

Good Grief

2Corinthians 7:8-16

When I was growing up I remember seeing anti-smoking commercials on a regular basis.

I learned earlier this week that the first ads aired in 1963.

My mom and dad (particularly my dad) made it clear to me that it would be a bad idea to take up the habit.

At school we learned what it does to your lungs and how it can lead to all sorts of illness.

So when I decided to take it up in my early teen years, it wasn't because I thought it was good for me, it was because I wanted to fit in with my friends.

One of my closer friends had parents who smoked and they bought him cigarettes and so he became my supplier.

If you can believe it I did most of my smoking at school.

Looking back on it I am amazed that the teachers didn't put a stop to a group of grade 8 boys standing in a circle smoking at recess.

So there I was standing in the circle of the cool kids into my second week of puffing on a cigarette and blowing smoke.

To be honest I couldn't really figure out what the big deal was, that is until one of the seasoned smokers in the group took up a conversation with me.

His name was Ben. Ben said to me, "Hey Sealy I thought you were loosening up a bit."

I agreed and took another puff.

That is when he started looking at me a bit closer.

After carefully watching me for a few puffs he said in a pretty loud voice for the whole circle to hear, "You are doing it wrong."

"Doing it wrong? What are you talking about?"

He said, "You're not inhaling the smoke!"

I had no idea that is what you were supposed to do and so on the next puff I sucked the smoke into my lungs.

That feeling was horrible. It felt like a 100lbs was sitting on my chest and the wind got knocked out of me.

And just like that my time of smoking was over. I tossed the cigarette away and never wanted to touch another one for the rest of my life.

I've had the wind knocked out of me a number of times over the years and I can say with certainty that it is a terrible feeling and I have never enjoyed it.

I am glad I felt it that day though because it kept me from getting into something that would have been very bad for me in the long run.

Experiencing something that felt bad led me in a good direction.

[Has anything like that ever happened to you? Have you ever experienced something that did not feel good at the time, but it produced good things in your life? That is what this morning's text is about. Turn in your bibles to **2Corinthians 7:8-16**. Grief is the subject of these verses and if you have ever felt grief then you know it does not feel good. This text though shows us that there is a good kind of grief that a person can experience. There is something the bible calls 'godly grief' and it produces good things in our lives. These verses teach us four things about godly grief. First, verse eight shows us that...]

Point #1 – Being used by God to produce godly grief is hard. (Verse 8)

Having the task of confronting other believers concerning things in their lives that the LORD hates is difficult for a number of reasons, but it is a task that Christians are called to take seriously.

Paul gives us a sense of the challenge that he felt over having to be the one to confront the Corinthians over some things that were going on in the church. (Verse 8)

Paul opens to us some of what was going on in his heart over this situation with this church.

It is very clear here that he knew very well that the letter he had written (likely one that is not preserved for us in the Bible) was going to be hurtful to these believers.

As he thinks about that in the present he has no regrets, but when he had written it he did.

When we think about the word 'regret' we probably most often think about someone wishing they had not done something or perhaps had done things differently.

It certainly can mean that, but there is more depth to the word than that.

It is possible to know that something is necessary, that you need to do something and yet wish you didn't have to do it.

That is likely what the apostle is trying to convey here.

He knew that God had called him to preach the gospel in Corinth, he knew it was by God's grace that people believed the gospel, and that a church had been planted.

He knew that being an apostle of Christ placed on him the responsibility of continuing to check in on this church and call these believers out of evil and into a maturing relationship with Jesus.

In 1Corinthians 4 Paul likens his relationship to this church to a father and child type of relationship.

He sees them as his responsibility and more than that as people whom he loves dearly and therefore he was willing to say hard things to them even if it meant causing them grief.

Did he wish he didn't have to do that? Yes, but he knows it had to happen.

