. The words that he uses in verse two all have financial overtones. It may be that some of the criticism had to do with money and that would make sense because that's what eight and nine are about. The word *wronged*, we *wronged* no one is a word that means to steal. We didn't steal from anyone. We *corrupted* no one, that's a word that means to bribe or solicit. You know, we didn't solicit or bribe anyone. We took advantage of no one. That's a word that means greed; that in financial terms, I took advantage of someone. So Paul is saying, hey, we didn't do anything wrong. We operated with the utmost integrity.

Now, I know I've made this point before but I think it's important to make again. And that is every time that Paul has been criticized his response has been the same, hey I lived with you for 18 months, my life is an open book, I operated with integrity, check me out. The reason I think that's so important is because it's so other than what people do today. When people are accused today, they kind of spin it some way. They deflect it, they point fingers at somebody else, they make excuses, they change the subject. But what very few people and specifically leaders are willing to do today, is to say, hey, I'm an open book check me out, I've lived with integrity. Yet every time Paul has been accused that's been his response. And again, it's response here.

In verse three he's saying that his intent is not to condemn them. Again, he doesn't know if the Corinthians have bought into the critic's criticisms or not, he's just trying to set the record straight and then he gives them what is referred to as an ancient vow formula. That he will die with them, that he will live with them. Almost every wedding that we do includes the line, until death do us part. We might say that's a wedding vow. That's kind of a formula we use. Well, in the ancient

world they also had a vow formula and in this case it was, *I will die with you, I will live with you*. It was a vow of commitment. One of the things that's so impressive about Paul is his commitment to these crazy Corinthians. Paul would have been justified in walking away in saying, hey, if that's the way you people want to be, that's fine and go on his way. But Paul has relentlessly pursued these people. Trying to reconcile the relationship, trying to work through the tensions; the reason is because he genuinely loves them. He cares about them, he doesn't want this tension and what he's saying here is I will die with you, I will live with you; we're going to do whatever it takes to work through this and to reconcile the relationship.

Verse 4:

Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.

We've seen this before and I've made this point before, Paul is saying to the Corinthians, I believe in you, I celebrate you! I think whether we're talking about us as parents, whether we're talking about the marketplace, whether we're talking about us as a church, what everybody's hungry for is for someone to say, "I believe in you! I think God's doing a work in your life, I believe in you, I'm for you!" And that's what Paul is saying to the Corinthians. Once again, he says, "I believe in you, that you are filling my life with joy." But, it does raise the question, what is it that Paul knows that has encouraged him about the Corinthians. That's what the rest of the chapter is about. But before we go on to verse five; I gotta do a little bit of background to bring us back up to speed.

We know that Paul spent about 18 months in Corinth. That's when he planted the church there. He left, he made his way up to Ephesus. He wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, a few months passed, he wrote 2 Corinthians from Ephesus. Somewhere in-between those books he took a journey from Ephesus to Macedonia, in route he stopped in Corinth. The plan was to stop and visit Corinth to go up to Macedonia, on his way back to Ephesus, to visit Corinth again and then go back to Ephesus. However, he tells us in chapter two that the first visit to Corinth on his way to Macedonia was so bad, there was so much tension, everything blew up, that there was such conflict that he determined that he determined that it would be better not to stop by again because it will only make matters worse. So, on his way from Macedonia back to Ephesus he doesn't stop in Corinth, he skips that visit. So, Paul's critics use that as an opportunity to say this guy doesn't keep his word. This guy's fickle; he can't make up his mind. We talked about in the Roman Empire for a leader to be fickle was a death blow, that was frowned upon. And so Paul is responding and saying the reason I didn't was because everything blew up and I just thought it would be worse. So, he sends what he refers to as a tearful letter. A letter where he confronts them for their sin, he confronts them for whatever the issue is and we really don't know what that is. But Paul writes this letter with a great deal of tears, he hands it to his friend Titus and sends Titus on his way to hand deliver it in Corinth. Paul goes from Ephesus down to the city of Troas. In chapter two, Paul tells us himself that God gave a wide open door to the gospel in Troas. In other words, a great opportunity. But Paul was in such emotional distress because Titus was supposed to meet him in Troas and Titus doesn't show up. Did something happen to him on the way? Did they do something to him in Corinth? So Paul is so upset that he cannot fulfill his ministry, he can't take advantage of the open door God gave him, he leaves and he goes to Macedonia. He hope there he will find his friend Titus. That's 2:13. Paul let's us hang there all the way to 7:5. Now, finally he's back to the plot.

