

Message #21

II Corinthians 7:5-16

Several years ago, as many of you know, I would backpack into the mountains to hunt elk. Very often I went alone. My backpack weighed just under 70 pounds. I had a tent, sleeping bag, sleeping pad, cook stove, some freeze-dried meals, some extra clothing, and of course my rifle, ammunition, binoculars, some soap, one towel, fire starters and a couple of lighters. Now at that time, I was in great marathon shape, but I was not strong in my upper body, like the Atlas I am now. So for me to pack 70 pounds on my back five miles up a mountain was grueling. It was a painful process and I had to stop and sit on a log multiple times just to rest. But the same process that brought me pain also brought me great joy because I got an elk. The very action that made me miserable brought me great fulfillment and joy.

That point about something that makes you miserable is able to make you happy is not only true when it comes to hunting, but more significantly when it comes to spirituality. When we sin, we should be very sad. We should feel the weight of it and if we judge ourselves properly, the very action that made us miserable may lead to a great relationship with God.

When we give into the flesh, we should actually be depressed about it. We should have emotional grief, distress and pain. We should be mentally wrecked. In fact, we should have sorrow. The word “sorrow” (λυπεω), which shows up seven times in these seven verses, is a word that means to have emotional grief, distress and pain (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 273). It is a word that is used seven times in these seven verses.

However, if we respond properly to the sorrow, out of it we may have great joy. That point is what Paul communicates right here.

A GODLY SORROW THAT PUTS ONE INTO DEPRESSION IS THE SAME SORROW THAT CAN POTENTIALLY BRING ONE OUT OF DEPRESSION, BECAUSE GODLY SORROW WILL ALWAYS LEAVE ONE RIGHT WITH GOD.

These Corinthians had lots of problems and struggles. The people were all over the map when it came to their consistency and stability. When you read I & II Corinthians, it is clear that every kind of problem was theirs. This letter Paul writes to the Corinthians will be his last letter and it is very personal and in this section he addresses four topics designed to encourage these Corinthians:

TOPIC #1 – Paul was surrounded by trouble that made him sad. **7:5**

There is no question that when you read **verse 5**, Paul was surrounded by trouble and when you read **verse 6**, he was very depressed.

Now the words that Paul uses to describe his circumstances in Macedonia indicate that things were horrible. He said that his “flesh had no rest,” which means there was no let up of problems; there was no break in the action.

Paul said we were “afflicted on every side” and we had “conflicts without” and “fears within.” The word “afflicted” (θλιβομενοι) means that things for Paul were continually oppressive and narrow. Everywhere he went and everywhere he turned, he was boxed in by problems (Smith, p. 207). The word “conflicts” (μαχαι) means that Paul was always in a contentious quarrel or dispute or verbal fight with someone (*Ibid.*, p. 280-281). Paul’s life was not a peaceful road. Inside he was often afraid. Paul was a human and he had fears and he had moments of depression.

Sometimes people think God’s great leaders are always up and never depressed, but that is simply not true.

Charles Spurgeon got up one Sunday in front of his congregation and said that he was the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that he hoped none of his people ever get to such extremes of wretchedness that he did. Martin Luther, the great reformer, went through many days when he was totally depressed.

People who love God and serve God still have their low moments of depression.

TOPIC #2 – Paul was comforted by God. **7:6-9**

Paul had moments of depression (**v. 6**). In fact, the word “depression” (ταπεινος) is one that means Paul was very low and very lonely. But God is the one who is able to comfort one who is brought low or feels very low and lonely. Do not overlook this point.

The one who is able to get you out of depression is God. God is the One and the only One who can bring His people out of depression when they feel low. **Most people miss this point, but the one who can really get a person out of depression is God.**

You will not get out of depression by a pill or a group therapy session; you get out of depression by looking to God. Paul did not seek out some counselor so he could cry on his shoulders, God comforted Paul and specifically there were two ways He did it:

Comfort Way #1 - Paul was comforted by the coming of Titus. **7:6**

Now this is interesting as to how God comforted Paul, he brought Titus to Paul. He brought another believer into Paul’s life who loved the Word of God and the work of God. Paul was depressed and all alone and he looks up and there is Titus and the moment Paul saw him “his spirits began to lift.”

