

Rev Joe Barnard: 2 Corinthians 7:10

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, feel free to open it to 2 Corinthians. Chapter 7, the key verse tonight is going to be verse 10, for godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

Maybe you've read that wonderful devotional book, Valley of Vision. There's a famous prayer, it's called, Yet I Sin. I want to read you a section of this, and I want you to imagine that you handed a portion of this to a friend who's not in the church, who's not a Christian, and asked them to read and to think and to ponder on these words.

Thou art good beyond all thought, but I am vile, wretched, miserable, blind.

My lips are ready to confess, but my heart is slow to feel, and my ways reluctant to amend. I bring my soul to thee, break it, wound it, bend it, mold it, unmask to me sins deformity, but I may hate it, abhor it, flee from it.

My faculties have been a weapon of revolt against thee. As a rebel, I have misused my strength and served the foul adversary of thy kingdom.

[1 : 31] Give me grace to bewail my sin. Grant me to know that to depart from you is to lose all good.

How do you think your friend would react if they tried to think about these words, tried to say these words? What would their thoughts be?

I think probably one thing they think is that these words are actually harmful, that it's unhealthy for mental health to say these kinds of things.

I mean, to repeat these kinds of words is to destroy your self-esteem. It's not a good thing they would think to say the kind of prayer that you've just handed them.

I think they'd probably say that these words sound kind of primitive. It sounds like there's some sort of cosmic CCTV that monitors all of your action.

[2 : 26] It's like there's this universal policeman. Like we're constantly under his surveillance, and that's the way people thought long ago. It's not the way they should think in the 21st century.

Your friend would probably say, in fact, this sounds a little bit regressive. This is the kind of stuff that children think about. It's not the sort of stuff that adults should think about. You should mature out of this.

Probably lastly, your friend would say, you know, deep down I just think these words are untrue.

They don't actually represent the truth of who I am. I'm not the person that this prayer says I'm in.

I'm just not that bad. I think there's actually some Christians that think those thoughts. It's not just the non-Christians.

Sometimes when we read prayers like Psalm 51, we wonder, you know, do these reflect our lives? Are these good things to think? And really my agenda is very simple this evening.

[3 : 29] By the end of this evening, I hope that you see that the words that we read in this prayer, the words that we sang with Psalm 51, with Psalm 32, that these are life-giving words, that there will be moments in your life when you realize that you've blown it.

And in those moments, you will seek for something to help you to confess the truth and help you find the relief that comes from confession.

I want you to see that the words of this prayer, the words of these Psalms, these are water for parched hearts. Now here's how I want us to begin.

We all need to appreciate that there is nothing in this world in its contemporary form that prepares us for the shock of sin.

You need to realize that all of the time you're inhaling a worldview. So as you watch the telly, as you read the newspaper, as you go into Stornoway to do your shopping and come home, whether you

realize it or not, you're constantly breathing in ideas.

[4 : 38] You're constantly breathing in values. The world is preaching to you all of the time. And this is its message. First of all, its message to you is that you are inwardly good.

You're naturally good. You're so good that the route to your happiness, and happiness is what your life is all about, the road between you and happiness is a life of authenticity, a life of being true to yourself, a life of self fulfillment.

Let me just read you what one American preacher said in his book, become a better you. Now you were made to excel. You were made to leave a mark on this generation.

Start believing I've been chosen. I've been set apart. I've been destined to live in victory. That's the message of the world. And whether you like it or not, you end up kind of starting to believe it.

Now here's the problem. Nothing in this world prepares you for that moment when you're blindsided by sin. And all of us are blindsided by sin.

[5 : 53] And tonight I don't really want us to focus on the petty sin. Not that there is a thing as petty sin, but I want you to know that Christians stumble into big sin.

And it surprises us because there's moments where all of a sudden we find out there was stuff in our heart darker and dirtier than we ever thought.

Even those of us that know about sin. They're the moments where Christian men succumb to pornography. They're the moments where Christian women in anger say things that are malicious and hateful and hurtful that later they think, I can't believe I did that.

