

True Repentance

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted [transformed], that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19)



By Matt Black
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AM Service
Text: 2 Cor. 7:10-11

Introduction: Open your Bibles to 2 Cor. 7:10-11. This morning we are going to talk about how to identify true godly repentance. This is the greatest struggle with our children or with anyone you share the Gospel with. You’ve talked to someone and they said, while half distracted—“Yeah, I believe Jesus died for my sins”. Yet there is no visible sign of repentance. Others we have seen weep and cry out for God to save them, but afterward there is no transformation of life whatsoever. How can we identify true repentance, which the Bible calls “godly sorrow”?

Illustration: Several years ago I went through an airport security checkpoint. Something went off in the scanner, and I was searched as well as my carryon and computer.

Wouldn’t it be great if there was some kind of repentance detector? When people seem to be acknowledging their sin before God, it would be fantastic to have some kind of meter for their sincerity! Well, we do have something of a

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. 11 For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Cor. 7:10-11).

[Prayer for Guidance]

Building on the right foundation is important. If you build on the sand, your house is going to sink in the sand. I’m told that the vast majority of young people are leaving our churches. Why is that? I think folk are building on a wrong foundation. Jesus said “Repent and believe the Gospel”. We need to understand that repentance and faith go hand in hand. Brokenness and God-dependence are together. Deep remorse and transformation—they are together!

We have a temptation to build on the shaky foundation of simple acknowledgement of the facts. But we’ll deal with that another time. Others build on the foundation of sorrow, thinking if there is sorrow for sin, there must be repentance. I want to look at that today. What is true repentance?

First we have to ask ourselves the question...

I. What brings sorrow? **Sin!**

Sin is the breaking of God’s law—it is anarchy in the face of God’s Lordship. It is taking God’s glory and putting my glory in its place. Whenever we do this, it leads to destruction and sorrow. Everybody’s sinned, so everybody’s sorry.

The unsaved do not trust God, but live in the state of self-rule where they have lived in as their own lord and master (Rom.10:9; I John 3:4).

The story of mankind is sorrow because only God can satisfy your desire for glory. I’m angry because of the passions at war within me (James 4). I yell at my child when he spills orange juice on the white couch because I want a comfortable place to live more than I want to be an instrument of redemption for my child.

II. What brings repentance? **A Vision of God!**

1. **Peter** – Luke 5:8, Peter saw Jesus high and lifted up through the miracle of the fishes, and, “he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”
2. **Isaiah** – Isaiah 6:5, “mine eyes have seen the king the Lord of hosts”.



III. What we need to avoid: **Worldly Sorrow**

Don't go there! It's self-centered!

1. Worldly sorrow **Defined**

- The word “sorrow” or “repentance” is *lupeo* (to cause pain, to make sorry).
- Everyone is sorry! What makes sorrow godly or worldly is whether it is God-centered or man-centered.

2. Worldly sorrow **Demonstrated:**

- **Esau** (Gen. 27; cf Heb. 12:17, “he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears”).
Motive: Sorry for what he lost! **Goal:** position & possessions
Comment: “I want what I want” (self gratification)
- **Pharoah** (Ex. 10:16-17, “I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. 17 Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only”).
Motive: Sorry for he had to suffer! **Idol:** peace—removal of suffering
Comment: “I’m hating life” (self preservation)
- **King Saul** (1 Sam. 15:24-30) “I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. 25 Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD”. Saul begins to hunt down David because he’s intoxicated with the glory of human power.
Motive: Sorry he got caught! **Desire:** popularity and people pleasing
Comment: “Let’s move on!” (excuses for self), “Tell me what to do”, “hoop jumping”
- **The Nation of Israel** (Joel 2:13, “...rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God”).
Motive: Sorry for the circumstances! **Desire:** remove bad circumstances
Comment: “Woe is me!” (self-pity)
- **Judas** (Mat. 27:4, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.”)
Motive: self pity and anger at self! **Desire:** take away the consequences
Comment: “Stupid me!” (anger at self – fears consequences)

3. **Worldly sorrow Described:**

- Various expressions of worldly sorrow (responses to sin that stand in the way of true repentance).
 - The person who **waters** it down. "It's no big deal!" "Let's move on..."
 - The person who **wallows** in it. "Poor me!" "I got caught!" "How stupid!"
 - The person who **works** to get rid of it (PENANCE). "I'll make up for this."

Penance: "A religious attitude prompting men to attempt to pay for their sins through good works and suffering."¹

- Various elements accompanying worldly sorrow (flipside of 2 Cor. 7:10-11).

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. 11 For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2 Cor. 7:10-11).

