

When I was a kid (going to school), I remember a couple of times when the teacher had a particularly bad day... The regular naughty kids, were extra naughty. The kids that were mostly OK (but easily led), were a little bit naughty. The kids that were usually 'good kids', were a little bit emboldened, and a little bit cheeky... And then of course, there were "the goody-goodies", and they were just always good...

Which category do you think I was in???

The other kids called me a "goody-goodie" – I was actually always very well behaved... And if you don't believe me, I can show you my report cards that my mother kept and later on passed on to me...

*But I remember a time, when the teacher was having a particularly bad day, and at lunch time, she made the whole class to stay in during the lunch hour... Now, as a goody-goodie, I really felt the injustice of this. There were a few of us who hadn't done anything wrong, but the judgment was made that 'the class' – the collective group of students, were out of order, and we **all** had to stay in for detention...*

Anyway, something a bit like that, is going on here.

We're studying what we know as "Paul's 2nd Letter to the Corinthians", it's actually the 4th one that we know about, but there's only 2 that remain in existence today.... And up until now, this letter has really been hammering the false teachers in the church (**and** the ones who have been following the false teachers)... And the flavour of the letter has sort of been lumping the whole church together... and it sort of seems like

Paul's putting the whole church in the naughty corner, as if they've **all** been following the false teachers...

But when we get to today's reading in Chpt. 7, we realise that this isn't the case at all... The false teachers, and the ones who are continuing to follow them, are no longer in the majority...

Paul had already paid them a visit, that in Chpt 2, he refers to as the 'painful visit', and then he wrote them a letter to pull them back into line. And he refers to that letter as a 'severe letter' – it was a letter that caused them grief – it was a letter that caused them a lot of pain...

But when they got that letter, the **majority** of the church took notice of it, and repented of their actions... And that's what we're reading about today...

And so, the flavour of the letter changes here. As one commentatorⁱ points out, in the first section, Paul was an apologist – he was defending the faith (**and** he's claiming his authority as an apostle – to teach the truth and expose the lies)... But now he becomes more like a pastor, and he's admonishing his flock – he's urging them to do something. And V2 sets the tone of what that is:

² Make room in your hearts for us.

It's like, "Even though they've repented from false teaching, and at some level, they've re-connected with Paul and his fellow missionaries, it seems like they were still holding him at arm's length... And the way that they were doing that, becomes evident from what we studied over the last few

weeks... Paul has been urging them to not be unequally yoked to unbelievers, and to **separate** themselves, from things that defile... **Go out from their midst... Be separate from them...**

And yet they're still letting the false teachers (and their followers), co-exist with them in the church... These are the ones who have been causing Paul so much grief: criticising Paul and running him down, and turning people against him, and leading people astray...

And until the Corinthian church separate themselves from these false teachers, they haven't made room in their hearts for Paul... And I don't think it's a personal thing, as much as a Gospel thing... As an apostle, Paul is upholding the true Gospel... And while they allow a false gospel to continue in their church, they're holding the true Gospel at arm's length, and holding Paul and his missionary mates at arm's length...

And so, his appeal is “² **Make room in your hearts for us.**

- We haven't wronged anyone;
- We haven't corrupted anyone;
- We haven't taken advantage of anyone;

Alright, he's outlining the difference between him and the false apostles...

And even though they're still holding Paul at arm's length, Paul loves this church deeply, and his heart's filled with joy, every time he thinks about them.

I'm giving today's message under 2 headings. The first is:

Christians Comforting Christians

Some people like to have the view, that if you're a Christian, life should be absolutely marvellous, and everybody loves you; and nothing should ever go wrong... But apparently, the Apostle Paul didn't get the memo on that. He's been persecuted, and he's suffered greatly:

In V5, he talks about “**fighting without**” and “**fear within**”. I think that's referring to the physical suffering (such as stonings; beatings; floggings), and the emotional suffering and worries that Paul has... - he's suffered greatly...

