

Two Kinds of Sorrow

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon contrasts the sorrow of the world, which leads to death, with godly sorrow, which brings repentance and salvation.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1, 2 Corinthians 7:10

Topics: "Sorrow", "Repentance"

Description

A.B. Simpson explores the contrasting natures of worldly sorrow and godly sorrow, emphasizing that while worldly sorrow leads to despair and death, godly sorrow brings repentance and salvation. He illustrates how the sorrow of the world is comfortless, wasted, and filled with vain regrets, ultimately leading to a cycle of despair. In contrast, godly sorrow is transformative, leading to a deeper relationship with God, sanctification, and a heartfelt desire for purity. Simpson encourages believers to embrace true repentance, which is marked by a change of heart and a longing for conformity to God's will. He concludes with the hope that through godly sorrow, believers can recover from their failures and experience the grace of God.

Transcript

"Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death." 2 Cor. 7: 10.

The world is full of sorrow. It comes both to the sinner and to the saint, but oh, how different it comes to each.

I. The Sorrow of the World

There is no comfort for the sinner's sorrow. There is no profit in his pain. Like the fire which consumes the dross, so the flames of suffering burn his heart to ashes and leave nothing but the bitter dregs and the burning lye.

1. Comfortless Trials. What can we say to comfort the heart that has no God, no Christ, no hope beyond and no faith in an overruling Providence here? Is there any task so trying as to stand by the bier of one who has died without the Savior and speak to a sorrowing household, who are equally destitute of His love and to whom that parting is forever? One can understand the terrible force and meaning of the apostle's words, "That you sorrow not as others who have no hope."

2. Wasted Sorrow. The Christian's trials are a wholesome discipline intended to teach him precious lessons in the school of holy character. Our trials are but "child training," as the apostle beautifully calls it in Hebrews, but the sufferings of the ungodly have no such issue. True, they are intended to arouse the conscience and transform the life, but they are unheeded and unblessed, and God at last gets tired of inflicting pain that does no good, and we hear Him crying in the pathetic language of the prophet, "Why should you be stricken any more; you will revolt more and more, the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint." How sad that so many have to suffer bereavement, disappointment, loss and failure and after all be like the one of whom Jehovah says in Isaiah, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him, but he went on frowardly in the way of his heart."

If our trials only taught us any good, they would not seem so hard, but to suffer in vain and find it has only embittered and hardened the heart, this indeed is the very sharpness of grief.

3. Vain Regrets. One of the sources of the worldling's sorrow is the painful reflection upon his past and the stinging memory of opportunities lost, of loved ones wronged, of sin and suffering that never can be repaired again. There is no more bitter drop in the cup of retribution than to have God say to a soul, "Son, remember." To go alone with our own heart and retrace our wretched steps through all the chambers of memory, and see in the full light of experience the consequences of our sin and folly and know that it is irremediable, this indeed is the "sorrow of the world that works death."

4. Futile Fears and Grievs. One of the sweetest comforts of the Christian is the thought that he is saved both from his past and future. The promise of the Lord is, "The Lord will go before you and the God of Jacob shall be your rearguard." That is, God will take care of your future and your past. But the ungodly have no such overshadowing Presence. The past remains in all its grim reality and fraught with all its future fruition, and, before, there is foreboding, fear and the thousand anxieties that all the world's philosophy is unable to still.

5. Self Judging. Conscience is the dread accuser of the wrongdoer, and conscience, without the restraint of divine mercy, is a terrible tyrant. There is no punishment more severe than that which we have power to inflict upon ourselves. To see your worthlessness, to know that you are wholly bad and helpless to make yourself better, to condemn yourself in utter disgust and self-despair has no healing virtue in it, no help for you and no balm to alleviate the pain. It is but the beginning of the eternal fire. People sometimes think because they call themselves hard names and inflict severe penances they have somehow made atonement for their evils. There is nothing in this. It is but the scorpion which spends its life in stinging others and then ends its life in stinging itself to death.

