

GOD TEARS

Scripture Reading: Read 2 Corinthians 7

After Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and before he wrote 2 Corinthians, he wrote a letter to the church that was not included in the New Testament, nor has it been preserved. It was a letter that came with many tears on Paul's part (2:3-4). Why did he write it? Apparently, Paul's 1st letter to the church did not accomplish as much as he had hoped. Trouble erupted again in Corinth. To address the problem, Paul visited Corinth personally but the visit was a disaster. Paul called it a painful visit (2:1). Apparently, someone challenged Paul's authority directly and the Corinthian church did not defend Paul. Paul was humiliated and left in despair. When he got back to Ephesus, he wrote his stern letter to the Corinthian church. Their response to his "tough love" letter was overwhelmingly positive: *Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it-- I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while-- yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done...*

In this passage, Paul contrasts the results of godly and worldly sorrow. The first type of sorrow produces repentance and leads to salvation while the second brings only death. What's the difference between the two types of sorrow?

Worldly Sorrow: It begins and ends with self. It is self-oriented sorrow. It manifests itself in two ways:

- 1) It is sorrow only that I got caught. Its focus is on escaping the painful penalties of my actions by rationalizing away my guilt and defensively blaming someone else for the problem. There is no true repentance. King Saul is an example of this type of sorrow (1 Samuel 15)
- 2) It is sorrow rooted in disappointment with self. It is clothed in toxic shame and self-condemnation. It is rooted in self and self's failure to have done better. It leads to self's attempts to atone for one's sins. It will promise to try harder next time but the dependency is on self.

Godly Sorrow: It begins and ends with God. There are God tears. There is sorrow over breaking God's laws and defying God's authority. It acknowledges the guilt but doesn't try to atone for it through self-effort. It cries out to God for forgiveness and looks to the cross for the solution to bring about a change of heart. The result is restoration. King David is an example of this type of sorrow (Psalm 51).

Action Step & Prayer Focus: The next time you fail, don't take the bait and fall into the trap of worldly sorrow. Get on your face before God and cry out with "God tears" to a God of grace and forgiveness.

Take-a-way: *One godly tear accomplishes more than an ocean of worldly sorrow.*