

Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

There Are Severe Consequences To Disobeying Commands (Part 2)

During our years of ministry, especially during the past decade, we've noticed a dramatic reduction in the number of *truly repentant* Christians. Maybe you've noticed the same downward trend. It's as if the unrepentant have a **veil over their mind** that keeps them from taking full responsibility for their wrongful actions, words, or attitudes. They neither feel any pain from the broken fellowship their unconfessed sins have brought about in their relationship with our Father, nor do they experience sorrow over the emotional grief their wrongs have inflicted on people they've hurt. They are in fact devoid of any sense of personal guilt; therefore they don't take any responsibility for the harm they cause. Yet there are severe consequences for them in their hardened disobedience.

How about you?

- When you sin against our Father or you wrong another person, does sorrow well up inside you that you hurt a relationship?
- Or, are you oblivious to your wrongdoing and its effects on others?
- If someone points out the wrong you did, do you respond by giving excuses and/or blame them?
- Do people close to you live in fear and apprehension of being hurt by you again?

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

In one simple and yet profound sentence Paul describes a choice each of us

has when we've hurt others: 1) either we experience the kind of heart sorrow which God intends to bring about repentance unto salvation, *or* 2) we respond with a self-justifying kind of remorse in which we're *sorry for ourselves* but ultimately end up eternally lost because we never see our need to repent.

When those who claim to belong to our Lord Jesus grieve with godly sorrow when they sin against Him or hurt someone, it's a strong indicator that they are in a *love relationship* with Him. They've tasted the utter depravity of their own sinful propensity, and their own unworthiness of His love and sacrifice on their behalf. Thus their heart overflows with grateful appreciation for His payment for the eternal death their sin deserves. They respond quickly when the Spirit makes known to them the pain they cause others when they sin, and they are quick to ask forgiveness and make restitution when it's appropriate.

Think seriously about this:

Set aside any false assertions of clergy who assured you that you'll be welcomed into heaven because you repeated some words but never repented or even understood the nature of your sinfulness. Godly sorrow that you have violated a holy Lord and hurt other people by your sins is one of the sound indicators that you really do belong to Jesus and are our Father's child! Your contrite heart when you do sin evidences a loving responsiveness to God like King David experienced in his own repentance and forgiveness (Psalms 51:17; Isaiah 66:2). When you wrong someone you love, you feel a deep sorrow which prompts you to not repeat the offense.

We're fully aware that even with hearts of deepest love, we're still capable of sinning. But do you know that even

when you sin our Lord reveals another facet of His amazing grace to you? We've emphasized this next point in previous writings, especially in *The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*. It's the essential process of **sanctification** in our life journey in Christ—*being set apart as holy for our Father's use* as we become more like Jesus in character and nature through the ongoing work of His Spirit in us. Paul wonderfully captures this process of change in which His work in us is reflected as an inner radiance shining outwardly from us:

*“Now the **Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit**” (2Corinthians 3:17,18).*

When you do sin, a response of godly sorrow and repentance leads to yet another opportunity for transformation:

- When you respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction and *confess your sin*, you're acknowledging that you violated a righteous command of our Father. That contrite and humble response brings about forgiveness and purification (1John 1:9).
- Your heart is determined that you don't want to commit that particular sin again, and the indwelling Spirit is glad to strengthen your resolve to not give way to that temptation (1Corinthians 10:13).
- You turn to our Lord *deliberately choosing* to forsake your particular sinful action or attitude and replace it with His command(s) as a new way of life for you (1Peter 3:11, apperceiving Psalms 34:14). And His way is often exactly opposite of what your sinful response was.

Our Lord has promised you that when you choose His way of life and abide in His love in keeping His word, *you will never see death*” (John 8:51). That's a positive consequence of the godly sorrow of repentance when you walk according to our Lord's commands and forsake your own sinful inclinations!

By trusting in your Lord's shed blood as payment for your sins and embracing sanctification as His Spirit's means for you to become like Him in character, love, and fruitfulness, you're assured that you're progressing on the pilgrimage to your salvation (Philippians 3:12-14). In effect, each time you repent of a sinful attitude or action and yield to the Spirit by replacing it with a character quality of Jesus, **you become increasingly Christ-like**, reflecting His glory from within you. That's a *positive consequence* of sanctification!

Why is this scriptural pathway of repentance and sanctification so rarely preached today? As we're informed in 1John 5:3, obedience to His commands is an *expression of love* for God, and His commands are not burdensome despite what false, man-centered “gospels” say. Repentance and sanctification are matters of the heart that flow out of love. Love cannot be taught from a pulpit, but only caught within a humble heart and practiced by a willing and sacrificial life.

“...worldly sorrow brings death”

Proverbs warns, *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death”* (14:12). Earlier we cited our Lord's assurance that those who keep His commands will not see death (John 8:51). But what death is He speaking of? Eternal death in hell (Revelation 21:8).

Worldly sorrow is *regret* that you did something wrong and got caught, like a child who's found with his hand in the cookie jar. You don't feel any guilt for what you've done, nor does the hurt you've caused concern you. That's why people around you remain in a prison of apprehension that you'll hurt them again.

If this describes you, something is missing deep inside you—most likely the Spirit of Christ since your sin nature seems to be in control (Romans 8:9). Please don't take this lightly. Do you or don't you experience godly sorrow when you sin? If only the regret of worldly sorrow bothers you, then you are living by the world's standards—and the consequence of that is eternal death.

“Once saved, always saved.”