Christians sometimes gossip. And later on come to the awareness, I started that rumor. Christians get angry.

Christians at moments go among their friends. They get drunk. They lapse into old patterns of behavior and realize, did I just do this?

[6 : 58] Christians cheat. Christians sometimes realize at the end of their life that actually they've wasted it. That they've invested so much time and energy in their career. They've lost their children.

They've lost their spouse. You know, if you don't believe me that Christians get blindsided by sin, let me just put before you the example of David. Is there anybody in the Old Testament that loved God like David whose heart was so passionate to serve and to worship as David?

And I don't need to repeat to you the story of David. As you're reading through first and second Samuel, would you ever expect that this man would not just commit adultery but be guilty of another man's life?

If you still don't believe me, how about Peter? You know, Peter, he's the leader of the disciples. You know, he's the one who's as close to Jesus as anybody.

And what does he do the night that Jesus goes to the cross? He betrays Jesus. He denies knowing him on three different occasions. He didn't see that that was ever going to happen.

[8 : 08] He didn't think that was within him. And friends, just what I want you to know is that there will be moments that you wake up and you realize that you've blown it, and what do you do?

Now, what I want you to know, there's only five things that you can do. You only have five options when you realize that you've really messed up and that you've really sinned big.

Your first option is that you can try to cover it up. You know, this is kind of like sometimes when you park your car in a car park and you open the door and you just kind of hit that car next to you and you see there's that little scratch and you try to just ignore it like it didn't really happen.

You lick your thumb and you try to rub it off and it doesn't rub off, but you just kind of think to yourself, okay, I'm just going to pretend like that's not there. You know, you can think of the example of Adam and Eve, right? When they break the only command that God has given them, what do they try to do?

They try to cover it up. They sew some fig leaves together. Maybe it won't be obvious that we did it. The problem with trying to cover up big sin is you can't cover it up because you know you did it.

[9 : 13] And so that just doesn't work as a strategy. Here's your second option. Your second option is to try to self justify. He's to try to lay the blame elsewhere. Again, for this, you can think of Adam and Eve.

You know, Adam, you know, after it's clear, he can't hide it from God. What does he do? He says, okay, Eve, she's the problem. What does Eve do? She's the problem.

She's the problem. She's the problem. And really everybody looks up to God and says, you're the problem. You created the world, right? I'm not guilty trying to justify their own behavior.

And we do the same. But again, I'll tell you the problem with trying to justify yourself or rationalize your sin is when you've really sinned, you know, you can't rationalize it.

You know, you can't justify it. You know, you can't lay the blame elsewhere. In those moments, you know where the guilt lies. It lies on you. So here's your third option.

[10:12] Your third option is you can try to self harm. So what a lot of youth do today, right? You know, maybe you cut yourself. And in that moment, there's that sense of a little bit of release, maybe some of the tension, some of the stress, some of the pain.

For a moment, you think it's subsides. But the problem is that doesn't work. We can't atone for sin through pain and self harm.

So again, that doesn't remove the problem. Well here's your fourth option. Your fourth option is you can try some kind of self imposed form of dementia.

Will you try to enable yourself to forget the sin? And here you can pick your poison. You can just try to work all the time because the more you work, the more you're concentrated on the projects in your life, the less you can think about the sin.

Or maybe it's alcohol. And the more you drink for those moments where you lose sobriety, you lose that awareness of the guilt. Or maybe it's a drug, or maybe it's the television.

[11:13] But you know, you turn on the volume, you leave the news on all the time because it distracts you to think about the world's problems. It keeps you from thinking about the self. But it doesn't matter what you try.

The problem is you can't really forget it because there are those moments of sobriety. There are those moments of stillness. And then it floods back. Your mind flips the pages and you see the sin. There it is. You feel the guilt. And so you can't forget it. And so there's only one other option. And that's that you can acknowledge it.

Here's the problem with acknowledging it. It's painful to look at. It hurts to look at it. Now you have to look at it if you're going to be honest and deal with it.

