

## 2 Corinthians 7:10

July 5, 2015

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Pentecost 6

*2 Corinthians 7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

Dear Friends In Our Savior Who Has Ruled All Things,  
so that we today live in a country where we may freely worship him,

It was a rainy morning. One of our children, sitting next to me in the car was watching the windshield-wipers in an early-morning daze. “I wonder who invented the pattern for windshield wipers.” You know—how the one on the right side moves up to shove the rainwater to the left wiper, then the left wiper, takes the water the right wiper has shoved at it and pushes the water down. It seems like that actually shouldn’t work because if all the left wiper does is push the water down, where does it go? I mean, if you keep sweeping the dust under the rug, eventually you can’t ignore the lump under the living room rug. Anyway, as we kept watching the wiper blades in the rain, it didn’t look so much like the wipers were trying to clean the windshield as one wiper was just trying to shove the responsibility of its own water at the other one. The other one trying to shove it down like it doesn’t exist.

### *A. The Cover Up*

Does human nature do any differently? Look at politicians and their fevered attempts to dodge and parry, to re-assign blame or altogether ignore mistakes. Like windshield wipers, feverishly moving back and forth to make sure that none of the mud sticks, so the politicians spin. It really isn’t fair to target politicians, because they simply do on the public stage what all of us try to do in real life. Don’t let the mud stick. “It was someone else’s fault, circumstances beyond my control, trials that no human should have to endure.” That was just about the first human behavior displayed after the fall into sin. Remember Adam and Eve in their first post-forbidden fruit conversation. They were trying to pretend that what just happened never happened, and at the same time blaming someone else. Blame dodging is one of the best-documented human behaviors in the Bible, in modern life, and everywhere in between.

Is that the best way to get up after a fall? To blame someone else?

### *B. What Do I Mean by a Fall?*

To be clear here, when I talk about a “fall”, I am not talking about people outside God’s church. I am talking about us; you and me. You can’t fall if you aren’t standing. When I talk about a fall, I am talking about Christians, people who have believed in Jesus and who yet fall into sin.

Much of the Bible is taken up with people like that. David falling into adultery. Moses killing an Egyptian. The disciple Peter swearing that he doesn’t even know Jesus. All of these believers, and many more fall into sin. It looks bad. Outsiders laugh with glee when Christians fall. Just look at the media posts whenever one Christian or another falls into a headline-making sin. They laugh and spread all kinds of scorn on those “Oh-so-perfect Christians.”

Well, fellow Christians, how do you turn that around? How do you get up after a fall? We are tempted, no, we many times have done the windshield wiper thing: blaming and covering up.

### *C. The Reason for the Cover Up*

I can remember going to school on days when there would be ice on the sidewalks. And since it was a boarding school, and since it was Wisconsin, even if there was ice, there were still classes. And if you hit one of those icy spots kind of unawares, you fell. But you got up as quickly as you could, and tried to act like nothing happened. “What somebody fell? Me? No, it wasn’t me.”

Why do we do it? Why do we think that getting up from a fall means covering up? Before people fell into sin, there was no need to take responsibility, because there was nothing to accept responsibility for! Everything was perfect. But eating the forbidden fruit brought sin into the world, and it brought a whole lot else. It brought sin’s punishment. And here is something else it brought: it brought shame.

Shame, not just because Adam was underdressed, but shame because Adam and Eve knew they messed up. They knew they had made a big mistake, that they had (here’s the dirty word) sinned. That is the reason for the cover up: shame.

Shame, led the disciple Peter to deny Jesus not once, but several times. After Peter denied Jesus once, I am sure that his conscience told him he had done something bad. So when someone accused Peter of being a Jesus follower *a second time*, what could he do? We’ve all been down that road—a road we know we shouldn’t even be on, but we keep going down it because making a U-turn would be admitting to everyone that we were wrong, that we sinned. So Peter had to ask himself if he really wanted to confess Jesus and be laughed at first as a Jesus follower, and then as a coward of a Jesus follower? Look like a fool to everyone? No. Keep the lie going, full-steam ahead, admit nothing, hope people will forget, all the while this little voice in the back of your head screams, “Stop!”

We all feel like that when we get caught in a sin. We feel shame. And we should feel that way even when we don’t get caught. When we start to realize that God does not just condemn murder and adultery and perjury, but also gossip and lust and hate and envy, then we start to realize how often we have fallen. We start to realize that God has every reason to condemn us, not just those people outside of Christendom; even us.