Qualities of Godly Sorrow

Qualities of Worldly Sorrow

Repentance "not...repented of" i.e. no regrets (10)	Regret giving up sin
"carefulness" i.e. eagerness and urgency (11)	Laziness, carelessness, lack of concern
"clearing of yourselves" or to come clean (11)	Excuses, rationalizations, defending accusations
"what indignation" [at sin— <i>hatred of sin because of the beauty of God's holiness</i>] (11)	Angry at the mess, angry at others, angry at self (not sin)
"what fear" [of God and His displeasure] (11)	Fears consequences and others the most
"what vehement desire" [for restoration] (11)	No longing for true restoration
"what zeal" i.e. – a willingness to do absolutely anything to please God (11)	No real effort to correct the real heart problem, instead there is "hoop jumping"
"what revenge"—or satisfaction of justice in Christ's atonement (11)	Creates various false refuges to counter the guilt

- The sure results of worldly sorrow
 - Temporarily: Habitual "kiss and make up" syndrome, deceive oneself, no sanctifying change. But worldly sorrow always goes back to sinning. Remember Pharaoh. How many times did he let the people go? King Saul—how many times did he say he had sinned against David, and kept going back?

That is because worldly sorrow has never given up the idols of the heart. Anger, depression, don't need anger or depression management, we need worship realignment!! The one with worldly sorrow is still worshipping at the throne of self!

¹ C. John Miller. *Repentance and the 20th Century Man* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1980), 19-20.

- Ultimately: only one sure result – death (Romans 3:23; 7:13). James 1, “*sin when it is finished bringeth forth death*”.

IV. What God desires and designs: **Godly Sorrow**

The only way to God! It's God-centered.



1. Godly sorrow **Defined**

- The word “sorrow” or “repentance” is *lupeo* (to cause pain, to make sorry).
- Godly sorrow is God-centered

2. Godly sorrow **Demonstrated**: The motive is always a need for God’s grace and a deep desire for the glory of God. “God is right to send me to hell, but He is so amazing to forgive a wretch like me!”

- **King David** (2 Sam. 12; Ps. 32, 51)

Heart cry: “Be gracious to me O **God**” “Against thee and **thee** [God] **only** have I sinned”

- **The Prodigal Son** (Luke 15:11-32)

Heart cry: “I have sinned **against heaven** and against you”

- **The Apostle Peter** – Luke 22:61-62, “**the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter...** 62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.”

Comment: Sometimes there are no words, just weeping. The reason we know Peter’s repentance was real, is that he was fully restored to God. We know that Peter’s weeping was God-focused. Remember, Peter had seen the battered face of the Son of God look right at him, and it was a broken hearted repentance that probably cried, “I have sinned against my loving Lord!” Peter wasn’t fleeing from the Lord when he saw Him next.

Remember he was fishing, and what did Peter do? John told Peter the Lord was on the seashore. According to John 21:7-12, Peter jumped into the water and swam all the way to shore, beating everybody! Remember Jesus said, “Come and dine!” By that time the other disciples had come to shore with the net, and Peter grabbed a hundred and fifty three fishes, but the net wasn’t broken! He was ready to be restored to Christ. What zeal! What true repentance! Remember who preached the first sermon of the New Testament era at Pentecost? It was Peter!

- **The Thief on the Cross** – Luke 23:39-43, “**we indeed [are condemned] justly**; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. 42 And he said unto **Jesus, Lord**, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom”

Heart cry: “remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom”

The thief was done with his own kingdom. He wanted Christ’s kingdom! God can radically deliver you from you! The truly repentant person prays: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” That is the most dangerous prayer that you can pray. It’s a prayer of self-crucifixion. Jesus came to break the back off your worship of self! He knows self-glory leads to self-destruction. The most effective god-replacement is SELF. You are never worshipless. You will always worship something! True repentance always crucifies self and puts God’s kingship in that place.

3. Godly sorrow **Described** (2 Cor. 7:10-11)—Let’s look at one more example of godly repentance.

- **An Example** of godly sorrow...
- **The Prophet Isaiah.** Look over at Isaiah 6. Isaiah doesn't say, I'm so bad God can't forgive me! Doesn't say "Stupid me, I got caught". Isaiah's had a vision of God. He now sees his sin because he sees God.

Isaiah 6:5-8, "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. 6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."

Example: The repentant see sin as ugly, like a leach. What if I were to roll my sleeve down and reveal a leach on my arm? I would do whatever it takes to get that blood sucker off my arm! If you knew leaches were in the area and you swimming in a creek, you would get out of the creek and do what? Start examining yourself.

- **Self-examination:** (with a God-focus, not a self-focus) – "O wretched man...who shall deliver me?... I thank God..." "Woe is me I am undone...for mine eyes have seen the King..."
 - **Come clean with a full admittance of sin.** "Woe is me for I am undone!" Proverbs 28:13, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."
 - **Restoration with the reception of God's grace and forgiveness.** "Thy sins are taken away, and thy sins purged." There is always forgiveness that follows all godly sorrow. Faith and repentance cannot be separated. If you think God cannot forgive you, then you have a heart full of pride. You will not believe God's promises.
 - "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground" (Isaiah 44:3).
 - "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isaiah (Isaiah 43:25).
 - "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).
 - "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).
 - "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).
 - "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity...?" (Micah 7:18).
- **Various Evidences** of godly sorrow. What's it look like? Look again at 2 Corinthians 7:10-11, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation **not to be repented of**: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. 11 For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, **what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!** In **all things** ye have **approved yourselves to be clear** in this matter".
 - - **Glad to have sins dealt with.** "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (10). There's no regret in bringing sin out into the open. Let the whole world know my sins. Proverbs 28:13, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

- **Change always follows.** A change of mind always results in a change of life. True repentance is always followed by faith—and a life of FAITHfulness. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted [*transformed*], that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19)
- **Urgency** – “what carefulness it wrought in you” (11). There is an eagerness, earnestness, diligence and readiness to deal with the issues.
- **Seeking and receiving pardon**, “what clearing of yourselves” or to come clean before God (11). Have you ever considered the phrase “come clean”. Come to God seeking forgiveness and pardon bringing all sin and guilt to Him, and you will “come clean” before Him!

