

Godly Sorrow

By David Phillips

In 2 Tim. 3:16-17 we learn that the Scriptures are useful for correction and instruction. When faced with the correction that God offers through His word, people respond in different ways. Some people become angry (Gen. 4:4-8, Cain). Some people know what they need to do, but never put forth the effort to make the necessary changes (Acts 24:25). Some people, reluctant to admit their wrongs or the wrongs of others, strive to justify their actions (Mal. 1:6-7; 2 Pet. 3:16). Then there are those few who soak in correction as if it were a glass of fresh water (Psalm 119:57-64). Have you ever stopped to consider how you respond to correction? Though most people feel justified in the way they respond to the Scriptures, let us consider Paul's second letter to the Corinthians to see how God would like us to respond (2 Cor. 7:8-12).

Paul's Rebuke to the Corinthians

In his first letter Paul gave many rebukes concerning the character and works of the church at Corinth. There were divisions and therefore carnality among them (1 Cor. 1:11, 3:1-4). There was immoral behavior among them such as was not even named among the unbelievers (1 Cor. 5:1-2). They were glorying and confident in themselves when sin was present (1 Cor. 5:6). They were misusing the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17).

Though Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians was justified, he had some concerns about the manner in which the Corinthian might have responded. There is always the possibility when a person or group of people is corrected that they may respond negatively. But, Paul's fears were soon laid to rest when he heard word from Titus that the Corinthians had received his letter and responded to his rebuke in a godly manner (2 Cor. 7:5-7).

The Corinthians' response to Paul's rebuke is described for us in 2 Cor. 7:10-11 because it models perfectly the manner in which every Christian should respond to correction. For, rather than becoming resentful, their sorrow was such that it caused them to repent of what they had done. They had a *godly sorrow*, which resulted in the following: They were **sorry** that they had sinned and determined to **discontinue** that sin. Their sorrow produced **diligence**. They didn't mope around and feel sorry for themselves. They didn't become bitter and gossip about Paul and how arrogant he was for rebuking them (which often happens today). Their desire to do right sparked an attitude of diligence to get the job done. There was a **clearing of themselves**: They worked ever harder to correct the wrong that they had done. Their sorrow produced **indignation**—anger or wrath, not directed toward Paul, but toward the sin that existed among them (Ps. 119:104, 128). They renewed their **fear** for God. Without their fear of God they would not have changed, but Paul's rebuke was such that it made them fear for their souls. Do you tremble in fear when you sin? They had a **vehement desire**—an earnest desire, a great longing for truth and righteousness in their lives. A new **zeal** was sparked in them manifest by their fervent efforts and fierceness toward learning and applying God's word and for putting away

sinful things. There was **vindication** or punishment toward the sin that had been taking place. **Note: Godly sorrow will not allow us to tolerate sin, rather it causes us to zealously overcome it and cast it from our midst.**

This is the type of reaction God's desires of us when we are corrected. This is what all of us must strive to be like when we are told how we can do better! Some people hate the thought of being sorry. Nevertheless, we must remember, "*For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted.*"

Making the Application

Consider the many things that the Corinthians were rebuked for. Too often Christians today fail to listen even to the smallest correction or suggestion that is meant to help them grow in their spiritual life. There is an ever-growing doctrine that says "God's grace will cover me, even though I continue in sin." Do not be deceived by such lies. "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*" (Gal. 6:7). God has said, "*Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity*" (2 Tim. 2:19).

We must avoid the mistakes of Cain, the rich young ruler, and many of the Jews of Jesus day who saw correction as more of an insult than as an opportunity for growth. We must not be like men of the world who think they can twist God's word to justify themselves.

Rather, let us desire the growth we can experience when we set aside our foolish pride and put on a hunger for God's righteousness. Do you desire change for the better? Do you desire to be a faithful and productive servant for God? If we learn to sorrow in a godly manner as Paul describes in 2 Cor. 7:10-11, God can cause all of this to happen in our lives, as it is written, "*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...*" (Rom. 12:2).

Conclusion

In his comments on repentance, Paul was speaking from experience. For his life was contrary to Christ before he was converted. But as he was confronted with the sorrow of his many sins, he was told by Ananias, "*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" (**Acts 22:16**). If you find that your attitude toward correction and instruction is contrary God's will, will you put off your stubborn heart and make it right with God today?

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