[The whole parent and child relationship is a good illustration of this point. No good parent enjoys disciplining their children. How many have ever heard a parent say, "This is going to hurt me more than you?" I'm guessing not too many children believe that at the time, but it is definitely something that can be true. It is painful to see your child do something wrong and hurtful, especially if they persist at it. It would be far better if children did what was right and parents didn't have to give them consequences. But there are no perfect children and so being a good parent means doing the hard thing at times.]

That is how Paul feels about the Corinthians and that is how we should still feel in the church today.

If you know what it is like to confront someone you care about with sin in their life, then you know what it is like to feel sick to your stomach.

You know what it is like to lose sleep at night.

You also probably know what it is like to have people turn on their heel and walk away from you, or never speak to you again, call you names, and a like.

Even in the best of situations it is hard to watch someone realize their mistake and be truly broken hearted over it.

Listen, sin is costly, it is deadly, and the cause of sorrow upon sorrow.

[Because that is true it is hard to deal with. I would be the first to admit that it is very easy to do a bad job of it. It is very easy to become self-righteous and judgmental when confronting the godless living of someone who claims to follow Jesus. Of course the LORD wants better for us than that. He wants us to deal with these things out of concern for people and with sorrowful hearts over the need to do such things. That is hard, there is no escaping that, but if in doing that someone experiences 'godly grief' it will lead to something good. That is the next lesson in this text, that...]

Point #2 – Godly grief results in joy. (Verse 9-10)

Feeling sorrow over godless living can turn people back to the LORD and that is something to be happy about.

Far from having ongoing regret concerning his actions toward this church he says this at the beginning of verse 9, “As it is **I rejoice**”.

He is happy with what has happened and very quickly explains why that is the case (verse 9).

He is not happy that what he wrote to them made them feel grief, he is happy about what that grief produced.

Whatever sorrow his letter caused made them realize their need to turn away from their godless behaviour.

That is what it means to ‘repent.’

It means to turn away from.

Their grief opened their eyes to see that what they were doing was wrong and they needed to stop.

The result is that they “suffered no loss” on account of the apostle and he gospel co-workers.

Now, we have to consider what he means by that.

The scriptures as a whole and even Paul’s own letters in the New Testament teach that there is a cost to repentance.

If you make your living at a sinful job, repentance is going to cost you money.

If your friends won’t be your friends unless you do the evil things they do, then repentance is going to cost you some relationships.

There is often a worldly cost to pay for repentance so when it says here their ‘godly grief’ resulted in ‘no loss’ it must refer to loss in the kingdom of heaven.

He makes that clear in **verse 10**.

That is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ at work.

This is what John talks about in 1John 1:9, **“If we confess our sins...”**

Do you know what ‘confession’ is? It is saying to God, “Lord I am wrong and you are right!”

Godly grief is what leads a person to that conclusion.

“If we confess our sins” it says, “he (God through the work of Christ dying and rising) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Genuine sorrow leading to genuine repentance leads to genuine salvation which is eternal life.

There is no regret there. No one will stand before God and say, “I wish I had kept going in my evil ways.”

That is what godly grief produces, eternal life with no regret before the LORD.

Worldly grief, on the other hand, produces something very different.

It says here at the end of verse 10 that worldly grief produces death.

Why is that? Because worldly grief is sorrow over the consequences of sin but not the sin itself.

Worldly grief is sorrow over not being able to continue in things that are contrary to God's word.

People with worldly grief are sorry because they got caught and given the opportunity to continue on without consequence they surely would.

That kind of grief can't save you because that kind of grief doesn't lead to repentance.

[If you read what the Bible has to say about hell you will clearly see that it is a place of extreme grief, sorrow, and pain. There are no happy people in hell. That said, the scriptures give no sense that anyone in hell is repentant. Quite the opposite, it gives the sense that people under God's judgment are filled with anger and hatred for the LORD. They are grieved at their punishment but unchanged in their heart towards God.]

The grief inflicted upon the Corinthians, by the Holy Spirit through the letter of the apostle produced something very different.