How often has this mantra of those who think they're Christian but have abided in the world's ways and values excused willful sin and covered it with worldly sorrow that's devoid of either repentance or love? Certain deceived theologians a few centuries ago failed to understand the importance of sanctification in the pilgrimage to salvation. Thus they instituted an erroneous interpretation of scripture that allowed a “profession of faith” to guarantee entry into heaven whether or not the one professing “lived like hell” afterward.

“Salvation” became a matter of a one-time profession, a public “going forward” or even a raised hand to indicate that they were now “saved.” The amazing grace of God through the sacrifice of Jesus and His glorious resurrection was reduced to a “cheap deal”—“**If I pray this prayer, then I'm forgiven. God HAS to receive me when I die.**” What a denial of the entire intent of redemption that's found throughout both testaments!

Jesus affirms that salvation is found by those who endure in Him: “*he who stands firm to the end will be saved*” (Matthew 10:22). Far from a one-time intellectual assent to certain verses, being IN Christ is an ongoing life of holiness, a responsiveness to His indwelling presence *if* indeed you have experienced spiritual rebirth (1Corinthians 1:2; Colossians 1:27). It's that life of obedient trust that Paul is calling for when he tells the followers of Jesus in Philippi to “*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose*” (Philippians 2:12,13).

God called those who professed to be followers of Christ to not only stand firm in their trust but also be alert and diligent to anything that would cause them to fall away from the path to His heavenly presence (1Peter 5:8,9). As we're warned in such passages as Hebrews 10:26,27 and 2 Peter 2:20-22, choosing to deliberately keep on sinning after receiving *knowledge of the truth* or even *knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior* leads to the “*raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*”

Wherever “**Once saved, always saved**” is heralded and worldly sorrow flourishes to excuse sin, divorce increases as well. This is especially true in the “Bible Belt” which has the highest divorce rate in this nation. Why? Because self-proclaimed Christians in general don't have a love-grounded relationship with the Father and our Lord Jesus in which they feel any godly sorrow for their sin. In effect, they've divorced themselves from our Father's requirement for sanctification, so they ultimately find themselves divorced. You may have noticed that a large number of TV teachers and evangelists come from the Bible Belt. Think of how they're impacting marriages across the land.

The effect of the **“Once saved, always saved”** catchphrase is seen in men throughout this nation who are so self-satisfied in considering themselves “saved” that they don’t pursue sanctification into Christ’s likeness. Their wives suffer because the men are devoid of *love* as a benchmark in their belief system. Relying solely on what takes place in their thought processes, these guys see no need for the Spirit of Christ to transform them in any way.

These men readily inflict emotional pain on their wives because they don’t develop the *sacrificial love* which sanctification produces. And in their stubborn arrogance they accuse their wives for not being Proverbs 31 women they want and expect! The consequence? 85% of divorces are now initiated by wives. **For both men and women, this is the heart-breaking consequence for removing sanctification from salvation!**

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”
(1Corinthians 13:4-7).

The kind of love the Bible is describing here is the *agape* love which only the indwelling Spirit develops in us through sanctification. Without His indwelling presence you can’t enact *agape* love for our Lord or for anyone else. This fact should shake you! Nothing else should matter to you until the Spirit of Christ is abiding in you. Godly sorrow, repentance, *agape* love—these are identifying characteristics that assure you that you

belong to Jesus. Yet these all come by grace as His Spirit quickens them and works them out in you. Ask your Father in heaven to give you the Holy Spirit (see Luke 11:13). Don't go on another day deceived and weighed down by worldly sorrow that leaves you without *agape* love. That’s a death trap with eternal negative consequences.

What are the consequences when you evade godly sorrow and refuse to live repentantly? You rob the people you offend of any hope. With no assurance that you’ll change, they’ll be forced to sever the relationship to escape further hurt.

When you sin against your heavenly Father without godly sorrow or repentance, you’ll incur His severe chastisement. He doesn’t flee you, He disciplines you to draw you back to Himself! Is this what may be happening in your life even now? Do you have strained relationships? Has your spouse fled? No matter what discipline you’re going through, the way to end it is found only in Jesus—appropriating His Spirit by faith and becoming like Him in character, love and obedience!

“But their minds [the Jews] were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2Corinthians 3:14,16).

Even today the minds of unbelieving Jews are covered by a spiritual veil whenever the old covenant which was established through Moses is read. But many self-identified “Christians” are similarly veiled.

Like the veil covering the minds of Jewish people who have yet to yield to Messiah Jesus, if you're a Christian who amasses Bible knowledge *without* our Lord Jesus at the forefront of your motivations, you may be "veiled" as well. The veil of **Bible knowledge without Jesus** is an intellectual trap that hinders you from *knowing* Him in the intimacy of His love as with a bridegroom and His bride. Pews are filled with people who know the Bible but don't know Jesus Christ as the lover of their soul. A veil is over *their hearts!* (Lamentations 3:65). Being taught *about Jesus* is not *knowing Him*. If your mind is covered in a veil of Bible knowledge and yet you have no godly sorrow when you sin, or hurt other people, then know that this veil of spiritual blindness can only be removed by turning to our Lord Jesus in humility and repentance. Jew and Gentile are alike in this matter of a veiled mind: "*only in Christ is it taken away.*"

Keep on praying to our Lord Jesus to help you until He removes the veil from your mind. You'll know it's removed when you can proclaim with heartfelt love and delight as did Mary:

"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation"
(Luke 1:46,47,49,50).

And, when the veil is removed from your own mind, pray to our Lord Jesus to remove the veil from people who are dear to you.