6. Chagrin and humiliation because of the deserved punishment of sin is another form of the vain suffering of the world. Many people are quite comfortable about their wrongdoing until it is found out. Then it looms up in lurid colors and the keenest suffering comes from wounded pride and the sense of humiliation before others. But there is no uplifting power in this. It does not reform the criminal to degrade him and expose him. It only destroys the last lingering spark of manhood and drives him into deeper despair. God does not thus try to reform and save, but rather blots out the very remembrance of the evil and lifts us up again into confidence and hope.

7. The Climax of the World's Sorrow is Despair. One of the illustrious statesmen of this land a century ago is said to have ended his life by repeating in tones of deepest anguish over and over again the one word, "remorse," "remorse," "remorse." But that remorse did not bring true repentance or take away one particle

of the deep depravity of his soul. It is but the beginning of the worm that never dies and the fire that never shall be quenched.

We have several instances in the Bible of people who said, "I have sinned," and yet it did not save them. Pharaoh cried out, "I have sinned," but it was only because he wanted to escape the judgments of God which his sin had brought upon him. Saul said more than once, "I have sinned," but it did not save him from going back and repeating his sin until at last he perished in his infatuation. Judas brought back the price of the Savior's blood and threw it at the feet of the Pharisees, crying, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood," but Judas went headlong immediately afterwards to self-destruction.

We have many instances also of people that were sorry, but it did not make them better. Herod was very sorry that he had to behead his much respected friend, John the Baptist, to please an infamous woman and a bold heartless girl, but he did it all the same, and brought upon himself the curse of innocent blood. The young ruler that came to Christ was very sorry that he could not accede to Christ's terms and part with all his earthly treasures and follow the Master. "He went away sorrowful for he had great possessions." But his sorrow did not bring him back or lead him to true decision for God. He is sorry still, no doubt, for his fearful mistake, but his sorrow is that of the lost.

Oh, beloved, sentiment will not save you; tears will not wash away your sin. The question asked of one who was bewailing his evil course may well apply to every one who reads these lines: "Sorry, are you, for what you have done? Well, are you sorry enough to stop?"

True repentance means more than a gush of emotion. It is a change of will, an altered attitude toward sin and God. Is that your attitude?

II. Godly Sorrow

There are many kinds of godly sorrow besides true repentance.

1. There is the sorrow that God comforts, the trials that bring Him closer to us and reveal Him to us as "the God of all comfort." That is a beautiful promise in the 72d Psalm, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass." The grass has just been cut down by the gardener to prevent it going to seed and drying up at the root, but it is bleeding at every pore and the gardener pours water on it or the rain falls in healing showers and the wounds are assuaged and the roots refreshed, and, lo, it springs up again. So God loves to visit the wounded heart, and it is never until we have suffered that we really know Him in all the tenderness of His love and understand such promises as this, "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you."

2. Trial Sanctified. The gardener mows that grass for its good and the Father chastens us "for our profit." That richly laden vine would have no fruit if it had not been cut back by the pruning knife, and so we shall some time thank God for our hours of deepest trial and the radiant memories of life's retrospect.

3. Suffering with Christ. The highest form of human suffering is fellowship with Jesus Christ in His burdens. "For unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for His Sake."

4. Sorrow for the Sins of Others. This is one of the sublimest heights of Christian love, to take on ourselves the load of another's wrongdoing and make intercession like Him who "was made sin for them, who knew no sin," and still bears upon His bleeding hands the names of sinful men in intercession before His Father.

This is why God has sometimes to let us know the bitterness of having some loved one go astray that we may know the Father's sorrow over His wandering child and the Shepherd's grief for the poor lost sheep.

5. Sorrow for Our Own Sins. There is a place for repentance in every Christian experience. There must be a definite conviction of sin, a calling of things by their right names and a turning away from all evil and giving God the right to cleanse and destroy it. Then God not only forgives but cleanses and takes away from us its memory and power.

But this is not the terrible and hopeless sorrow of the world. It comes through a different process and from a different source. It is born of faith and love and not of doubt and fear. The truly contrite heart is sorrier for its sins after it knows that they are forever forgiven.

