

Don't Forsake Me!

Sermon Text: Psalm 38

Study Texts: 2 Corinthians 7:8-12

Sermon Recap: The main idea of this week's sermon is this: Those who repent of their sins and look to the LORD for salvation will not be forsaken. Take time before your growth group to review the key points you noted from this week's sermon.

Sermon Connection: 2 Corinthians 7 brings us face-to-face with the very issue Psalm 38 highlights: godly repentance. In this text, Paul is reminding the Corinthian church that two types of sorrow exist: Godly sorrow, which is sorrow that comes from knowing that we have offended God, and worldly sorrow, which is nothing more than feeling bad about something. Godly sorrow, Paul notes, is a good thing because it motivates us toward repentance, something that worldly sorrow lacks. Although Paul takes no pleasure in the actual grief of the Corinthian church, he is ultimately grateful for their grief, because through the grief, they have been led to repentance. As we have been reminded from Psalm 38, those who repent of their sins and look to the LORD for salvation will not be forsaken.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: To see that true repentance is born out of godly grief and is a mark of true conversion.

Lesson Points:

Point 1: The Purpose of Godly Grief (vv. 8-10)

Point 2: The Fruit of Godly Grief (vv. 11-12)

The Context: It is generally understood that Paul wrote 4 letters to the Corinthian church, of which we have 2 preserved in the Bible.¹ In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul makes mention of a previously written tearful and severe letter that caused him much grief over sending it, but it also caused the Corinthian church much grief over receiving it.

¹ Paul's first letter, although not preserved, is mentioned in 1 Cor. 5:9; the second letter is our 1 Corinthians; the third letter (also not preserved) is mentioned in 2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8; and the fourth letter is our 2 Corinthians.

The Corinthian church was in turmoil over some false teachings, and when Paul arrived to settle the controversy, the church actually rebelled against him, and Paul felt it better to suffer humiliation and leave rather than stay and fight. Through the power of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of the Corinthian believers, along with Paul's severe letter, grief and repentance came.²

It is the grief of the Corinthian church that is our focus. Paul states that such grief, being godly, is good, for it produces godliness in God's people.

Opening Question: Do you grieve over your sin? Do you grieve over your private sin? Are we more prone to grieve over public sin rather than private sin? Why or why not?

Point 1 - The Purpose of Godly Grief (vv. 8-10)

In v. 8, Paul mentions a letter he had sent previously (often called the "tearful" or "severe" letter). What is the source of the regret Paul felt over sending it (v. 8)?

Paul notes that he was initially grieved when he sent the severe letter to the Corinthian church because he knew that the letter would cause the church much grief. Paul knew that such a letter—which we understand from his mentions of it (2 Cor. 2:3-4, 7:8), that was a painfully corrective letter—would be tough to receive and that the people would be hurt and upset. And this grieved Paul. For even though he had the right intentions and a pure heart toward the Corinthian church, he was still grieved over hurting them. And as he notes, he was grieved almost to the point of regret, wishing he had not sent it.

Why does Paul note that his grief over the letter changed?

But the news of the Corinthians' response to the letter transformed Paul's regret into joy. He notes in v. 8 that while the Corinthian church was, in fact, grieved, it was only for a little while. His joy, Paul notes, was not over the Corinthians' grief itself but over the fact that their grief produced godly repentance. The Corinthians were so moved and so grieved over the sin that Paul's letter had brought to light that they repented of the sin.

Why is the Corinthians' grief from Paul's letter a good thing? How is this instructive for us?

The grief noted here is good because it leads the Corinthian church to godly action, namely, repentance over sin. We can sometimes worry ourselves into paralysis over causing another person grief and never address a real issue in their life. Paul shows us that we can experience personal grief over addressing sin in another's life while also dealing with the sin...even when that causes grief in the life of our brother or sister. Paul never rejoices that the Corinthians experience grief. What we see in Paul is a love for the good of the Corinthian church that was more important than his desire not to create an uncomfortable situation of confrontation. His personal grief was not more important than the Corinthians' holiness.

² See introductory notes in ESV Study Bible for a more thorough explanation.

What does this teach the Church about the giving and receiving of discipline and correction? This text lays down a pattern for us to follow while also explaining the reasoning behind corrective action. Paul, who was himself grieved over having to deal with the sin of the Corinthian church, was not willing to take the easy road. He was willing to cause the Corinthians' grief in order to help bring about their repentance. Furthermore, Paul was also prepared to endure their scorn had they not repented. Paul's ultimate goal was not his own comfort but the good of his brothers and sisters in the Corinthian church.

What does v. 10 show about the benefits of godly grief?

Because the Corinthian church received Paul's severe letter with an attitude of humility, remembering Paul's love for them and his role as their spiritual shepherd, they repented of their sin. The church, no doubt, felt deep and tremendous grief over their sin, which was an offense against God and against God's messenger, Paul. In rejecting Paul, the Corinthian church had rejected God's authority in their lives. Paul's letter brought this reality to bear, and because the gospel was real in their lives, the church repented through grief.