But **in** all of this affliction, he's filled with comfort, and he overflows with joy...

How does God comfort the downcast??? He does it through the church. God gives comfort to his children, by bringing Christians to encourage Christians....

*Some of the most depressed people are almost **impossible** to comfort, because they just want to be on their own. They get into this dark pit of depression, and they don't want to see anyone; they don't want to talk to anyone; and they just want to wallow in their self-pity...*

And by cutting themselves off from other Christians, they cut themselves off, from the comfort of God. God brings comfort to the downcast, by bringing Christians together...

And if you're someone who's prone to depression – you might be **in** the pit of depression, well don't just internalise it. And don't cut yourself off. Meet with other Christians. Fellowship with other children of God, because that's how God chooses to give comfort – through fellowship...

Anyway, Paul had had a pretty tough time. Even in his dealings with the church in Corinth, he's had a tough time:

- When he'd visited Corinth, things didn't go as well as he'd hoped... And;
- then he wrote the severe letter to them; and
- then he was worried about how they'd respond to it; And
- then he'd sent Titus to them, to try and ascertain how things were (Do they love me? Do they love me not?); And
- he waited in Troas for Titus, and waited and waited; and waited, but he still hadn't turned up; and
- you can imagine, Paul's getting more and more anxious; And so
- he went on to Macedonia; And
- it was at Macedonia, where he had no rest: “**fighting without**” and “**fear within**”...

But then something happened that filled Paul with joy:

Titus turned up... And the source of joy, wasn't just Titus' smiling face – It was the good report he carried – “Hey Paul, things are OK in Corinth”.

When Titus got to Corinth, **Titus** was comforted. How was Titus comforted? The Corinthian church received him (fellowship). And there had been a big change in the Corinthians. They were sorry for the way they'd treated them in the past, and now they were keen to be with them again...

Did you know, that one of the greatest sources of joy for a pastor, is to see people they minister to (and with), growing together in Christ... *Some of the greatest encouragements that I've had, is when people contact me out of the blue, and say "Thank you so much for what you're doing at Bush Disciples, and the teaching you're making available for us..." And then they share with me how much they've been growing, and what God's been doing in their life...*

The encouragement that that is, can't be overstated...

But the joy doesn't stop with me... I then share these stories with others here at BD, and their faces just light up... It's a source of comfort – it's a source of joy – that God is taking what we do here, (in this little church out in the bush), and God is using it to grow faith in others – People who we probably don't even know....

And I want to encourage you today – every one of us, who's listening to this – I encourage you:

- to contact someone who has helped you to grow in Christ; and
- tell them what God has been doing in you...
- Tell them, in what way you've been growing spiritually.
- Tell them, in what way God is now using **you**, to minister to others...

And I can guarantee it, that you will be a source of comfort, and you will be a source of joy, to that person, and they'll probably share it with others, and the joy will grow...

Have you noticed how some people have a real gift of encouragement? Well you know what? We can **all** be encouraging, simply by doing something as simple as this.

Something you mightn't realise, is even people in ministry (especially people in ministry), need the comfort and joy of God. And do you know how God does that? He does it through you. Christians comfort Christians... Who's going to comfort your brother or Sister in Christ? You are...

And let's never fall into the mindset, "Oh, that's the minister's job – we **pay** him to care for people." ... That's not the way it's supposed to be... We are a body, and we care for one another.

(Christians comforting Christians)

Righto, so that's the first heading. The second heading, is:

Godly sorrow/pain Vs. Worldly sorrow/pain

And it's a very specific sort of sorrow/pain we're talking about here. We're talking about sorrow/pain caused by guilt/shame...

I remember a scene from the Simpsons... Marj volunteers to do a bit of work for the church, and this frees up Rev. Lovejoy to do a bit of reading. And he tells Marj how wonderful it's been, because he's managed to discover "a form of shame that has gone unused for 700 years."

