

Good Godly Grief

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 November 2015

Preacher: Rev. Jeremy Graham

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. I can't tell you how great it is to be with you this morning. As much as I enjoy being downstairs in Sunday school week by week, there's no greater privilege than teaching your children.

But it's a real delight to be up here with you this morning and have a chance to open God's Word with you. Well, we're in the final week of our sermon series in 2 Corinthians before we break for Advent and Christmas.

And I have it on good word that we will be returning to 2 Corinthians someday soon. So I hope that excites and gives you a sense of anticipation for the new year.

The passage that we just heard read this morning is from 2 Corinthians 7, verses 5 to 16. And if you could have that open with you in front of you now as we begin to look at this passage closer.

2 Corinthians 7, verses 5 to 16, page 967. Since September, many of us have been reading and studying 2 Corinthians together.

[1 : 05] And I wonder, what have you found the most encouraging about Paul's letter? Or what have you found the most challenging about Paul's letter?

I think for me, I have to go back to chapter 4. Particularly in the verses when Paul reminds me that I am a fragile clay pot.

Yet God has deliberately chosen to display the power of the gospel through my weakness and in my weakness so that I will learn to rest in his strength and not in my own strength.

That's been a very powerful word from my heart these last couple of months. And I wonder what has challenged or encouraged you from 2 Corinthians.

You know, to be honest, this truth that I just shared from my experience is really, for me, both encouraging and also challenging. Haven't you found that 2 Corinthians is very good at doing that at the same time?

[2 : 08] Combining encouragement with challenge? And I think it's because this book is confronting us with the upside-down gospel of grace. And it's giving us this perspective of the world which doesn't match the world that I see around me from day to day.

It doesn't match what I see and what I hear in so much of my life. You know, we regularly experience this pressure to feel embarrassed by the gospel, don't we?

This gospel that tells us that we are to come in weakness, that we're not to turn away from suffering, not to be afraid of foolishness.

And we hear voices around us say things like, what do you mean you follow a king who was killed on a cross? Or, what do you mean you're not willing to boast in your own accomplishments?

Do you want to be like Charlie Brown for the rest of your life? The laughingstock of your co-workers and family? I love that David entitled this sermon, Good Godly Grief. It reminded me of Charlie Brown.

[3 : 19] You know, whereas all of the cultural signals in Corinth and in Vancouver would make us think that building up our own status and our own power and my own family legacy, that must surely be the path that leads to glory and to a lasting influence.

Long after I'm gone, surely that must be the logical direction. And then suddenly, here in 2 Corinthians, we're confronted by this upside-down gospel of grace, and we discover that our perspective on the world is entirely wrong.

And suddenly, the paradox of the gospel proclaims that the only real and lasting power of transformation and new life is found in dying to ourselves, is found in becoming a new creature in Christ Jesus, and walking in the way of weakness through the Holy Spirit.

Or here's how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians chapter 3. Maybe you remember these verses. There is a veil over our minds, but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed, and we, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed from one glory into another.

2 Corinthians chapter 3. You can look at it later in more detail. You see, right at the heart of the upside-down gospel of grace that I'm talking about is this turning, right? And it's an acknowledgement that the path that we previously walked on, the path paved with good intentions, that we're sure must lead to life, liberty, and the fulfillment of the Canadian dream.

[4 : 56] And by the way, if you know what the fulfillment of the Canadian dream is, let me know. I have no idea. We discover that this path actually leads to nothing but idolatry and death.

We heard about this in chapter 6 last week when David preached. And so the Bible calls this turning that I'm speaking of, calls it repentance. And it's pictured in Scripture as both a physical turning of ourselves, almost a guttural reaction, in an entirely new direction, like a 180-degree turn.

It's pictured as that physical turn. And also, it's pictured as a change of our heart and our mind as we turn away from our sin and towards dependence on our Lord Jesus.

This is biblical repentance. And why am I saying all this? Good question. Because here in 2 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul gives us yet another glorious characteristic of the upside-down gospel of grace.

And it's this. Godly grief produces repentance, which leads to salvation, comfort, and joy. Let me say that again. Godly grief produces repentance, which leads to salvation, comfort, and joy.

[6 : 12] And nothing in the world would lead us to naturally connect grief with comfort or joy, except that God's grace is determined to overturn our expectations and draw us into a deeper union with Christ and a deeper trust in Him.

So let's have a look at the key verse in this text together. If you look at chapter 7, we're going to begin at verses 9 and 10. And this is really the very heart of this chapter.

And everything around it, it radiates out to connect with everything around it. So as you heard it read, if like me, when I first read it, you were thinking, what is Paul talking about?

