

14. Learning the Meaning of True Repentance

In our last topic, we saw that the relationship between Paul and Titus meant that Titus was an encouragement to Paul as well as Paul being an encouragement to Titus. In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to encourage others as well as be encouraged by others. One of the things that brought great encouragement to Paul was to hear about the repentance of their sin by the Christians in Corinth. As a result, Paul used that repentance to explain the meaning of true repentance. That explanation will be a part of our topic today.

In 2 Corinthians 7:8, we read, “For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while.” Paul realized that the letter that he had written to the church in Corinth had caused the people to have sorrow. As he thought about the final result of that letter, he said that now he did not regret the fact that he had sent the earlier letter. He said that for a time he did regret sending that letter. However, now that Titus had come Paul realized that the letter had brought them to a point of true repentance and so their sorrow had only lasted until they repented.

Paul then used their repentance to explain the difference between false repentance and true repentance. This is a key lesson that we really want to help our children understand so that they can help others. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 says, “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.” Paul was filled with joy because he saw that the sorrow of the Corinthians had led them to true repentance.

Paul went on to explain that there is both a godly sorrow and a worldly sorrow. The word that is translated “repentance” means *a change of mind which causes a person to turn from sin and restore their relationship with God*. That is why the two key words that we want to help a non-Christian understand are repentance and faith. Repentance for the non-Christian is turning from sin and turning to God. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Faith is essential because a person must come to God through Christ. The non-Christian must believe that Christ shed His blood and died for his sin of unbelief and that God showed He was satisfied by the payment that Christ made by raising Christ from the dead. When a non-Christian repents of the sin of unbelief and turns to God through Christ, that person becomes a child of God and receives eternal life as a gift.

Repentance from sins is necessary for a Christian to walk in fellowship with the Lord. Repentance for a Christian means that Christian has realized that he or she is not walking in fellowship with God, because self-will led him or her to commit sins that have broken that fellowship. In 1 John 1:9, we see that when a Christian has a change of mind and turns from those sins because of repentance, their fellowship is restored. That verse says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Repentance for the Christian results in cleansing from the sins that have hindered fellowship with the Lord. For the Corinthian

Christians, their godly sorrow caused them to restore their fellowship with the Lord.

In contrast, we see that the sorrow of the world produces death. The world experiences sorrow, along with fear, guilt and shame when they sin and get caught. However, this sorrow does not cause them to repent and turn from their sin of unbelief and turn to God through Christ. Instead, the world continues to live in their sin. They continue to experience fear, guilt and shame in their lives. This means that they do not experience inner peace and joy in their lives on this earth. Revelation 20:15 says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” In this verse, we also see that it means they experience judgment and eternal separation from God at death.

Paul was filled with joy because the Christians in Corinth had confessed their sins and restored their fellowship with the Lord. As a result, 2 Corinthians 7:11-12 says, “For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!* In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Therefore, although I wrote to you, *I did not do it* for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.” Here, we see that Paul pointed out to the Corinthians that they had showed godly sorrow that did lead to repentance.

Here, we see some of the results of godly sorrow in the life of a Christian. The word that is translated “diligence” means *earnestness or eagerness*. The Corinthian Christians were now eager to maintain that fellowship with the Lord. The word that is translated “clearing of yourselves” means *a clearly thought out statement*. The Christians wanted others to know that they had repented of their sins. The word that is translated “indignation” means *anger at their own sin*. The Corinthians did not want to repeat that sin again. The word that is translated “fear” means fear that produces a reverence for God. Now, their desire was to please the Lord. The word that is translated “vehement desire” means *longing*. The Christians had a longing to again enjoy fellowship with the Lord. The word that is translated “zeal” means *to love so much that it causes one to defend a person*. They wanted to serve the Lord instead of hurting Him any longer by their sins. The word that is translated “vindication” means *a desire for justice*. The Christians wanted to be right with the Lord even if it meant the discipline of God in their own lives. The word that is translated “clear” means that *a person wants to be cleansed from all carnality or sin*. They wanted to be cleansed of their sin.

Paul did not write this letter to the Corinthians to punish the one who had done wrong. He did not write the letter for the sake of the one that had suffered because of the wrong that had been done. Instead, Paul wrote so that the Christians in Corinth would know and understand the great care and concern that Paul had for them. As 1 Corinthians 4:14 says, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn *you*.” Paul showed the genuine concern of a parent for his spiritual children. This is the same concern that we need to show for our physical and spiritual children.

That is why Paul and Timothy went on to write in 2 Corinthians 7:13-16, “Therefore we have been

comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. And his affection is greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.” Here, we see that Paul and Timothy go on to express the comfort and joy that they felt because of the godly sorrow of the Corinthian Christians.

They were especially rejoicing because of the joy that they saw in the life of Titus when he came to them from Corinth. We see that Titus was filled with rejoicing. His spirit had been refreshed or given rest by the changes that he had seen in the attitudes of the Corinthians. Paul said that he had boasted about the Corinthians to Titus. Here, we see that Paul had told Titus that he was confident that the Corinthians would repent of their sin. Now that Titus had come from Corinth, he was able to tell Paul that he had been right about the choice that the Corinthians would make when they read the letter from Paul.

Here, we see that Paul gives us another important example. We need to trust the Lord to work in the lives of others when we have to deal with sin in their lives. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Here, we see that even when a person is caught red-handed in a sin, our goal is always to restore and not to condemn. This will only happen if our own attitude is right with the Lord. Then, we will seek to restore that person in a spirit of gentleness. When we have a genuine love for others, we will know that the Lord will work in their lives.

Titus was excited because he had also had the opportunity to see how the Lord had worked in the lives of the Corinthians. He had developed an even greater kindness and compassion for the Corinthians because of what he had seen the Lord do in the lives of the Christians. He remembered their obedience to the Lord when they heard the letter from Paul. They had received Titus with godly fear and trembling that produced true repentance. Here, we see that one of the ways that we help our physical and spiritual children in their growth is to give them the opportunity to participate in the ministry so that they can see for themselves how the Lord works in the lives of people.

Paul was filled with joy as he saw how the Lord had worked in the lives of the Corinthians. The word that is translated “confidence” means *to be of good courage or to be bold*. Here, we see that Paul had courage to be bold in writing to the Corinthians and the Lord had rewarded his courage by giving Titus the opportunity to see how the Lord worked in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how the Lord works to bring repentance in the lives of others.