And, for many people, that's the view they have, of what the church (and preaching), does to people... They reckon that us preachers – the ambition we have, is to just heap as much shame as we can, onto people... And if we can give a message that's going to make everybody feel 'wretched' about themselves, then we've done our job....

But then there's other 'feel good' churches, where they strive to remove all sense of guilt and shame from the Bible ... And basically, instead of preaching the Gospel, they become a place of social therapy, where people are told "Cheer up – you're wonderful (just as you are). God's got a wonderful purpose for your life..." , and they appeal to our vanity..

So, is guilt and shame, a good thing, or a bad thing???

Well, it depends on what we do with it... It depends on whether we process guilt and shame in a **Godly** way, or whether we process it in a worldly way.

Paul says V¹⁰ For **godly** sorrow/grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas **worldly** sorrow/grief produces death.

What we're talking about here, is a consciousness of sin, that fills us with guilt and shame, such that we're filled with sorrow/grief about our sinful actions ...

And if we process that in a Godly way, that sorrow/grief leads us to repentance (God, I'm so sorry for what I've done.

Please forgive me. Help me not to do that anymore.) And guess what: God forgives us, which is why Paul says that it **leads to salvation without regret.**

And I stand before you today, and I testify to you, that I have no regret, for the depth of guilt and shame that I have sometimes felt.

There have been times, when I have grieved because of the guilt that I was carrying ... Now, why do I have no regrets about this? It's because that's the very thing that's led me to repentance and salvation... And even as a Christian, I grieve with guilt and shame (for things that I've done), And with tears, I repent...

You see, Paul wrote a really harsh letter to that Church in Corinth. ⁸ For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it — (he did regret it in a way though, because he saw that it grieved them)..... ⁹ As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, (but because of what you did with that grief) but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a **godly** grief,.....

I was quite disturbed the other day – Whenever there's visiting preachers or whatever, wanting to connect with our church, I like to read the statement of belief of their own church (or their ministry), to see “where they're coming from, and what they believe”.

And I was reading a Statement of Belief of a particular church, and one of its articles of belief was:

Those who are in Christ should have no consciousness of sin; rather they should have an overwhelming sense of righteousness.

And it's quite wrong... Paul wrote this letter to a church. He was writing to Christians... And he's rejoicing, because when he highlighted their sin to them, they became conscious of their sin. And they **grieved** because of their sin, and that's why they repented...

Those who are in Christ, should **absolutely** be conscious of sin... That's what makes us repent of sin... And then once we've repented, by faith, we know that the guilt is gone. And **that**, is when we have an overwhelming sense of righteousness...

godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret

whereas **worldly** grief produces death.... What does that look like? Well it can come in several forms:

One form of worldly grief (over sin), is:

Self-righteous indignation.

I've used this example a number of times over the last 6 months, but I can't think of a better example:

Israel Folau posted (on social media), a whole heap of sins, that if we don't repent of these things, and turn to Jesus, we're going to go to Hell... And the list of sins, pretty much

included everybody... I know, I was on that list... What was the response???

Well, it was somewhat met with self-righteous indignation...

- *Who do you think you are?*
- *What gives you the right to decide what's right and what's wrong?*
- *How dare you tell me that I'm going to go to hell...*
- *Your list is out-dated... Those things aren't sins.*
- *How dare you...*

That's one form of worldly grief – There's an inner conviction. – God's righteous Law has been revealed – People understand (very well) the message (Repent & turn to Jesus, or bear the consequences)... And it's obviously affected them (we can tell that in their outrage), but they don't respond with Godly grief...

There is a conviction of sin, but they hide their sorrow and grief, with anger and self-righteous indignation... There is no repentance. There is no salvation. It leads to death...

A second form of worldly grief, is:

Guilt without repentance.