It produced repentance and that is making Paul happy and even if the Corinthian believers are still feeling some grief in the present it will soon turn to joy because it is clear evidence that they have the gift of eternal life.

I have to tell you there is nothing like seeing that happen in someone's life.

No doubt it is hard to have to cause someone sorrow with the truth of God's word, but if they by God's grace respond and turn away from what is killing them it is amazing.

[It is also amazing to know that this has happened and is happening in our own hearts. We would all be wise to ask ourselves why we feel bad about doing something wrong. Because we got caught? Because we can't do it anymore? Or, because we see that we are wrong and God is right. Being truly grieved over sin leads to joy because it leads to life. In addition to joy here is something else godly grief produces...]

Point #3 – Godly grief produces godly behaviour. (Verse 11-12)

True repentance does more than turn a person away from what is wrong, it causes a person to pursue what is right.

Verse 11 gives us a list of how the Corinthians responded to being grieved by the apostle. (Verse 11).

They became earnest and eager. That is they worked with diligence and they were motivated to do so.

Those are two qualities that are critical in the war against ungodly things in our lives.

As far as I can see in my bible the devil is no quitter. We know with certainty that he will be defeated by the power of Christ, but he is not going to surrender.

If you are seeking to flee from evil you can be sure he will put temptation and obstacles in your way.

Besides the devil we must also contend with our own sinful natures.

As long as we live in this fallen world and in these fallen bodies we will have a desire for things that God hates.

That said, we are reminded here that our battle is far from hopeless.

Being born again by faith alone in the person and work of Christ means that God is also at work in us and if by faith we are diligent the power of sin will be overcome and the desire for what is right will grow.

He also speaks here of indignation meaning that they have become upset or unsettled by evil in their midst.

Because of godly grief they have 'fear' meaning they are very concerned about what God says about right and wrong and want to do what is right for the sake of His glory.

He speaks of "longing and zeal". There is a powerful desire among these believers to resolve this situation.

Near the end of the verse he mentions 'punishment'.

That translates a Greek word meaning *justice* and likely means that the Church has taken necessary steps to deal with people in their fellowship who refuse to turn away from their evil and harmful behaviour.

As Paul has heard of all that they have been doing to deal with the wrongdoing in their congregation he concludes they have done everything they can to be proved 'innocent' in the matter.

By 'innocent' he does not mean they haven't made any mistakes, rather he means that they have done everything they can to deal with the situation in a godly manner.

All of this was a benefit to the situation and it was a benefit to the church as well which is pointed out in **verse 12**.

This is bigger than just the particular people doing wrong things and the particular people who were wronged.

The situation was used by God to reveal to the Corinthians their own 'earnestness' for Paul and his fellow workers.

At first glance that might sound self-centered as though Paul is making this whole thing about himself.

This isn't about being on Paul's side for the sake of Paul. This is about accepting the authority of an apostle because an apostle is under the authority of Christ.

Their earnest for Paul is an earnestness for the gospel.

So the big picture here is a turning away from what is wrong in God's sight and turning towards what is right with considerable effort and determination.

Both of those things are essential in the Christian life.

[The fight against sin is a little bit like renovating an old broken down house. In a house like that the person fixing it up will often find a bunch of rotten wood some of which is really important to holding the house up. If a builder leaves a rotten support beam the house will fall down. That beam has to be removed, but if a builder only removes the beam the house will again fall down. What does he have to do? He has to remove the old beam and put in a new one that is good and solid.]

Brothers and sisters that is what God the Holy Spirit does in His people on an ongoing basis.

These people felt godly grief because the Spirit was working in them.

That grief produced things by the work of the Spirit.

He does more than simply get us to stop sinning He works in us so that we will be pursuing what is right.

As that is taking place, the reality of saving faith is made known through what we do.

[Genuine sorrow over sin does not produce fake tears. It does more than simply produce an "I'm sorry let's move on" type of attitude. Genuine sorrow produces a real distaste for unholy things and an eagerness for what is right. When all that happens it leads to something else that is very good. When someone is willing to be used by God to produce godly grief, when that grief produces repentance and therefore joy and the pursuit of what is right, then this last lesson will surely follow. The lesson is that...]