Let's start at verse 9 and 10, and we'll see if we can't work our way out from there. Let me read it for us. As it is, Paul says, 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 that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

[7 : 24] Let's stop there for now. Let's stop there for now. It's important to say, before I go any further, that this grief or this sorrow that Paul is speaking of here, in this context, is not the grief that we experience over the death of a loved one.

This is grief in response to sin. And I think, Paul, this is quite shocking. Paul is actually saying that whether we know what sin is, whether we're able to give it a name, whether we're a Christian or not, he's saying that every one of us experiences this kind of grief, whether we're able to label it sin or not.

And I want to go a little bit deeper into the idea of godly versus worldly grieving that we just heard, particularly in verse 10. Godly versus worldly grieving. But before we go any further, it's going to be necessary to do a little bit of context and background.

Because the reading began at verse 5, and you can be forgiven if you've completely forgotten what Paul's talking about and where he's picking up from.

You have to go all the way back to chapter 2 to remember what Paul was talking about. And I think that was back in September. Who can remember that, right? So let's do a little background work, and I'll try to move quickly through this.

[8 : 52] So imagine four or five years ago, St. Paul planted a church in Corinth, a wealthy and popular city, a lot like Vancouver. And let me just say that the Corinthian church gave Paul more trouble than all the other churches he planted put together.

And now we see that Paul hasn't visited them for a while. In fact, the last time he visited them in person, he was forced to leave almost with his tail between his legs.

because at least one leading member of this congregation got up and openly spoke out against Paul. You ever been in part of a congregation where someone did that? Denouncing Paul's apostolic authority and even calling his character into question.

And the Corinthian church, they were very polite. They did nothing to defend Paul. They just looked at the ground, and they just left him hanging out to dry.

And so Paul took the high road, amazingly, and he just left Corinth knowing that it wasn't the right time to reconcile face to face. However, he did write a letter to the Corinthians. This is sometimes called the severe letter, but I think if you read chapter 7 in particular, I prefer calling it the tearful letter.

[10:08] The tearful letter. Because chapter 7 really shows Paul's pastoral heart, doesn't it? This letter, this tearful letter, Paul had it delivered by the hands of Titus, who I've always imagined Titus kind of looks a little bit like Dan Gifford.

And we don't know much about the contents of the tearful letter, but we do know this much from 2 Corinthians, that Paul called the Corinthians to repent, and he called them to discipline the one or ones who had spoken against him.

But amazingly, remarkably, he actually says in chapter 2 that he wants them to forgive this person. He wants them to forgive them and welcome them back into fellowship. Isn't that remarkable?

So now, here we are in chapter 7. Paul's been waiting anxiously for news of the Corinthian response. And I need to just, before we go any further, I just need to say that if you're wondering why it's so important to Paul how they respond, I mean, is this an ego trip that he's on?

Why does he care so much about what they did to him? It's not about whether they're willing to submit to his apostolic authority, or it's not about his ego or being deeply hurt by a betrayal, although those probably were true.

[11:24] It's not even about punishing those who turned against him. No, for Paul, this is a gospel issue. I think that's why he's so grieved at what the Corinthians have done, because their loyalty to Paul is really a reflection of their loyalty to Christ.

And to reject Paul's authority and Paul's gospel is to reject the gospel of grace and reject Jesus the King. This is foundational stuff for Paul, and that's the source, the heart of his grief over this.

He can't sleep at night, verse 5 says, because this church that he loves has turned away from the gospel of salvation. So I hope this context is helpful as we move on through chapter 7.

Because in chapter 7, Paul is sharing... Okay, listen carefully to this. Paul is sharing with the Corinthians his response to the Corinthians' response to his tearful letter.

Does that sound like postmodern meta-fiction? Let me say that again. Paul is sharing with the Corinthians, he's writing it to them, his response, how he felt when he received from Titus their response to his tearful letter.

[12:36] That's why it was so confusing when we heard it read. And out of this very specific moment in this very personal relationship between one man, a pastor, and one congregation, God's Word teaches us some very important things about grief and repentance.

And if you like to take notes, and I wanted to tell you this, Dave, two people in my Bible study that never take notes arrived with pages and pages of notes after your last two sermons, but their notes were written with a trembling hand.

So I don't know what that means. But if you like to take notes, for the remainder of the sermon, we're really going to divide the passage into godly grief and worldly grief. We're going to start with worldly grief. And if you wonder how much space you're going to need, just think of it this way.

Worldly grief narrows and diminishes until it amounts to nothing. Whereas godly grief widens and multiplies in an amazing display of the power of the upside-down gospel of grace.