But the reason we're going to look at verse 10 of 2nd Corinthians 7 is because Paul makes a distinction that's so fundamental. It's not enough to acknowledge the sin.

[12:16] Paul forces us to recognize that there are two types of sorrow, two types of pain that can come when we look at our sin.

One is what in the ESV is godly grief, which ultimately leads to life. But the other is a worldly grief that actually leads to death.

It's not enough that you are willing to admit and own and look at your sin. You need to know whether you experience godly grief or worldly grief.

Living grief or the grief that leads and produces death. And so that's what we need to consider. Now let's take the grief that produces death.

What is it? It's not just one form. There are different forms of this type of grief. Let me just mention a few of them to you. One is the grief or the sorrow of shame.

[13:19] Now do you know what shame is? It's a fundamentally narcissistic emotion. Shame occurs when we look at the mirror and all we see is our self.

And we feel shame in those moments when we look in the mirror and we realize that we've fallen short of the ideal that we had for our self.

Now the reason shame cannot bring life is because shame is mesmerizing. When we feel shame, all we can see is the dazzling image of ourselves.

In the degree to which we fixate on the shame is the degree to which we can't see God. We can't find a savior. All we can see is the self and it chokes and it strangles us.

And friends that's not a grief that leads to repentance that leads to salvation. Now another form of worldly grief that produces death is what I'd call hopeless guilt.

[14:25] Now guilt is a part of real repentance. But let me talk for a moment about hopeless guilt. There's a certain kind of guilt when all that you are aware of is the fact that you are guilty.

There's no hope. There's no message of a redeemer that will lift your eyes to grace and to forgiveness. And when you have hopeless guilt, it leads to death.

You want an example? Think Judas. What happened to Judas? He knew he was guilty. He knew he'd sinned.

But he had no hope. He didn't think there was grace and forgiveness for him. And so that grief, it didn't lead him to repentance. It led him to take his own life.

Friends, that's a worldly grief that produces death. You know, another kind of worldly grief that doesn't bring any kind of life is the grief of embarrassment.

[15 : 31] We've all felt embarrassed. You've all had the situation where you're sitting at a dinner party. Everybody's laughing. That night you really think that you're kind of, you know, you must be on fire because everybody's laughing at your jokes.

You go to the restroom. You look in the mirror and what do you see in your teeth? You see a big chunk of spinach. And you walk back to the table and you're just flooded with embarrassment. You're thinking the whole time people were laughing, not at my jokes, but at me. We know what embarrassment feels like, but you know the thing about embarrassment? It only lasts for as long as you think people are thinking about you.

As soon as you know that conversation has moved on, they're no longer thinking of you. The embarrassment lifts. And friends, we felt embarrassed about sin before. Sometimes we get caught. It's really embarrassing, but you know why embarrassment?

It cannot produce repentance. Because again, it only lasts as long as you think other people are thinking about you. As soon as they find something else to gossip about, the embarrassment leaves you.

[16 : 35] That doesn't lead to repentance. One last form of worldly grief that does not bring life. This is the grief of regret.

You know, sometimes we regret sins in our past, but the truth is we don't regret doing this sin. We regret the consequences that came from having done it.

And more importantly, having been found out. And the truth be told, if we could have figured out a way to do the same action without getting caught, without the consequences, given the opportunity, we'd do it again.

You know, maybe you remember Lance Armstrong, the famous cyclist who won all the Tour de Francis, only to find out later that he'd been using performance enhancing drugs. You know, I wonder if Lance Armstrong really has repented of his mistake.

Or I wonder if he just regrets having been caught. I wonder if he could have done the same thing, but not have been caught and not have the embarrassment that followed if he'd do it again.

[17 : 40] Again often that's the grief that we feel. It's the consequences. It's not the action that we regret. And friends, this type of sorrow, it does not lead to repentance.

It does not lead to life. But as Paul says here, worldly grief produces death. So that leaves us the big question.

Verse 10, what is godly grief? Well, godly grief is the kind of sorrow that produces repentance.

So what are the elements of this kind of godly grief? Well, first of all, you need to know this is a grief felt before God, not the self. Remember shame?

