



What Is Godly Sorrow?

By Keith Greer

In today's world, many people say they're sorry. When we have spoken unkindly or done something that we ought not to have done, we say "I'M SORRY." Often, in their own lives, people do things that bring sorrow upon themselves. But, what type of sorrow does God want us to have toward Him? Is there more than one type of sorrow? According to the apostle Paul, there are two types -- worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. What is worldly sorrow? Simply stated, worldly sorrow is what we feel when we are caught! If the situation presented itself again, and I could keep from being caught, I'd make the same choice. It's like my mother telling me not to eat cookies before dinner. When she came into the kitchen, and saw my hand in the cookie jar -- I was truly sorry - - sorry she caught me in the act! In this article, we want to discuss the other type of sorrow -- godly sorrow. This is the sorrow God demands of sinners before He will forgive them.

Man must first acknowledge that he has disobeyed God's law. By our actions, we have sinned against and wounded God. All sins, even sins against other people, are acts of wrong toward God. True repentance demands that we recognize this. David is an excellent example of this attitude. When the prophet Nathan confronted him concerning his sinful relationship with Bathsheba, what did he say? "So David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD..." {2 Samuel 12:13}. David accepted accountability for the matter. Peter is another example of this type of repentance. When he realized that he had betrayed the Lord, just as He told him he would, "Peter went out and wept bitterly" {Luke 22:62}.

When a spouse is unfaithful to a mate, the hurt is intense and deep. In like manner, when we sin, God grieves over our actions. Why must man feel godly sorrow? "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" {Romans 2:4} "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" {2 Corinthians 7:10}. This type of sorrow leads a person in the

direction of repentance. Worldly sorrow can never lead man to true repentance. True repentance will never be regretted. True repentance changes one's conduct. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, he instructed them to deal with a member who had taken his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5). The church's obedience to Paul's instructions brought about the desired effect. The man repented, and Paul encouraged them to forgive him and receive him back into fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:5-11).

Next, we want to examine some of the ways by which godly sorrow leads to true repentance.

PRODUCES DILIGENCE. The one who had previously been indifferent about his conduct now eagerly seeks for ways to correct his behavior. The one who feels true godly sorrow for his conduct is not indifferent about the changes he needs to make. When sin takes hold of one's life, it must be seen for what it is -- a danger to the soul! As long as we are indifferent to our conduct, we do not see the need to change for the better.

CLEARs THE SINNER. Instead of trying to hide the sin, the guilty one wants to take the steps necessary to clear up the matter with God, and with the brethren. Correcting the wrong also results in removing the guilt of sin that plagues the mind. It is important for a Christian, when he becomes guilty of sin, to develop an attitude of wanting to take care of the matter soon, rather than later!

PRODUCES INDIGNATION. When one has true godly sorrow, he no longer allows himself to make excuses for his conduct. He is overcome with righteous indignation over his conduct. Shame, remorse, and regret for his actions will overwhelm the guilty person. This person has seen, and abhors, sin's destructive nature.

CAUSES FEAR. What should a sinner fear -- God's just and awesome wrath! "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace ... It is a fearful thing to fall

into the hands of the living God" {Hebrews 10:29,31}. Many folks want to rely on their hope that God's love for them will cause Him to "overlook" their sins. Such a conclusion is wishful thinking! A just God cannot overlook sin; it caused His Son's death.

INSTILLS VEHEMENT DESIRE. The sinner anxiously desires the eternal peace of mind that comes from knowing he is in a right relationship with God. He also wants to do everything possible to bring about peace with those against whom he sinned.

BUILDS ZEAL. Realizing that, because of sin, one is rightfully separated from God, brings about zeal for embarking on a course of action that involves correcting the wrongs committed. This is completely opposite from an attitude that is indifferent toward sin.

PROVIDES VINDICATION. The person who feels godly sorrow seeks to regain his good name and return to a proper relationship with God and his brethren. This can be accomplished only by following the path in which godly sorrow leads. Humility is very evident when this attitude encompasses a penitent sinner.

In these passages, Paul clearly shows that having a proper attitude toward receiving forgiveness involves more than just being "sorry." True repentance, which godly sorrow produces, exhibits a clear realization of what sin has done to our relationship with God and to our spiritual lives. Only by understanding how terrible sin is can we ever achieve godly sorrow. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" {Romans 6:23}. If allowed to go uncorrected, sin can have eternal consequences. Godly sorrow leads one to see the need for a course correction in his life. Until we see our sinful selves the way God sees us, we can never achieve godly sorrow. Man cannot abide in sin and expect God's forgiveness.

What about you dear reader? Do you have godly sorrow for the sins of which you stand guilty before God? If not, your soul is in danger. One who allows godly sorrow to have free course in his life will not regret where it leads him. Do not wait until your heart is

so hard you cannot feel this type of sorrow. It is the only sorrow that accompanies assurance of God's forgiveness.