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9:00 a.m. Christian Education

10:00 a.m. Worship

Children's Sunday School during Worship



"From the Heart: Godly Sorrow"

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

Rev. Ron Holmes

October 3, 2010 World Communion Sunday



Continuing in our journey through Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth brings us to the 7th chapter which needs a bit of introduction before reading. You'll recall we've referred to 2 Corinthians as one of, if not the most personal of Paul's letters. As today's passage is read, you'll hear a couple of references to the personal relationship of Paul with the Corinthians. First, he mentions a previous letter sent to the Corinthians. While there is legitimate thought among scholars that Paul wrote more than two letters to the Corinthians, at least a 3rd letter which has been lost or some of which is incorporated into 2 Corinthians, the letter referred to here is what we know as 1 Corinthians. A casual read of 1 Corinthians reveals a church in conflict. Paul writes them with some corrective measures and, occasionally, some harsh language including corrective church discipline to be taken against a member living in an improper relationship (1 Cor 5). Paul actually commands the church to expel this person from their fellowship. Harsh words, but Paul adds that the goal is to turn this person away from this behavior and restore him. Keep that in mind as today's passage is read.

Then, Paul had sent his colleague Titus to Corinth, possibly carrying written instructions from Paul (perhaps the missing letter from Paul), to check on the state of things in Corinth. Paul had hoped to meet up with Titus in Troas (2:12, 13), but failing to find Titus there proceeded on to Macedonia in hopes of meeting Titus there. That indeed is what happened, as you will hear in the reading of today's passage. Not only that, but Paul is relieved to receive good news from Titus about the state of things in Corinth.

So, keeping those things in mind, listen now to the word of God through the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:2-16.

Are you familiar with the "non-apology apology?" I know you've seen it. It goes something like this: A person, usually a public figure of some kind—a politician, an entertainer, an athlete—gets caught doing or saying something stupid. They are forced by circumstances to come before the media, in front of the

omnipresent cameras, and "apologize." And the apology goes something like this: "*If anyone was hurt by my actions,*" or, "*If anyone was offended by my words, I apologize.*" The non-apology apology. Not an admission of guilt or wrongdoing. Certainly not an act of repentance for something done or said that was wrong. Rather, an "apology" if their words or actions hurt someone. Almost as if the person in the wrong is the person who was offended or hurt! Certainly not an expression of sorrow or contrition for their words or actions. A non-apology apology. If there is any sorrow involved, it is sorrow over having gotten caught and not any sorrow over the harmful words or actions.

That, of course, is not Godly sorrow. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, literally a "turning away" from an action, a 180 degree turn from something that is wrong. Godly sorrow leads to restoration and reconciliation, the kind of abundant life God wants us to experience. Worldly sorrow, Paul tells us, leads to death.

A major goal of Scripture, as evidenced in Paul's letters which form a major portion of our holy Scriptures, is to set the standards before us that God wants us to live by; bring awareness to believers of when we've violated those standards; call us to Godly sorrow over such violations; be restored in our relationships with God and others through true repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. That is certainly Paul's goal in this sequence of events with the Corinthians. A major violation of God's standards had occurred in the Corinthian church. The church had not dealt with it—at the very least its silence and failure to act giving tacit approval to the situation. Paul, in his first letter to the church, rebukes both the person involved in the improper relationship and the church for its failure to address it. It's a highly charged, emotional moment. Paul is concerned about the state of things in the church in response to his rebuke. He is elated to learn that the church and, seemingly, the individual have responded positively with Godly sorrow (recall that 2 Cor 2:5-11 spoke of forgiveness for the sinner) leading to repentance and reconciliation. The goal is not to bring someone to overwhelming sorrow. The goal is to bring them to restoration and reconciliation through Godly sorrow and repentance.

Let's look for a moment at what godly sorrow produces ("*See what this godly sorrow has produced in you:*" 7:11).

Earnestness. A seriousness about the standards God sets before us and a sincerity to live according to them. And, I think, a similar seriousness and sincerity to set things right when we make mistakes.

Eagerness to clear yourselves. The word Paul uses here is *apologia*, obviously the word from which we get our word "apology." The point is not to clear one's self from the accusation of wrongdoing, but rather from the wrongdoing's effects. In other words, to clear one's self from broken relationships through the process of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Indignation. Appropriate indignation is what one thesaurus lists as a synonym—"righteous anger." Not indignation over the rebuke one receives for wrongful actions or words, but "righteous anger" at the damage they cause and a determination to correct the situation and not do it again.

Alarm. Interestingly, the word Paul uses here is that word *phobos* again. Fear. Undoubtedly, Paul is again referring to the healthy fear of God we are to have when finding ourselves outside God's standards for our lives. It ought to come with some alarm—a "wake up call" if you will to the fact that we would commit such an action to begin with, and a wake up call to the damage it causes in our relationship with God.

Longing. The desire of our hearts ought to be for reconciliation.

Not a longing for the pleasures of a wrongful action, but a longing for a return to the standards God sets for us.

Concern. Actually, the word Paul uses here is the word *zalon* from which we get our word "zeal." One commentator says of the NIV's use of the word "concern" here that it is "weak, missing almost entirely the depth of Paul's emotion" (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Ralph P. Martin, p. 235). Not sure why they chose the word "concern" for their translation. Perhaps "zeal" too often carries a negative connotation, referring to someone who is over the top, fanatical. Of course, zeal can be either negative or positive. Zealousness in restoring relationships, zealousness in returning to and adhering to the standards God wants us to live by is not a negative thing and is clearly what Paul means here. On the other hand, the NIV probably captures better the next, and final, quality Paul refers to,

Readiness to see justice done. Paul uses a word that literally means "punishment" or "revenge." But clearly Paul is not suddenly moving from an attitude of restoration to some sort of glee over a punishment meted out to someone who has done wrong. Again, the purpose of any such "punishment"—for example the immoral member's expulsion from the fellowship of the church Paul called the church to do in his first letter (1 Cor 5)—is to restore and reconcile, not continually punish. It is, indeed, to see that "justice is done"—improper behavior is addressed and corrected, damages caused to others are repaired and removed. Certainly here the NIV gets it right—a true apology, true repentance will lead to diligent work that justice is done.

That is what godly sorrow leads to. It is not a self-pitying sorrow, a sorrow over the fact that one's been caught. Rather, it is a sorrow over the damage done...both to the offended and the offender. It is sorrow over the broken relationships caused—both relationships with others and with God. And it is a sorrow that leads to true repentance—a turning away from wrong and a returning to the righteousness God demands.

Godly sorrow is a sorrow that is possible, a sorrow that is survivable, because of this table and all that it means. God's sorrow over our sin and the damage it does led Jesus to the cross, where he brought forgiveness and grace—the fruit of true repentance. This table is a poignant reminder of that. On this World Communion Sunday, I invite you to bring to this table a godly sorrow for your sin; a godly sorrow that produces in you "earnestness," "eagerness to clear yourselves," "indignation," "alarm," "longing," "concern/zeal," and a "readiness to see justice done."

Let's take a moment for silent reflection.