

WHAT KIND OF SORROW?

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In 2 Corinthians 7:10, God tells us that there are two kinds of sorrow: 1) godly sorrow, and 2) the sorrow of the world. The verse says, “*For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*” Many wicked people become sorry that they got caught, or sorry that they are suffering the consequences of their deeds. But that kind of sorrow does not produce repentance. That is the sorrow of the world. *Godly* sorrow is not equivalent to repentance, but it is one of the necessary steps on the road to repentance. Godly sorrow *works* repentance. The Bible gives us some good examples of people who had such godly sorrow and then repented of their sins.

The Israelites under Samuel’s judgeship

In the Old Testament, the Israelites displayed a cyclical pattern of disobedience for many centuries during the time of the Judges (see Judges 2:11-19 for an overview of this pattern). One of these cycles of rebellion began around the time of the judges Jephthah and Samson, which was actually right before the time of Samuel: “And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not him. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon” (Judg 10:6-7). The Israelites who lived West of the Jordan River suffered under the Philistine oppression, while their brethren to the East repented and were delivered from the Ammonites by God via Jephthah (Judges 11). Judges 13:1 describes what was going on in the rest of the country when Samson was born: “*And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.*” The Book of First Samuel begins during this dark time of Philistine oppression. The Philistines even captured the ark of the covenant in 1 Samuel chapter 4. Finally, after persisting in wickedness and idolatry for several decades, and facing God’s wrath and punishment for it at the hands of the Philistines, and after losing the ark of the covenant and enduring more than 20 years with it being away from its proper place in the tabernacle, “*all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord*” (1 Sam 7:2). Finally, Israel was sorry. But *what kind of sorrow* did Israel have here? The verses that follow make it

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(continued)

clear that Israel's sorrow was truly a godly sorrow, because they sincerely repented. "And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. *Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only*" (1 Sam 7:3-4).

The Church at Corinth

In 1 Corinthians chapter five, the church at Corinth was rebuked for allowing fornication to be in their midst, to the point of even being puffed up about it (verses 1-5). The divinely inspired apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:6-13: "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? *Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.* For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: *therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. *But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.* For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." This rebuke made them sorry, but the good news is that it was a godly sorrow. Later, Paul wrote about these events in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: "*Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world works death*" (2 Cor 7:9-10). The Corinthians' sorrow helped lead them to repentance. The sorrow of the world only works death. If we ever find ourselves in a situation where we are not doing right in God's sight, we need to have sorrow about that. But it needs to be the right kind of sorrow, the godly kind, the only kind that works repentance.