Is Paul saying in v. 10, that by repenting over sin, we earn salvation? If not, what is he saying?

The Bible is clear in a number of places that man is not saved by his works but by God's grace alone (Eph. 2:1-10). So, we may rightly say that Paul is not advocating works-righteousness here. On the contrary, Paul is highlighting a doctrinal point made clear in James 2:14-26, that "*...faith without works is dead.*" The Corinthians' repentance was not a means of obtaining or maintaining salvation. Rather, their repentance was evidence of the gospel that already lived within them.

Point 2 - The Fruit of Godly Grief (vv. 11-12)

Paul associates the Corinthians' repentance with spiritual maturity. What spiritual principle does this help us understand? See also Luke 6:43-45; 1 John 1:5-10.

The principle is this: The presence of the gospel in our lives will produce godliness in our lives. In other words, Christians live and act like Christians. The opposite is also true. Non-Christians, those in whom the gospel does not dwell, live as non-Christians. Paul is not surprised when the Corinthians repent, for he knows the true gospel brings repentance. Therefore, we should expect that the gospel will bring about repentance in those who follow Jesus, even if it be by means of grief.

According to v. 11, the Corinthian believers have cleared themselves of this wrong committed against Paul and ultimately against God. What does it mean that they have cleared themselves?

The beauty of the gospel is that Christ has already dealt with our sin on the cross. It is finished, just as He said. And this brings into view what some call an "already-not yet" application of gospel promises. Christ has already dealt with our sin on the cross, and it is a finished work. But we have not yet experienced glorification, that is, the final gift of perfection

that God will give to all of His children on the final day. We live now in the in-between where we know that sin is dealt with, but we still struggle against it in our earthly lives.

Another way to state v. 11 is this: The Corinthians commended themselves blameless in the matter. Although they were rightly guilty of sin through rejecting God's authority in the church, they had repented, and their repentance was genuine, born out of a gospel-infused heart. Therefore, they rested in the finished work of Christ on the cross, knowing that He had died on their account, and they looked forward to the day when their struggle with sin would be over. Their repentance rendered them blameless, and forgiveness was not withheld.

How does this instruct us in how to deal with godly grief, wrongdoing, and repentance in the Church? See also Psalm 38.

This is profoundly helpful for us as we seek to live in gospel-community with one another. This church had sinned against God, against Paul, and had rejected the authority of God in their lives. It was no small incident. Even so, when confronted and called to repentance, they repented. And having repented, they were welcomed back without pretense.

Our culture is all too familiar with sin, but it is the restoration part that we tend to struggle with. When someone sins against us, our worldly response is to write that person off; to deem them unworthy of a place in our lives any longer. But this is not the gospel. The gospel is that we love because God first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19). We extend grace and mercy because God has extended to us eternal grace and mercy. The reason the Psalmist can cast himself upon the Lord is because of God's grace. In the same way, we should be able to cast ourselves upon the grace of our brothers and sisters in Christ. And, like Paul, we should also be ready to have burdens cast upon us.

What is the point of v. 12?

Paul notes here that his severe letter was not for the purpose of dealing with the individual who caused the controversy, nor was it on his own account (he was the one who suffered the wrong). Rather, his writing the letter, his confrontation of their sin, was for their sake, that they might see where their loyalties truly lie. Paul's purpose was to sober the church, to cause them to see themselves before the face of God and to act accordingly. Such is the nature of gospel-centered discipline and correction. Paul caused them grief for their good. He identified their sin for their good. He called them to repentance for their good. And he received them back with full grace for their and his good. The fruit of godly grief is godliness.

The Big Picture - Grieving over Godliness

Psalm teaches us that those who repent of their sins and look to the LORD for salvation will not be forsaken. Good, God-given grief over sin leads to the repentance of salvation. There are two primary forms of salvation grief that a Christian experiences. First, there is the initial gospel conviction that causes us to respond to the gospel for the first time, thereby receiving

justification by faith. The ongoing salvation repentance is what Paul notes in 2 Cor. 7. For those in whom the gospel is real, in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, sin cannot occupy the primary role. By God's grace, a Christian cannot and will not persist in sin. Grief will come, and this grief will lead to repentance before the face of God.

Paul was not content to let the Corinthian church persist in blatant sin. In love, he wrote the severe and tearful letter, calling the Corinthians to account. His actions lay down a pattern for us in two ways. First, and primarily, we should always be aware of sin in our lives and asking God to bring us to repentance where needed. And second, Paul's willingness to confront the Corinthians' sin should encourage us to love our brothers and sisters more than we love our own comfort. Paul grieved over the godliness of the Corinthian believers, so much so that he was willing to risk his relationship with them. May our love of God and of one another cause us to grieve over godliness in the same way.

Application Questions

- Are there areas in my life where I need to repent of sin? If so, what are they?
- How am I trusting God's mercy through repentance?
- How am I leading and teaching my family—spouse, kids, in-laws, etc.—that God is honored and merciful through our repentance?
- Is our growth group a place of repentance?
- How can our growth group encourage repentance more?