So you're going to need pages and pages for the godly grief section. I want to read these verses again before we go any further. Verses 9 and 10. 2 Corinthians chapter 7. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting.

[13:52] For you felt a godly grief so that you suffered no loss through it. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret. Whereas worldly grief produces death.

Okay. First worldly grief then. Worldly grief produces regret, which produces death. But what is regret?

What's this regret that Paul's speaking about? I got this one from Aaron Roberts. He says, if you look up regret in the dictionary, surely you're going to see a picture of a man named Ronald Wayne. Do you guys know Ronald Wayne? I didn't until Aaron shared this story with me. He's the man in 1976 who owned 10% of Apple computers the day it became a company, incorporated. 10%.

And he sold it two weeks later for \$800. And those shares are now worth, I'm told, \$60 billion. Lovely man, though, to this day, has said he does not regret his decision.

[14:55] Isn't that beautiful? I don't believe him for a minute. I think this probably is what most people's definition of regret would be, Ronald Wayne's. Or what about the politician or the celebrity, it happens all the time, doesn't it, that's caught red-handed in a misdeed, and we hear lines like, I regret if anyone was hurt by what I did.

Or the famous line now, mistakes were made in the passive voice. But that's not what Paul's talking about at all. For Paul, the difference between repentance and regret is how it relates to the cross of Christ.

The difference between repentance and regret is how it relates to the cross of Christ. Because regret describes when we know we've done something wrong, and this is the funny part, we might even call it sin sometimes.

We might even label it sin. But we're not acknowledging it in repentance before God. We give it another name. We say, mistakes were made, or I'm sorry you feel that way.

Our grief is more about wanting to be rid of the consequences of getting caught, or wanting to be rid of that feeling of shame, that yucky feeling of shame that we're feeling, than it is about truly wanting to turn away from our grief and receive forgiveness by the blood of Jesus.

[16:14] And I don't think there's any better example of this than Judas in Matthew chapter 27. Judas, who was a disciple, a close friend of Jesus, betrayed him for 30 pieces of silver.

And we read in chapter 27, verse 3, Judas, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, was filled with remorse. The Greek there, he was filled with regret.

He was filled with this worldly grief. And he brought back the 30 pieces of silver, and he tried to give them back to the chief priests and elders, saying, listen to this, I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.

You see, he even could call it sin. They said, what is it to us? See to it yourself. They don't want his blood money. And throwing down the pieces of silver, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

Tragic. Tragic. Judas experiences worldly grief. He even is able to call it sin. But his regret leads him only to death, not to repentance, because he does not let his shame lead him to the cross of Christ and to forgiveness.

[17:27] He turns his back on the cross and he hides. He hides from it in death. Worldly grief produces regret, which produces death.

You see, regret always turns us in on ourselves. Remember I talked about repentance as this turning from ourselves, walking in a new direction, physically and also in our minds. In Eugene Peterson's message translation of chapter 7, this is how he translates verse 10.

Those who let distress drive them away from God are full of regrets. They end up on a deathbed of regrets. It's not enough for us to feel grief or sorrow.

It's not enough for us to regret what we've done. Or even to make a me-centered apology. I don't know if you've ever tried this on your spouse. I'm sorry I can't even say it.

I'm sorry you feel that way, honey. She sees right through it. Worldly grief turns us in on ourselves. It turns us in on ourselves. It narrows and constricts like I said before.

[18:36] And it feeds on our bitterness. It leads only to spiritual death. Godly grief. Well, let's turn to godly grief.

Shall we? Godly grief. And yes, we're going to read it one more time because it's that good. 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 that leads to salvation without regret. You know, in the ancient Greek and Roman kind of culture, I'm told that they shunned public repentance.

They shunned public grief, displays of grief and contrition, public apologies. They were a lot like modern day politicians. And this was especially true among the upper class and the sort of upwardly mobile.

This is the people that we've been talking about in Corinth. So you can imagine when this letter, the tearful letter, arrived and called them to repentance what the temptation was for them.

[19:44] Just like it is for us. I'm going to practice a little private regret in my heart about what happened. I feel really terrible that, you know, that I hurt Paul's feelings.

I'm sorry that he doesn't feel comfortable staying in my home anymore. But then I'm going to forget about Paul and his crazy upside down gospel of grace. But you know, the amazing thing is that instead the Holy Spirit stirs up the hearts of the Corinthians towards this godly grief.

And I mention the Holy Spirit because there is no possibility of genuine repentance without the work of the Holy Spirit in us. And as the Corinthians responded in repentance to Paul's letter, there's four things that happened in their hearts.