Pay attention to what God does when you are depressed. Pay attention to what you will see God do. Mary and I have had people send us a card in the mail the very day we needed it. We have had people call the very moment we needed it the most. Not long ago, I was having a low moment and someone said did you know that a few months ago two people trusted Jesus Christ as Savior in a Sunday morning service. That is what God does. That is how he gets his people out of depression.

Comfort Way #2 - Paul was comforted by the report of Titus. **7:7**

Titus came and brought a report to Paul that the Corinthians had responded to his instruction. So what got Paul out of depression was not a deliverance from his depressing circumstances, it was by a focus on what God had done through his life and ministry.

So when you find yourself in depressing situations the real work of God that will bring you out of it will be to bring someone into your life that will cause you to refocus on God. Now the report of Titus that brought Paul out of depression is seen in **verses 7-9**. There were two report subjects Titus gave to Paul that lifted him out of his depression:

(Report #1) - Titus reported to Paul about the emotional reaction of the Corinthians. **7:7**

Paul had written some very stinging things to the Corinthians and he wasn't sure how they received it until Titus showed up and he informed Paul that the Corinthians longed for Paul, mourned for Paul and had a zeal for Paul. These Corinthians truly did care for Paul. That caused Paul to rejoice.

I don't think there is anything that makes you feel lower than when you feel no one cares about you or what you do. Paul's life was a tough life. He proclaimed the Word of God and the grace of God to the world and it was a lonely assignment. He was traveling to new places where no one knew him and he always found himself in trouble wherever he went. There were moments in his own private life when he must have thought, am I really accomplishing anything? There were times when it didn't seem like anyone even cared. But when Paul got this report about how the Corinthians felt about him, it lifted his spirits. Sometimes that is all it takes.

(Report #2) - Titus reported to Paul about the impact of his letter to the Corinthians. **7:8-9**

When you read the writings of Paul it is clear he was a very kind and sweet man. He did not like to have to say negative things. He didn't enjoy writing rebukes. It is clear from **verse 8** that Paul regretted the fact that he had to write the letter, but when he learned that the letter had caused them a healthy sorrow, which was short-lived, he was glad he wrote it.

Now Paul carefully explains that "he rejoiced" not for the fact that he wrote something that made them sorrowful, but for the fact that his letter caused them to repent. His letter caused them to change their thinking about their fleshly sin and they responded to the will of God.

TOPIC #3 – Paul discusses biblical sorrow that leads to repentance and life-versus-worldly sorrow that leads to death. **7:10-11**

As we said, the word "sorrow" refers to things that cause a person emotional grief. All people get hit with things that bring them emotional grief. What is the difference between "godly sorrow" and "worldly sorrow"? In these verses, there are three differences:

Difference #1 - Godly sorrow leads to salvation and worldly sorrow leads to death . **7:10a**

One obvious difference stated here is the end result. One type of sorrow leaves a person right with God and the other doesn't. One type of sorrow can leave one in heaven and the other will leave one in hell.

Judas was sorry and emotional over what he had done as a traitor, but he never cried out to God for cleansing and was the son of perdition who is burning in hell. Esau was very sorry for what he had done and he cried and cried, but there was no real repentance and he lost his birthright (Heb. 12:16-17). On the other hand, David was so distraught over his sin that he realized he had grossly sinned against God and he cried out to God for His cleansing. Peter was so distraught over his sin that he wept and did repent and became a powerful apostle.

Difference #2 - Godly sorrow factors in God . **7:10b**

Notice carefully that three times in **verses 9-11** the phrase “according to God” (κατα θεον) shows up. Obviously a critical difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow is not a bunch of tears or emotions and it is not a bunch of promises or movement such as raising a hand or going forward before people; **the key difference is godly sorrow factors in God. In godly sorrow, one realizes the weight of the sin in the presence of God.**

It stands to reason that if there is a sorrow according to the will of God, it will immediately look to God and factor in God.