How beautiful the Bible pictures of repentance. Look at that woman weeping at the Savior's feet and bathing them with her tears of love, while the Master says, "Much forgiven, she loves much."

Listen to Zaccheus standing among his acquaintances and declaring, "The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore it fourfold." What could be more beautiful, more inspiring, more encouraging than that kind of sorrow for sin?

Look at Peter turning his face toward his Master in the moment of his profane denial. He catches, not a withering look of anger, but a pleading glance of sorrow and love, and breaking away from the multitude he hurries out to hide his tears of uncontrollable anguish and sorrow for the wrong he has done his Savior.

Listen to the prodigal hastening home and crying upon his father's bosom, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son."

This is repentance, and it is almost the most beautiful thing in the world. No wonder that God says, "The sacrifices of the Lord are a broken spirit." "With this man will I dwell who is humble and of a contrite heart and who trembles at My word."

6. The sorrow that comes from a deeper sense, not merely of our actual sins, but of our sinfulness and lack of entire conformity to the will of God. As the light of self-revelation comes to the heart and we see ourselves as God sees us, there comes a deep, intense longing for purity and entire conformity to God. How finely this comes out in the 51st Psalm, which was David's cry when he saw his own heart in the light of his terrible fall. It was not that he was afraid of punishment, but it was the sense of having grieved God and lost spiritual purity and blessing.

How keenly Job felt this when the searchlight of God was let in upon his soul and he cried, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You and I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

How beautifully the Lord Jesus describes this in the 5th chapter of Matthew in the opening paragraphs of the Sermon on the Mount, where He pronounces the blessing first on those that are poor in spirit, that is, the souls that have seen their spiritual shortcomings, and then adds a similar benediction on those that mourn; that is, that mourn because of their spiritual poverty and are deeply affected by their shortcomings and failures. On such, the Lord says, there rests a great blessing, and to such surely comes the divine consolation.

7. The Fruits of Godly Sorrow. In the following verse the apostle describes the fruits of true sorrow for sin. "For behold this selfsame thing that you sorrowed after a goodly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yes, what clearing of yourselves, yes, what indignation, yes, what fear, yes, what vehement desire, yes, what revenge. In all things you have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." (2 Cor. 7: 11.)

"What carefulness it wrought in you," that is, what watching against the recurrence of a similar fall. "What clearing of yourselves," that is, what honest, earnest efforts to undo any ill effects of our wrong doing upon others. "What indignation," not against others, but against ourselves. "What fear," that is, what godly fear and vigilance lest we should be again entangled. "What vehement desire, what zeal, yes, what revenge," that is, what earnest resolve, by the grace of God, to retrace our steps over the same ground and recover all that we have lost.

God lets us do this in infinite longsuffering, and like Samson, whose dying joy it was to win the victory even by the sacrifice of his life that he had thrown away through his sinful folly, God permits us to retrieve our failures.

The story is told of a regiment, which by cowardice had lost its colors, and the Colonel had refused to give them a new flag. At length, in a bloody campaign, the opportunity came to recover their lost honors. The enemy was posted upon a hill and the Colonel, pointing to it, said, "Boys, there are your colors. You can win them back." And up that hill they charged, captured the enemy's flags and guns, and got back the colors they had forfeited.

So God brings into each of our lives some hard place, some strong temptation, which is just another name for a new opportunity to recover what we have lost, and it is then that our true sincerity and godly sorrow are fully vindicated. God has deliverance for His tempted children. God has victory for us over every failure and every defeat. Let us take heart and allow Him to make us more than conquerors through His love.

A jeweler was once engaged cutting a beautiful cameo figure. Suddenly he discovered a dark streak in the stone. It was a flaw. At first he thought he should have to throw it away, but after thinking hard over it, there came to him the fine conception of working that stain into the drapery of the figure. This he succeeded in doing, so that it became an actual ornament and appeared like a flowing robe upon the spotless figure of the design and added immeasurably to its beauty and effect.

So God permits us take our hard places and failures and shape them into robes of transfiguration to show to wondering angels through all eternity the marvelous power of that Grace for which nothing is too hard, so that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

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