There's four things very quickly. They turned away from their sin and turned away from themselves. They turned towards the Lord God and towards the cross of Christ.

Thirdly, they laid aside their old selves, rejecting that pattern of sin in their lives. And they put on, fourthly, put on a new self, reminded once again of 2 Corinthians 5.17.

[20 : 56] If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. We turn away from ourselves, we turn towards the Lord Jesus and the cross of Christ. We lay aside our old selves.

In fact, that previous sin, true repentance, leads us to a place where that former sin is absolutely repulsive and repugnant to us. And we put on a new self once again, the new creation in Christ. And Paul writes in verse 10 that godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation without regrets. And we have another example of grief in the Gospels.

Even in the narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection. We have another, we have another example of grief. Do you know who it is? The Apostle Peter.

Simon Peter. Peter also betrayed Jesus. And you know what? Only a few verses before Judas comes back to the leaders and tries to give the money back.

[21 : 57] Only a few verses before this in chapter 26 of Matthew. We read this. After a little while, the bystanders came up and said to Peter, he's around the fire while Jesus is on trial.

Certainly, you too are one of Jesus' disciples for your accent betrays you. You got a Cockney accent, Peter, and it betrays you. Peter began to invoke a curse upon himself and to swear, I don't know this man.

And immediately, the rooster crowed and Peter remembered the saying of Jesus before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly.

This is a dark, dark night for Peter. And it might have been the exact same night that Judas wept bitterly.

We don't know for sure. But two men regretting what they did and they were by God's gracious providence, we read in John chapter 21 that when the risen Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples and speaks face-to-face with Peter, he asks him three times, do you love me?

[23 : 03] Once for each time that Peter betrayed him. And the third time, John writes, Peter was grieved and said, Lord, you know everything.

You know that I love you. Peter was grieved. Do you know what I'm going to say next? That's the same word that's in 2 Corinthians 7.10. Peter was grieved.

But his grief was a godly grief and it led him to repentance. A grief demonstrated by his turning away from himself, falling at the feet of his Lord Jesus and saying, with love and affection, Lord, you know I love you.

You are my Lord and Savior. I give my life to you. That's godly grief on display. So godly grief produces genuine repentance and new life.

But before we close, just very quickly, I want to show you how this godly grief doesn't just stay with the Corinthians. It multiplies, like I said. And we only have time for two very quick examples.

[24 : 06] You can look at this later on your own. But I just want you to see how there's two lists in verse 7 and verse 11. And I wish your Bible printed them as a list rather than just, it's so hard to see these things.

But particularly at verse 11 we're going to look at. Let me just read these things that Paul fires off very quickly. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourself, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment. They're just rolling off his tongue. So first we see how this godly grief doesn't just stay in the Corinthians' heart, but it actually multiplies out of them into the local church.

I think these words, what some of them have in common is there are a wide range of godly characteristics, but they all point to their words that serve the gospel, the going out of the gospel. They're words that speak to an enthusiasm and an eagerness and an outward momentum so that what begins in their hearts is now pouring out of them in zeal and earnestness and enthusiasm,

pushing the gospel forward into new avenues.

[25 : 14] And then secondly, we see how this grace multiplies in the spreading to other Christians, particularly to Titus and to Paul. Did you notice how the central verse from which I said everything radiates out is surrounded, it's bracketed at the beginning of the chapter and the end by seven references to comfort or maybe better strength.

And so we see in verse four, I'm filled with comfort. Verse six, God comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus. Verse seven has two more comforts. And then on the other end of the bracket, verse 13, therefore we're comforted and besides our own comfort, we rejoice still more at the joy of Titus.

So we get there even two comforts and two joys, it's just multiplying, isn't it? And what are these comforting, these strengthening verses all about? Why are they here? I think it's because the amazing upside down gospel of grace, the mathematics, I think I remember David saying this early in the sermon series, the mathematics of the gospel of grace are all wonky.

They're upside down. It means that the godly grief that began at Corinth is now multiplying in repentance in the local church, multiplying into comfort and joy and strength in Titus as he visited them and was refreshed by them.

And then as he travels back to Macedonia and to find Paul, that it's now multiplying into Paul's heart as well. And so we get in verses 14 to 16, this undulation of joy, like this Paul can't hardly contain himself.

[26 : 44] You almost forget that Paul's also writing a letter of pastoral concern and kind of, you know, he's addressing some real problems at Corinth that still remain. But you wouldn't know it from verse 14 to 16 because in this moment, Paul's joy is so magnified.

he's so strengthened and comforted by the news of this godly grief.