Shame is always in the mirror of self. What you are aware of when you feel shame is you're aware of yourself. What determines godly grief is that the audience is God.

[18 : 39] And what's fundamental is that you see two things of God simultaneously. There's a bifocal vision on the one hand. You recognize that he is righteous.

That's fundamental because his righteousness reminds you that this really isn't about you and about you falling short of your aspirations for yourself.

He's offended. He hates what you've done. He's altogether good. And this has distorted and corrupted his good creation.

So you see the righteousness of God. That's what gives rise to the feeling of guilt. But at the same time, this is just as important.

You see the mercy of God. Friends, if you didn't see the mercy of God at the same time that you saw his righteousness, you'd be left in the position of Judas without hope.

[19 : 42] Or you'd be left in the place of hiding, trying to cover up. But what happens when you see righteousness in mercy is that the mercy of God, the conviction that there's grace and there's forgiveness, this is what makes you willingness to come out into the open.

This is Psalm 32. The one who realizes that there is a gracious God and that's why he can be driven into the act of confession.

And so first of all, Godly grief is a grief felt before God. But secondly, Godly grief is a grief in which there's a transparency of the self.

When you feel Godly grief, it drives you to that repentance where you hide nothing. Remember Psalm 32, there's no deceit in real repentance.

When we really repent, we don't self justify. We don't rationalize. We don't lay the blame elsewhere. We do what David did when he penned Psalm 51 and we come clean and we say, God, my nature's corrupt.

[20 : 57] I am corrupt. I'm a filthy rag. My righteousness is filthy before you. We hide nothing. I did it. I didn't think I'd do that, but I did it.

It came from my heart. That's the origin of that sin. And we come and we confess it. In France, what motivates, what's the underlying motive behind the Godly grief leading us into the act of repentance?

Do you know what it is? It's motivated by love. What would drive you to that place of exposure? It's only the fact that you love God, that you want to be reconciled to God, that the deepest pain in your soul is that sin has disrupted this relationship.

And what you want more than anything is for that relationship to be true and to be real and to be pure. You want your guilt cleared before God. Who cares what the neighbors are saying?

[22 : 06] Who cares what the gossip of the town is? You just want your name cleared before God because those are the only eyes that matter. In fact, more deeply still, you want to be like Him.

And that's the greatest pain of all is that that action is such a distortion of who He is. And you want to be reflective of Him. You don't want to stare in the mirror of the self.

You want to reflect the Creator God in anything in you that puts a damper on His light, on His luster, on His holiness.

You want it removed from you. And so it's love that leads you to the place of repentance. Now, I'll tell you what I love about this verse is that the aim of verse 10 is not repentance.

You know, godly grief, that's the smoke of repentance. Where there's smoke, there's fire. Where there's godly grief, there's repentance. But the focus of Paul is not on the act of repentance.

[23 : 14] Repentance by itself would be useless except for that look at what Paul says, repentance that leads to salvation.

Paul didn't waste his words. He's never careless with what he says. Paul carries a tool belt of words with him all of the time and he only uses the right tool for the right job.

Look at what Paul didn't say. He didn't say that godly grief produces a repentance that leads to justification. Although he likes that word.

He didn't say that it produces a repentance that leads to sanctification. He likes that word too. He's got a lot of words he could use. He picks out salvation purposefully.

Looking up on that great biblical theme that God's people land in situations due to their sin that they can't rescue themselves.

[24 : 24] And in those places and at those moments, all they can do is cry out for a savior, someone who's willing to deliver them.

And that's why Paul uses salvation because he knows that even for the Christian, it's not like Jesus only saves us once and we never need his help again.

Repeatedly we need him to rescue us. Not because we're not saved. Once saved, always saved. Yes, but repeatedly sin overpowers us.

Suddenly Satan speaks his accusations into our ear and in these moments we need one who can rescue us from the power of sin.

Rescue us from being dazzled by the image of self. Rescue us from the accusations of the evil one. Let me tell you a brief little story.