One article I read from the "Psychology Today" websiteⁱⁱ, quoted one study that found, that people generally feel guilty, for about 5 hours a week. (If you add up all the moments we feel guilty, it comes to about 5 hours.)

- Guilt makes it hard to think straight

- It makes us reluctant to enjoy life
- It can make people self-punish;
- It can make us resentful

Guilt can become this weight that bears down on a person, and fills them with torment and depression and sadness...

And all they need to experience, is “forgiveness” to set them free...

And the Gospel is that Jesus died, to set us free from this very guilt,, but they don’t bring their guilt to Jesus. And they don’t repent... And so they don’t experience the freedom that comes with forgiveness.

They just continue to feel guilty. Guilt without repentance – a worldly sorrow, that leads to death.

But then there’s times

When we are forgiven, but we don’t feel forgiven

Now, in our heads, we know that **no** sin is too big for Jesus to forgive...

And we know this, until it gets personal...

- We’ve felt guilty
- We’ve grieved because of our sin;
- We repent (and we ask for forgiveness)
- And in our heads, we know we’re forgiven;
- But we still feel guilty...

Has that ever happened to you??? It's happened to me...

“Guilt” is a good thing, but only until it's done its job. Guilt is what leads us to repentance, and then we're forgiven... But if I continue to feel guilty after I've already been forgiven, well, that's where guilt becomes a bad thing...

Satan is always, the accuser. Satan wants:

- to tell you that you're not good enough;
- you to feel that you're not forgiven
(How could you possibly be forgiven? Your sins are way too bad...)

And that, is a form of worldly sorrow, because it's not based on truth...

Godly sorrow, **knows** that we're forgiven, and so our sorrows are turned to joy. There are no regrets.

In Christ, there is no sin that's too bad for Him to forgive. And so, in Christ, we are forgiven...

And if you feel like you're **not** forgiven, your feelings are **wrong**.

Sometimes we have to let our faith override our feelings. Yes, you might still feel guilty. That's Satan, trying to rob you of your joy. And don't let him do it...

And sometimes other Christians might want to rob you of your joy, and they look down their nose at you, because they know what you've done in the past. But the fact of the matter is, "My wicked past, has been dealt with on the cross, and so has yours."

Alright so, I might confess my sins to Jesus, and ask Him for forgiveness... but the next day, I'm still feeling guilty. And I might say, "Jesus, you know that sin I confessed yesterday," and Jesus says "Nup."

Psalm 103:12 as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from
us.

Hebrews 8:12 For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."

At times, every one of us, will grieve, because we're filled with guilt and shame... What we do with that, will determine whether we live in joyful freedom or whether we carry a sorrow that leads to death...

It's strange (you know), unbelievers point their fingers at Christianity, and they say "It's all about guilt and shame"... But it's exactly the opposite. Faith in Jesus Christ, is the only way that we can be free of guilt and shame.

godly grief produces a repentance that leads to
salvation without regret

And that's why we're joyful... We have no regret...

Let's Pray,

Lord Jesus Christ,

We thank you for the forgiveness that we have in
Your Name.

Lord, we have done so many things,
that can lead to so many regrets,
but we have no regret.

Even for the times of bitter sorrow,
When we've been filled with guilt and remorse.
Lord, we thank you for these times,
Because they were Your Holy Spirit,
Leading us to repentance,
That we may experience salvation without regret.

And Lord, I pray for any person listening to this
today,
Who is feeling great sorrow because of
unconfessed sin.
Lord, I ask that you would introduce them to Godly
sorrow,
That they would repent,
And that they would experience salvation without
regret.

Lord, I pray for those who are forgiven,
but don't feel forgiven.

Lord Jesus, give them faith.

Restore their joy.

Help them to celebrate the freedom we already
have,

In Your Name,

Amen.

ⁱ Hafemann Scott J. *The NIV Application Commentary – 2 Corinthians*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids. 2000. P.306

ⁱⁱ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/201411/10-things-you-didnt-know-about-guilt>