Difference #3 - Godly sorrow includes real repentance . **7:10c-11**

We must not ever be fooled by tears or sorrow. Real godly sorrow is not about tears, it is about repentance. A third difference is that godly sorrow leads to a real repentance, a change of thinking or mind (repentance). It will lead one into fellowship with God because one has a complete change of thinking about the sin that brought about the sorrow.

Now contextually the death path is one that is sorry for the sin, but does not really deal with it. A death path would be one who gives into the flesh and feels bad about that, but doesn't change. One may look at something or do something that makes them feel sorry they did it, but if they don't have the godly sorrow, they are on a death path, because they haven't resolved anything in their relationship with God.

Now I understand the “for” of **verse 11** to give an explanation of the sorrow and repentance that produces life. There are eight results of godly sorrow that includes a real repentance:

(Godly Sorrow Result #1) - Godly sorrow will produce earnestness . **7:11a**

The word “earnestness” (σπουδη) means that godly sorrow will leave a person with a diligent, earnest zeal for God and His Word (*Ibid.*, p. 415). A real repentance will leave one very serious about how he is going to govern his life.

(Godly Sorrow Result #2) - Godly sorrow will vindicate you. **7:11a**

A true godly sorrow leaves a person with an eagerness to prove they are vindicated. The word “vindicate” (απολογία) means that godly sorrow that leads to repentance enables you to have a verbal defense before God and others. A true godly sorrow that leads to repentance enables you to say, “Yes I did that and yes I walked away from it.” It enables one to say look at my life now because my life speaks for itself. True godly sorrow and repentance vindicates you before God.

(Godly Sorrow Result #3) - Godly sorrow will make you mad at yourself. **7:11b**

The word “indignation” (αγανακτησις) refers to being indignant, vexed at yourself and the sin. True godly sorrow leaves a person hating what he did and hating himself for doing it.

(Godly Sorrow Result #4) - Godly sorrow will make you fear God. **7:11c**

When God is truly working a godly sorrow, there will be a deep sense of the fear of God and the fact that we have sinned against God and will face God. That is what godly sorrow will do.

(Godly Sorrow Result #5) - Godly sorrow will make you long for God. **7:11d**

The word “longing” means one will have a great desire and longing and passion for God, His Word and for what is right (*Ibid.*, pp. 172-173). When one has experienced true godly sorrow, one longs for God and His Word and longs to do what is right.

(Godly Sorrow Result #6) - Godly sorrow will give you a zeal for God. **7:11e**

One will have a burning zeal for God and His Word and a zeal to do right.

(Godly Sorrow Result #7) - Godly sorrow will avenge what is wrong. **7:11f**

When a person has a true godly sorrow, they will do their best to make things right biblically. Godly sorrow causes people to do what is biblically right to make things right. That is what godly sorrow does. It causes people to take proper steps to avenge the wrong.

(Godly Sorrow Result #8) - Godly sorrow will demonstrate innocence in everything. **7:11g**

What this means is that true godly sorrow will pursue that which leaves one biblically innocent in the sight of God.

TOPIC #4 – Paul explains why the Corinthians brought him so much comfort and confidence. **7:12-16**

Paul says in **verses 12-13** that he wrote all of the strong things so they might have a good standing in the sight of God and he was comforted because they responded and not only that but Titus also was refreshed by what he saw. These Corinthians were serious about God and His Word.

In **verse 14**, Paul said he had boasted about the Corinthians to Titus and he was not put to shame by his report. They received Titus and the Word of God with “fear and trembling.” Paul rejoiced in all of that.

Paul basically says, “I am comforted by you and I knew you could do it.”

There are things we may do and say in life that should leave us depressed. However, if in the depression we turn to God and do what is necessary to be right with Him, then the very thing that made us sad can leave us happy.

When it comes to salvation, there are ways that seem right to most people in this world that are ways of death. There is only one, very narrow way to having a relationship with God and it is through faith in Jesus Christ. Believing in Him is the only way to life.

Now you may admit you are a sinner and you may cry over the sins you have committed and none of that will save you; you must turn by faith to Jesus Christ. Believe on Him now and you will be saved.