[25 : 28] I grew up right near the Mississippi River. Now along the Mississippi River, they often have these boats that will dredge it and they take the kind of silt in the soil from the river bed and they dump it on the side of the river.

Creates these big mounds of kind of dirt and silt. Now what's strange about these mounds is that if you walk on them, they're dangerous because they'll collapse and they'll cover you.

Now there was a young mom. She moved into a village near the river. She had two boys. She told her boys, don't you go near those mounds.

If I ever see you going near those mounds, I'm going to kill you. I'll take your life. Don't you go near those mounds. Now one day she left, she went to get some errands done.

The boys were around the house, they're bored. They're trying to figure out what to do and what do you think those two boys did? They wanted to go down to the river to explore those mounds.

[26 : 30] The mom came home later that day, she called out for her boys, she couldn't see them anywhere. She looked around the garden, they weren't there, she spoke to the neighbors, they hadn't seen them. Finally, one of the neighbors asked her, do you think they went down near the river?

This mom said no. Now made them swear on their life that they would never go down near those river. Well finally they couldn't find these boys, so they go down to the river, they're searching along the river, they look forward, they see one of these mounds of silt and it's collapsed.

And they start running toward it. And they're running toward this mound and all of a sudden they see the face of one of these boys looking out from the dirt.

He doesn't look like he's conscious. They run up, they're crying out to him, he finally opens his eyes, they're asking him, where's your brother?

Where's your brother? And a tear comes down his eyes and he says, I'm standing on his shoulders.

[27 : 37] What happened was in that moment when the silt was collapsing, the older brother recognized they couldn't both survive, they both suffocate.

So he told his younger brother to stand on his shoulders and he rescued them. That's the kind of elder brother that we have, that we have, I should say.

Now that elder brother, he didn't know what he was getting into on that day when they went down to the river. Our elder brother did. He knew the filth of our sin.

He knew the consequences of our actions. And yet he intentionally came that he could go to the cross to pay the penalty for our sin so that we could stand on his shoulders and be rescued.

And he's not the kind of elder brother that says, Hey, look, I've rescued you once. I've rescued you twice. Then will you learn to pick yourself up and start behaving like a mature Christian?

[28 : 48] Now we have the elder brother who tells us, call to me in your distress. Call to me in the day of your affliction.

Call to me when you mess up big and I'll rescue you. And that's what Jesus does. That is the kind of savior that we have.

So friends, what should we do when we're blindsided by sin? When we've made a mess of life, when we've made a mess of our Christian life?

There's only one thing to do. We run to Jesus and say, Jesus cleans me. Jesus, rescue me.

There's a wonderful hymn written by a free church minister. Maybe you know it. Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul.

[29 : 45] Not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole. Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God. Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load.

Thy work alone, O Christ, can ease this weight of sin. Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, can give me peace within.

Thy love to me, O God, not mine, O Lord, to thee, can rid me of this dark unrest and set my spirit free.

It's a famous book from the 1800s written by a Russian author, Dostoyevsky, called Crime and Punishment. It's one of these huge Russian novels that runs about 1,000 pages.

Here's what's interesting about the book. The first 50 pages, the main character, Raskolnikov, murders somebody for no good reason.

[30 : 50] The last 50 pages is him repenting and heading off to Siberia, facing the consequences. But do you know what the whole 800 pages in between is?

It's the real prison that he goes through, the mental anguish as he hides his sin from the world. And it's when he finally confesses it that he feels free, even though he goes off into Siberia.

And that was Dostoyevsky's point, that we put ourselves in prisons because we refuse to come out clean and confess the truth about ourselves.

And my encouragement to you, if there is anyone here and you feel that inner corrosion of trying to keep something from God, come and confess it and know the freedom that comes when we discover just how merciful, just how gracious, and just how forgiving our God is.

And tomorrow as we gather around the table, that's what we celebrate. Not a group of people that have cleaned ourselves up and that are worthy of God's grace, but people that know the grace and the mercy of God and come to receive again from the love of God that is unending.

[32 : 24] Let's pray and ask God to bless his word soon.