Remember Nathan confronted David and said “Thou art the man!” What was David’s response? 2 Samuel 12:13, “David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.”

- **Indignation and anger that God is offended.** “what indignation” [at sin—*hatred of sin because of the beauty of God’s holiness*] (11). You are not angry that you got caught, but angry at your anarchy and treachery against the beauty of God’s holiness. Think of a beautiful painting, and someone spray painting their name and vandalizing it! That’s the indignation that repentance brings. We say to ourselves: “Enough!”
- **Fear of God and His displeasure.** “what fear” (11). Romans 3:18 brings the indictment of mankind, “There is no fear of God before their eyes”. Through God’s grace, the repentant sinner sees God’s greatness, and His ability to throw us all into hell; and the sinner sees that he has ignored God, and He deserves hell. “What fear” (11)!!
- **Longing, yearning to get right with God and others.** “what vehement desire” [to be right with God and others] (11). You almost have to pull a repentant sinner back. They are like a wild dog in front of a steak dinner. They are willing to uncover everything and make restitution. Remember Zacchaeus? In Luke 19:8, we read of his repentance. He was a rich tax collector that had defrauded many people of money. He owed a lot to a lot of people. We read in Luke 19:8, “And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” He was willing to do what Moses’ law required. If you steal, then you restore four times the amount! “What vehement desire” to be right with God and others true repentance brings!
- **Zealous passion for God.** “what zeal” i.e. – a willingness to do absolutely anything to please God (11). The desire now to know God and love God and be right with Him is powerful!
- **A concern for justice in all matters of your life** . There’s no rug-tucking! “what revenge [or satisfaction of justice]” (11). He says, “In **all things** ye have **approved yourselves to be clear** in this matter” (11). —There is a sense in which you see the need for God’s justice to be satisfied. This satisfaction of God’s justice is ultimately met and satisfied in Christ’s atonement.

Misconceptions (counterfeits) of godly sorrow...

- Not just an activity of the mind
- Not just an intention to do right (remember Saul)
- Not just a sense of wrongdoing and guilt (remember Judas)
- Not just a felling of anguish or terror over sin
- Not just shedding tears over sin (remember Esau)
- Not just admitting sin (most people admit sin)
- Not just a resolve against sin or even stopping a particular sin
- Not just trying to do the right thing

All of the above can be very *man-centered* filled with selfish motives.

What is true repentance?

- One good definition is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q87). "Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after, new obedience".
- One author said it this way:
"Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace whereby a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are repentant, so grieves for and hates his sins as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments." – William Plumer, *Vital Godliness*, 214.

V. What is the sure result of godly sorrow?

Salvation & Sanctification

God's promises are all true! Receive them!

1. **God will fully pardon you.** 2 Cor. 7:10, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of". We need God centered sorrow and a full reception of His pardon. All His promises are for the truly repentant.
2. **Remember, it's all of grace!** You cannot follow a formula for repentance. Repentance is a gift from God that comes through His Word and His Spirit. You cannot make someone repent. It is a miracle of grace. Acts 11:18 says the early Jewish believers were shocked and prayed to God when the Gentiles were saved—it says they "glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life". 2 Timothy 2:25 tells us how we are to teach unbelievers: "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth". God must grant it, and He grants it through the instruction of the Word of God. God chooses the foolish things of this world to confound the mighty that no flesh should boast or glory in His presence! (1 Cor. 1:26ff).
3. **Consider God's promises to the broken hearted.**
 - Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven".
 - 1 Peter 5:5, "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."
 - Psalm 34:18, "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit".
 - Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise".
 - Psalm 147:3, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."
 - Isaiah 57:15, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Conclusion: We don't have a "repentance meter" that man has built, but we do have a meter that we are all to measure ourselves by: the Word of God. Let us pray for God to work and look for signs of a contrite heart, humility, meekness, brokenness, godly sorrow, and a turning from sin to Christ.

Illustration: When I was a child, I was caught at the beginning of a storm at the end of a baseball game a couple miles from my house. I was very young, and had never been through a thunder and lightning storm before. I saw the storm coming. I heard the thunder. I saw the lightning. I got on my bike and peddled. When I fell off my bike I ran as fast as I could until I saw a house where I knew I would be safe. It was a friend of our family.

The storm is coming friends. But I have good news! There is safety in Jesus Christ. He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. There is refuge in the Lord who died on the cross in your place. Flee to Him!

If you are a Christian, we need to remember that repentance and faith are constant throughout the Christian's life. This was the principle of the Reformation.