For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, [Basically, means he couldn't sleep.] but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. (vs. 5

Paul says that when he got to Macedonia Titus isn't there. They couldn't sleep at night, they were attacked from the outside. The term *conflicts* is a military term. We don't know exactly what was going on. We do know from the book of Acts that there was a group of Jewish legalists that followed Paul many places where he went and made his life miserable, maybe that's who was there. But he also says there were fears within. That Paul was fearful, they couldn't sleep at night. This isn't exactly Paul's greatest moment. I mentioned when we started the study of II Corinthians that of all the letters that Paul writes, this letter more than any other is the one where Paul exposes himself as a human, as a person with real feeling and emotions. We tend to think of Paul as the super missionary. Paul as the ministry machine, Paul as the guy that's got it all together. And yet in this moment, Paul must have wondered if it was all coming unraveled. Paul was not thought of as a celebrity in the first century, his life was really hard. Paul left Ephesus because the thing blew up! You read the book of Acts, it blew up, he had to flee! Paul's looking for his friend and he can't find him, it seems like everything's coming unraveled in Corinth, he had a wide open door for ministry in Troas but he couldn't pull it off because emotionally he was shot! So, he ends up in Macedonia and he must have been wondering, *is it worth it all? It's all coming unraveled!* You're saying, now wait a minute, this is the Apostle Paul, how could he have fears within? He's the very guy that wrote the words, *be anxious for nothing!* He's the very guy that wrote the words, *God has not given us a spirit of fear.* He's the very guy that keeps saying, it needs to be faith not fear. But, he's a human being, he was a real person and he struggled! We have to understand that being faithful doesn't mean I've always got it all together that my faith is so rock solid nothing bothers me, I'm a machine! If you're going to live out ministry in the trenches, sometimes there are wonderful victories and sometimes there are very discouraging defeats and sometimes it feels like it's all coming unraveled and I wonder if it's worth it at all. It's exactly where Paul was a he waited for his friend Titus.

Verse 6:

But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

There it is right there the "D" word! Yes he was, he was depressed! Oh, that can't be, that doesn't happen to spiritual people! Well, it happened. He was emotionally exhausted. He had nothing left. He was in an emotional pile and he was struggling. But he says he found his comfort in God. Depression is common today, the question is where do you find to find refuge when you're depressed, where do you turn when your emotions are coming unraveled? People in our culture turn to lots of things to find refuge, they turn to alcohol. They turn to drugs and when I say drugs I'm not referring to prescription drugs written by a doctor, I think there's a place for that. I'm talking about illegal drugs, I'm talking about illegal drugs, I'm talking about drugs that are just an escape. Some way to escape reality to get away from the pain for a little bit. People find refuge in credit cards. People find refuge in spending and materialism. People find refuge in immorality and pornography. There's lots of ways that people try to escape in our world today. But all those do is numb the pain, all those do is provide a little bit of temporary relief. At some point you have to come back and face the fact that the pain is still there. There's only one place to find healing. There's only place to find refuge and Paul understood that in his hour of need, he found his refuge in God Himself. That's what he says.

But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more. (vs. 6-7)

In this particular case, God comforted Paul in that Titus showed up, he was okay, his friend arrived! But not only that but Titus said, hey, these Corinthians were wonderful! They received me well and they responded wonderfully to your letter. But, he goes on to say and by the way Paul, these people in Corinth they love you! They long for you, they grieve that you feel there's some tension between them. Titus brought back a great report and Paul finally knows that the false teachers and the critics have not persuaded the Corinthians believers but they're committed to Paul and they love them. And so Paul was strengthened by this. Verse 8:

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. 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. (vs. 8-10)

