

## Godly Sorrow Leads to Repentance and Salvation

II Corinthians 7:6-11, Laetare Sunday

March 2, 2008

Beloved of the Lord.....In our catechism the question is asked, "How is this Old Adam to be drowned in us?" The answer, "The Old Adam is to be drowned in us by daily contrition (sorrow for sins) and repentance (faith), by which we also resist the evil desires and suppress them." Contrition is true and genuine sorrow over sin. It is not manufactured nor made up, but it is real. It cannot be measured nor quantified, but it is there. Contrition is God-produced or God-made sorrow, by the law which reveals our sins and God's wrath against our sin. Edward Koehler writes, "Contrition is to feel sincere sorrow in the heart, as did Peter." We remember that Peter wept bitterly after he realized his sin of denying the Lord. But we should also recall David who had committed adultery with Bathsheba. When he repented he didn't cry at all but only confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord." In any case, whether there are tears or no, God is the one who works contrition in the heart. And contrition is a necessary and daily part of the believer's life. We cannot do without it. For we are to daily confess our sins and be sorry for them, and daily seek forgiveness for our sins in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. His grace leads to everlasting life.

In today's lesson then we are going to look first at godly sorrow, which is God-produced contrition, and then daily repentance which is really a continual conversion. May God teach us this all-important truth that **GODLY SORROW LEADS TO REPENTANCE AND SALVATION**.

I. "I do not repent, though I did repent." Paul begins, "Nevertheless God, that comforts those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." How refreshing and encouraging it is to see a friend when we are cast down! Paul was very refreshed just at the sight of Titus, and Titus had good news! The Corinthians had received Paul's words of admonition, and repented! For Paul, in his previous letter to them, had found it necessary to rebuke the Corinthians for several errors, the greatest of those being they had failed to exercise church discipline in a rather shameful case. One of their members was living in an adulterous affair with his step-mother! Paul had written "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." They were to excommunicate this impenitent sinner, in order he see the greatness of his sin, repent, and be saved!

Paul's words were strong! They had to be! God holds Christians accountable for the souls of one another. We are our brother's keeper. When Paul wrote his letter of admonition, he took no joy in using the rod of the law. Nor did he know if they would repent. Paul says, "I do not repent, though I did repent." This means he doesn't regret saying what needed to be said, but he wondered if he had been too harsh. It is often that way when pastors admonish members in a congregation. Pastors don't like to admonish. They don't want to give the bitter pill. But sometimes a surgeon has to cut off a leg in order to save the body. In like manner, we have to learn to love our neighbor and friends enough to go and correct them from time to time with God's Word, if it is truly necessary. While we should never be searching around for those little motes in our neighbor's eye, some sins just cannot, and ought not be ignored, but rebuked in the proper spirit.

II. Godly sorrow. Thankfully in the case of Paul and the Corinthians, they listened to and accepted his brotherly rebuke. Paul writes, "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing." Godly sorrow is a true and real God-produced sorrow in the heart. Christians daily experience such godly sorrow when they realize they have sinned and done something contrary to God's law. Since we love the Lord our God we feel bad when we have grieved Him by our behavior. Yet as soon as we sin, or realize we have sinned, our heart immediately turns in repentance and faith to Christ our Savior. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, which here includes faith in the redeeming merits of Christ. And once we turn to Christ, we need not turn away from Him. In this case, what made Paul most happy is that once the people realized their sin, they immediately turned to Christ for forgiveness. This is what Christ desires of all sinners, that they turn to Him in faith and drink of His living waters.

When speaking of godly sorrow, we ought to understand there can also be a fear of God's wrath, which Christians at times experience due to their sins. C. F. W. Walther, a fine model of a Christian, explains godly sorrow this way, "When I am terrified by the thought of my sins, hell, death, and damnation and perceive that God is angry with me and that, being under His wrath, I am damned on account of my sins, - that is godly sorrow." (L & G 246) If we have had terrifying thoughts of death or hell, or if we have considered God's great wrath against our sin, and what we deserve because of our sin, this is truly godly sorrow. Though such thoughts are frightening, they are useful in the sense that they prepare us to receive Christ. That is actually God's purpose in giving us the law. "He gave us the Law, the commandments, even the threats of punishment, for one purpose above all: to bring us to see our need and desire the blessings of the Savior."

It is really the end of godly sorrow which is most important, for the end of godly sorrow is faith. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." After godly sorrow, comes repentance which here means faith. Repentance in the wide sense includes both sorrow over sin, and faith in the forgiveness of such sins. Our Confessions put it this way, "Repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which is born of the Gospel, or of absolution, and believes that for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers from its terrors." (Augs. Conf. Art. XII) Again, what made Paul happy was that the sorrow the people endured led to repentance, it led to faith. Not only did they confess their sins, but they applied the joyous news of the Gospel to themselves and remembered how Christ had become their righteousness. When we then in like manner feel the weight of our sin, or even the terror and we fear God's wrath and anger, Jesus tells us we need only come to Him and all will be forgiven. "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Indeed the only reason God aroused this knowledge of sin within yourself was so that you would see your need for Jesus, and happily receive Him into your heart by faith. All sinners who long to be forgiven and rid of their sins need only trust in Jesus who by the cross reconciled the whole world unto Himself. Through Jesus, God does not impute nor count our trespasses against us. By His blood no sin, not a one is charged to your account. "Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound." And so you should no longer be terrified of your sins, but be at peace with Jesus. Remember that you are one of His

chosen lambs, special and beloved in His sight. Jesus said, " My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand." We are like a little lamb in His arms. Jesus calms our troubled breast with His forgiveness saying, "Thy sins be forgiven Thee....Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." In Christ alone then we find spiritual peace, and it is a peace which this world cannot take away from us.

III. Daily repentance, which is continual conversion. In our last verse for today Paul writes, "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." In other words, due to Paul's admonition they made diligent search for their sins. They found and discovered their sins by God's law, and they sincerely and truly repented. They confessed their sins to Jesus, and they trusted in His blood to cleanse them of all sin. They also remedied or amended the situation. They changed course, amended their sinful ways.

In like manner, daily repentance is needed in every Christian's life. We are to examine ourselves daily, look at what our sins have been today, examine them, think about them, confess them to God, and seek not to do them again. We are to also diligently use the Means of Grace, for God through His gracious Word first forgives us of our sins, and then gives us the strength to lead a holy life. Today we have Holy Communion. We come to the altar after confessing our sins. God then gives us His true body, and His true blood, along with the forgiveness of sins. In short, He feeds us with His grace so that the peace of God can prevail in our heart. But this spiritual food He also gives us through the preaching of the Gospel in church, and also the reading of our Bibles in our homes. Wherever God's Word is, there is also His grace.

And so the Christian life is somewhat a continual turning and returning. We daily sin much, and that is a turning toward sin, but we daily repent of our sins and turn back to the Lord. Such daily repentance is sometimes called Continued or Continual Conversion. Pieper writes, "The wicked flesh still adheres to God's children, and so they daily need to turn with a contrite heart from unbelief and its evil fruits to the free grace of God for the remission of their sins and the renewel of their lives." It is not that we fall away from faith daily, for daily we cling to Christ. It is only that this wretched body of sin continues to sin in spite of our not wanting it so, and so we must continually turn and return to Christ and His grace for strength. We should also remember that where there is repentance, there is also an earnest and sincere desire to amend our sinful ways.

And so, beloved of the Lord, let us remember to make daily repentance a part of our daily life, along with our Bible reading. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Godly sorrow leads to repentance AND salvation. May God therefore preserve and keep us in the blessed faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.