Point#4 – Godly grief restores and strengthens godly relationships. (Verse 13-16)

One of the many wondrous things about the gospel is that it can free us from holding onto the pain that people have caused us and be glad to have them back in our lives.

Because of the good things that the Corinthians grief over their sin has produced Paul can say this in verse 13-14.

One of the things we have to keep in mind as we are reading this is that communication in the ancient world was slow going.

Today we send a text message or email and we generally don't have to wait very long to figure out how it has been received.

When Paul wrote the letter that ‘grieved’ these believers someone had to walk and maybe even take a boat to get the letter to them.

Whatever was in the letter Paul was clearly concerned that there was a chance it could be received badly.

Have you ever heard the expression, “Don’t shoot the messenger”?

That is a saying because it could actually happen back in those days.

While it is doubtful the Corinthians would kill the letter bearer they could easily toss him out of the church and say, “Tell Paul we never want to see him again.”

Can you imagine sending an email with some painful truth and having to wait months before you learn how it was taken?

When Titus finally catches up with Paul though the news is good.

The Corinthians received him, they had responded well to the letter, they were pursuing godliness, and were a source of encouragement rather than a source of danger to Paul’s fellow servant.

Any distance or discord that was felt by the church toward these gospel ministers had been erased.

We also see in verses 15-16 that the strengthening of the relationship is a two way street. (**Verses 15-16**)

Their obedience and desire for holiness caused Titus to increase in his affection for them.

Paul is rejoicing because he has been filled with confidence concerning their spiritual condition.

In order for both of those things to happen the apostle and his co-workers must refuse to hold anything against them, the record of wrongs is blank, and so the barriers of sin that were hindering their relationship are gone.

In the church godly grief that results in repentance should also lead to forgiveness.

If you have both of those things genuine repentance and forgiveness you have a restored relationship.

Therefore, if the relationship is not restored you are missing one or both of those ingredients.

[Imagine division in the church like a broken piece of metal. If you have a piece of metal that is broken into pieces it is possible with the right tools and the right skill to weld them back together. It takes heat and a welding rod and if a welder is really good the piece can be put back together like it had never been broken. It is amazing to see.]

It is far more amazing to see two or more believers be brought back together through repentance and forgiveness.

It is like repentance is the heat and forgiveness is the welding rod and what was broken is made whole again.

Now, someone may object and give examples of sins that are so severe that they leave permanent scars upon people.

I would agree that there are acts of evil that can be committed that make it impossible to go back to the way things were before. (Murder for example cannot be undone)

While I admit that, I would offer two important words of wisdom.

First, while some sins leave permanent scars, in the gospel there is freedom from hatred, bitterness, and resentment.

There is healing beyond measure in the love of Christ.

Second, it is very easy to use extreme examples to justify keeping up barriers to restoring relationships.

It has been my experience in the church that most people stay at odds with one another over things that don't rise to the level of the extreme. In fact, I'm sorry to say that most of the time it is over fairly small things.

Christ calls us to something far better.

He calls us to restore the one who has godly grief and who repents from their sins.

He calls us to toss out the record of wrongs and rejoice in the salvation and sanctification of our fellow believers.

Just imagine what the church might look like if we lived this out.

Imagine if in a spirit of love and wisdom more people were used by the LORD to produce godly grief over sin?

Imagine how much more joy there would be if we saw more people freed from things that are leading to their destruction.

Imagine if we did more than trying to stay away from bad things, imagine if we sought more godliness in our behaviour.

Imagine if the things that divided us were cast aside and we were growing closer together as believers and strengthening each other in the LORD.

How good would all of that be?

It can happen if we are willing to feel grief over our sin and have that good grief motivate us to obey the LORD.

No kind of genuine grief feels good, but godly grief results in good things.