Now, this is a critical text to understand, what Paul is saying is that when he sent this tearful letter, not II Corinthians but the one that Titus hand delivered, confronting them over whatever this issue of sin was that for a while he regretted it, he thought maybe it was going to make matters worse. But, now Titus has brought the report and he says, I don't regret it, I did, but I don't now because I understand how God has used it. Yes, it did make them sorrowful because they recognized that they were doing the wrong thing, that they were in sin and it did break their heart as it should. But, it was a Godly sorrow and Godly sorrow leads to repentance. Repentance is a word that means a change of mind, it means a mid-course correction. It means to go the other way. In other words, they were off track. They were on the wrong road. But, when Paul confronted their sin, in their sorrow, they reorganized, hey folks, we're off track, we're going the wrong way, we're headed for trouble. It was corrective. And by corrective it means they got on the right path and Paul says Godly sorrow leads to repentance which leads to salvation. Salvation here not referring to conversion but referring to life. Salvation is past, present and future. Salvation is the life that God promised us. Paul is saying that Godly sorrow leads to repentance which is a correction to get on the right path that ultimately leads to life. The contrast to that is worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow means when I'm exposed, when I'm busted, when it becomes evident that I've been sinning, when I've been doing the wrong thing, I've blown it, I've failed, I've messed up! I'm sorry but sorry often leads to shame, it leads to guilt, it leads to defensiveness, it leads to pointing the finger at somebody else, it leads to blaming somebody else, it leads to trying to managing the situation, it leads to trying to protect myself, it leads to some way to deal with that other than correction. The problem with the world is it has nothing to do with failure, there is no answer. In a performance based culture, when your value comes on the basis of your performance, when you don't perform well, the world has no answer for that other than to say you're a shameless loser.

Therefore, it is a sorrow that leads to death. Rather than responding correctly there is defensiveness, there's cover-up which usually leads to another bad choice which usually leads to another bad choice and pretty soon you have this snowball out of control that ultimately destroys your life. Looking back, you would recognize the defining moment wasn't the sin itself it was my

unwillingness to deal with it and get corrected and get back on the right path. That's what Paul is saying to them.

Verse 11:

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.

Every single one of those terms Paul uses is meant to be positive. Paul is applauding them! And saying you people are wonderful, I confronted your sin, you were sorrowful but it was a sorrow that lead to repentance, you've corrected your behavior, you're back on track and Paul says you're zealously pursuing the right thing. It's become an opportunity for you to demonstrate the reality of the presence of God in your life. And Paul finds himself that the Corinthians are very impressive because in their moment when their sin was exposed they responded rightly and they're back on track and he knows they have hope for the future. So Paul ends up actually up applauding them.

Verse 12:

So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, [This is whatever that situation was, somebody was the offender, somebody was offended and we really don't know what that was.] but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God. For this reason we have been comforted (vs. 12-13a)

Paul is saying that now I realize the purpose for the letter wasn't necessarily for the offended, it wasn't for the offender, it was an opportunity for the church to step and do the right and give testimony to the presence of God in their lives. Now I don't think Paul's saying that he understood that when he sent the letter. You know, God impressed him to send the letter and he may not have understood the reason for that at the time. This would be a very good opportunity to feature Paul on my radio show *Hindsight for Living*. (laughter) Because looking back it's really clear. But, Paul is saying I think this is what God had in mind. That this was ultimately an opportunity for the Corinthian church to say, hey folks we're off track we need to deal with this and their sorrow lead to repentance which was corrective back on the right path, Paul applauds them and it's an opportunity to say God is clearly at work in these people and it bears witness to the testimony that their lives have been changed and Paul says that comforts us. He goes and says

And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth. His affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. (vs. 13b-15)

Paul says not only has this been a wonderful encouragement but over the months Paul said I boasted about you, I told Titus what a great bunch of people you were and I was afraid when I sent the letter that maybe I would be put to shame. Maybe Titus would come back and say Paul I gotta tell you these people are nuts, they're crazy! But it's just the opposite, Titus came back and said Paul this is

a great bunch of people. They were off track they received your letter, it did hurt but it lead to repentance, they corrected their behavior, they're back on track, what an impressive group of people and Titus comes back and says, "I love these people! It's clear that God is at work and they're back on track!" Paul is reminding us that what's critically important in those moments when we blow it when we fail, when we sin and our sin is exposed, what's critically important is what now? If we respond with a worldly sorrow that's full of defensiveness, it's full of excuses, it's full of management, it's full of cover-up, it's full of deflection, it's full of shame of guilt then we are going to stay of a pathway of destruction. If we experience Godly sorrow it leads to repentance which is corrective that gets us back on track and we will look back on our lives and say that was the defining moment but what mattered most is how I responded in that moment when my sin was exposed. At the core of this issue, in my opinion, is still whether you truly understand God's economy of grace or whether you're still embracing a performance based value system that defines our world. If you still embrace a performance value system where your value is based on your ability to perform even perform religiously that your live is defined by competition and comparison and your value is attached to your performance then you have no margin for failure, you have no margin for sin, you have no way to say I blew it! Because that is a bad performance review. It's like being in the play offs, one loss and you're out! My self esteem cannot afford that. Therefore, in the moment of truth, I can't come clean, I can't be truthful, I can't face my sin, I have to make excuses, I have to get defensive, I have to blame somebody else, I have to manage it, I have to protect myself. I have to figure out some way to demonstrate this wasn't a failure or my self esteem's going to go in the tanker.