#### *D. Right and Wrong Kinds of “Sorrow”*

We usually think of pain as a bad thing. Have you ever heard of those people who have no sensation of pain? It sounds great until you hear about the people who don’t feel pain. They break bones and walk around untreated. They get complications that can kill. Leprosy usually kills, because it kills nerves. Without feelings of pain, cuts on hands and feet get infected and go gangrenous. The ability to feel pain is important for our survival.

So is that little voice called conscience. Like pain, our conscience starts to talk when things are not well. It is a warning sign that we have made mistakes. Conscience cries out that something bad has been done, and that something needs to be fixed. Our reading says that there are two ways people try to appease their consciences. It says, **“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation...but worldly sorrow leads to death.”** Which do you feel when you have sinned: godly sorrow or worldly sorrow?

Well, this is what worldly sorrow looks like: I am sorry that I got caught, but not sorry over what I did. This is worldly sorrow: try harder to be better. This is worldly sorrow: being more careful next time, more careful not to get caught. Here is another type of worldly sorrow: “Damage control”. Worldly sorrow, to put it into picture terms, is anytime you resemble those windshield wipers.

Here is what God’s word says about worldly sorrow: **“Worldly sorrow brings death.”** Worldly sorrow is worthless. In fact, it brings God’s condemnation.

The way to get up after a fall into sin is the other kind of sorrow: **“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.”** Tied with “I am sorry” as the most difficult thing in the world to say is, “I was wrong.” In fact, it is so difficult that we can’t say it on our own. But by God’s gift, we can finally say, *“I know that nothing good lives in me”* (Rom 7:18). Then we can despair of

finding the good we seek in ourselves, and we start to look to God. Godly sorrow gives way to repentance. Repentance admits wrong-doing and admits there is no excuse. Repentance knows that we cannot make up for our wrong. Repentance means that instead of enjoying sin, we are sorry it was even part of our life.

#### *E. Godly Sorrow Changes Our Life*

Here is an example of godly sorrow and repentance in real life: on a recent radio show, a prison chaplain recounted how he has escorted a small number of prisoners to their own executions. Criminals who had done the worst, but come to know their Savior. He told of one particular man who was truly sorry and when going to the execution chamber, he said, “I am getting what I deserve.” That is what a Christian says about every sin we have ever sinned. Every sin deserves nothing but death. That is the godly sorrow that the Holy Spirit wrote about in our reading. No cover up, no windshield wipers. Getting up from the fall, admitting the sin, knowing that the only way that the stains of sin can be removed is by the blood of Jesus.

Only then can the conscience have peace. In Jesus Christ, there is resolution. We lay past sins to rest. We leave the feelings of guilt and embarrassment and the reflexes of shifting blame, we can leave it all at the cross, because Jesus paid for it all. And if ever anyone brings it up to us again, we can say, “You will have to talk to Jesus about this matter.” We are forgiven.

Here is what godly sorrow and repentance meant for the disciple Peter—not the part where he continued to deny Jesus a second and a third time—but when he finally ran out weeping, crying because he knew what he had done. He repented. And when Jesus rose from the dead a couple days later, do you know what the angels’ message was? (It’s one of those little details we often don’t notice.) “*Don’t be alarmed... You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’*” (Mark 16:7). God’s message was specially addressed to that man who had three times denied Jesus. It was an assurance to Peter that his sin had been forgiven. The pain of godly sorrow had led to forgiveness. What freedom and joy!

That freedom in forgiveness leads each of us to a new reality, a reality in which we stop the posturing and blame shifting, and other people stop doubting our earnestness. It is a new reality in which we repent and our fellow Christians rejoice, not in our humiliation, but in our restoration. We change because we know that in spite of the inexcusable nature of our sins, they are forgiven in Jesus Christ.

Finally, because God has been so gracious and forgiving to us, a repentant heart is a changed heart. A repentant heart is as sensitive to future temptations as it has been to past sin. When we feel the pull of the whirlpool of temptations that lead us into old familiar sins, we get out of there. When we feel ourselves drawing close to the satisfaction of knocking someone else’s reputation down, or filling the mind with filthy images, or getting away with wasting someone else’s wealth or time, a repentant heart stops. We leave the room, we close the internet browser, we change the conversation, we get back to work, we think of God, we pray to master wrong desire. That is the future result of godly sorrow over past sin.

May God grant that godly sorrow to each of us, that our lives are one of daily repentance, and also daily acceptance by God in Jesus’ name. Amen.