

Blessed with Godly Sorrow

I was nineteen years old, and so very far from God. One evening several friends and I were drinking when someone decided to make prank phone calls. They dialed the number of a girl who was still in high school, and handed me the phone. I knew the young lady only by name, but when the home answering machine picked up, I left a message, which, in very vulgar terms, claimed to personally know her to be horribly immoral. A few days later, I heard that her parents, who were Christians, were the ones who checked and heard the vile lies I had spoken.

About five years later, having come to Jesus Christ, I called an air conditioning service man to my house. The man who came was the young lady's father. He was kind and helpful to me and even discounted his services. When I realized who he was, the memory of that night came rushing back and I knew what I must do. That evening, I called their home and the mother answered the phone. I told her who I was and what I had done those several years ago. I expressed my sorrow and asked for their forgiveness. The words she spoke broke my heart even further. "Keith," she said, "We always knew it was you, and yes, we do forgive you."

Almost forty-five years later, if I think of that foolish night, tears will fill my eyes as I consider the hurt I brought to that young lady and her parents. It is not that I think about these things often, but when I do my heart feels the same brokenness over that period of shame. I do not live in condemnation. In fact, I consider these memories to be a friend in my walk with God. My sorrow over such things of the past reminds me even more of how gracious God has been to me.

True repentance is not just words that we speak at the time of conversion to Christ. It is an ever-present condition in our heart. The Apostle Paul spoke of a "godly sorrow" which "works

repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” This “godly sorrow” over past sins is actually a blessing that causes us to cling ever closer to Jesus Christ. It is as Jesus spoke concerning the woman who washed his feet with her tears, saying, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

The Apostle Paul personally understood the lifetime effect of “godly sorrow.” Before coming to Christ, he had been a great persecutor of the early church. Then known as Saul of Tarsus, he dragged believers from their homes, cast them into prison, and gave witness against them when they were put to death. This was the reason, that even as an Apostle of Christ, he referred to himself as the chief of sinners

This “godly sorrow” over past sin never left Paul. In his latter years he would write, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” This was not a pretended humility. Paul never forgot what he was before experiencing the grace of Christ.

The Bible also speaks of a “sorrow of this world” which “works death. This kind of sorrow will drive a person into darkness and condemnation. It will destroy them instead of drawing them close to Christ. Yet, what we see often in the church today is a complete lack of sorrow over sin. They may say the words of repentance, but it is not real in their heart, Many can laugh and even brag about the things they did in darkness. Yet, Paul describes the past sins of a believer as “...those things whereof ye are now ashamed.” If such things can be spoken of without “shame,” something is very wrong. When there is no sorrow for sins of yesterday, people usually have no concern about it being in their life today.

True repentance with godly sorrow will be in a person’s heart as long as they abide in Christ. When it ends, it usually takes with it the reality of their walk in the Lord. This

“godly sorrow” is in fact part of what gives them joy at the mention of Jesus’ name. It is manifest in their worship, their walk, and their desire to ever be close to Jesus Christ. It is truly a blessing from God!

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