But, what happens is that lead to another bad performance which leads to another bad performance and pretty soon you get the label, you're just a loser, shame and guilt overwhelms you and you find yourself snowballing down into a pathway of destruction. The only alternative is to understand God's economy of grace and to recognize that through what Jesus has done for me on the cross my sense of value comes from being rightly related to God. And even though my performance was poor, even though I failed, I sinned, I blew it, I understand that doesn't affect my value because my value isn't connected to my performance. Therefore, in that moment I have the freedom to say, yes, I sinned, I blew it, I didn't perform well but it's a sorrow that leads to repentance, I have the freedom now to be corrective, to get back on the right path to face my issues and to move on which actually provides an opportunity demonstrate the reality of the presence of God in my life which provides an opportunity for others to say, "Man, that was the right response, God is alive and well in you, you're going down the right path, it's an opportunity to celebrate!" Because it's been corrective and that will be a defining moment in your life.

The fact of the moment is we all blow it, we all mess up, we all sin. The critical question is in that moment when our sin is exposed, now what? Worldly sorrow will only lead to destruction. But Godly sorrow leads to repentance which is corrective which gets us back on the road of life.

Our Father we're thankful this morning for the realities of grace. Lord, in a performance based culture there's just no margin for failure, they don't know what to do with sin and one bad decision leads to another and leads to another. Lord, because of the realities of grace we have the freedom to face our sin, yes, it's sorrowful, it should be. But, in our sorrow there is repentance which is corrective. To get us back on the path of life. Lord, my prayer this morning would be one day we would look back and realize what was key in those defining moments was not just whether we sinned or not but how we responded in that moment when our sin was exposed. Lord, may we have responded with Godly sorrow which leads to life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Godly Sorrow versus Worldly Sorrow

Each One Reach One: The Cost and Rewards

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What have been some of the “defining moments” in your life? What made those moments so important?
2. Obviously we have choices to make that determine if we practice sin or not, whether we take a right turn or wrong turn along the way. However, just as critical is how we respond when our sin is exposed. What are the possible responses once our sin is known?
3. Often how we respond once our sin is known has more to do with the long term consequences of that sin than the sinful choice itself. Why is that? Can you provide any examples of good or bad responses to sin and the consequences of that choice?

Bible Study

1. Compare 2 Corinthians 7:2-4 with 6:11-13. Often in times of conflict both sides wait for the other to make the first move. How does Paul’s approach differ from that?
2. Review where we left Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:13 as it relates to the storyline (2:14-7:4 divert to Paul’s defense before he picks up the story again in 7:5). Read 2 Corinthians 7:5-7. Describe Paul’s emotional state during this time when he waited for Titus to return. Does it surprise you that Paul was fearful and distressed? Why or why not?
3. Paul found his comfort in God when he was depressed. What are some other sources of refuge people seek in our culture when depressed? Where do you seek refuge when you struggle emotionally?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 7: 8-13a. What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? Describe the characteristics of both.

5. Paul basically states that his letter confronting the Corinthians of an issue they needed to address was actually a chance to reveal the earnestness of their faith before God. Why is it so critically important to respond rightly when our sin is exposed? How dramatically can this affect the pathway of our lives?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 7:13b-16. Contrast the difference between a performance-based value system and a grace-based value system as it relates to how we respond when sin is exposed? As a parent, a fellow believer and as a church, how does a grace-based value system actually provide a basis for celebrating and encouraging when sin is exposed?

Application

1. Practically speaking, how do we find our refuge in God when we find ourselves in emotional turmoil? How can your small group help you find comfort in God and not turn to other means of coping with depression?
2. While the choice we make to sin comes with consequences, often the real lasting consequences come from how we respond once that sin is exposed. What will be necessary for you to experience godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation in that moment? How can your small group help in this process?