

Seven Aspects of Godly Repentance

The Apostle Paul, a man of High Intellect, often wrote things that are Profound in their Comprehensiveness. Relating one Extraordinary Event, we're given a glimpse into the Emotional Responses involved in the Process of Repentance.

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The Apostle Paul is acknowledged as a highly trained theologian. He was tutored by the most renowned teacher of his day; Gamaliel. ¹ Paul's writings often reflect his deep theological background with a level often lost upon untrained readers. In addition, he is reported to have had personal encounters with the Lord, once on the road to Damascus and in Arabia. ² In his writings, some things can often go right over our heads. He often uses very complex thoughts and very theological language, so when we read certain passages, we can miss what he's saying. At times we need to look closely to benefit fully from his inspired insights.

Corrected for Wrongdoing

In the seventh chapter of 2nd Corinthians, we read of an unexpected response to a letter of correction sent by Paul to the congregation there in Corinth. In writing the letter, Paul was apprehensive as to what reception his correction would receive. Their actual response was unexpected and perhaps a profoundly mature reaction on the part of that entire congregation!

We are not told what the specific issue was, nor for our purposes does it really matter, but we can discern that there was some interpersonal offense where the congregation had taken on a less than appropriate position. Apparently, there were spiritual matters involved which warranted Paul's admonition.

The chapter relating this situation also explains that Paul wasn't present when they responded. What he knew of the situation was related to him by Titus. Paul's prior praise of the Corinthians

¹ Acts 22:3 Paul's personal repentance testimony.

² Acts 26:12-18; Acts 9:1-9; 1st. Corinthians 15:8; Gal. 1:11-17.

was proven to have been justified as demonstrated by their genuinely repentant attitudes, and Paul speaks to that.

But there's one passage in the narrative I find to be a perceptual goldmine. I don't know that it's been given adequate attention. It was something that caught my attention more than thirty years ago. It has to do with the subject of true repentance.

We tend to think of repentance taking a rather straightforward approach, but as Paul reveals, it can be a little more involved than perhaps we give it credit for being. This chapter and the focal verse of it shows us that there are multiple emotional responses involved in the process of true and Godly repentance.

God Grants Repentance

We know from Romans 2:4 that repentance is not something that is entirely self-generated. Repentance is in large part, not only what we feel, but it is in large part a gift of God. It's something that He triggers within us to produce certain responses, and it's something in which He participates with us in its accomplishment.

We typically focus on this subject during the Days of Unleavened Bread. We understand the illustration of unleavened bread, where the observance pictures the process of putting sin out of our lives.

That is the objective of repentance. It's something that we have to be personally involved in. It's not something that God does for us. He brings us to a point of realization, but we have to respond appropriately, we have to do something. In effect, when the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread are over, they're not over.

Repentance is Ongoing

Those Seven Days picture an entire lifetime, and that's what we need to keep in mind. Even though we may acknowledge what those days illustrate, reflecting upon the process of repentance and getting sin out of our lives, its full meaning is not limited to just that time of year. In effect, the effort's not over. It's something that must remain ongoing throughout our entire lifetimes. Repentance is an ongoing activity!

Paul addresses what might be regarded as an unusual reaction in 2nd Corinthians, chapter 7. That is the focal chapter for this topic. Paul brings out something that, even though this particular chapter was applicable to that one congregation, it's also applicable to each of us personally.

Remembering First Reactions

It may have been a long time since we first came through our early repentance experience as we were coming into the truth, so Paul's described responses may be a long time ago for some of us. I discovered this passage and came to realize what it was saying some time ago. While some of the emotional responses Paul describes may not be that fresh in our minds, they should always be involved. If we're always repenting, if we're always carrying on the process of dealing with sin in our lives, then these emotional responses should be there, to one degree or another. And, if we understand them, we can do a better job at achieving what we seek.

In 2nd Corinthians, chapter 7, we read Paul's description of the emotional responses involved in the repentance experience. Keep in mind, Paul had written a letter of correction to this particular congregation, and they responded in what we could call an extraordinary manner because the whole congregation together responded positively to the correction that they were given.

Beginning in verse 1. *"And having therefore these promises, dearly beloved ... "* What promises were those? I'll come back and answer that. *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of*

God." Can you think of a better way of describing the process of repentance? That is the subject of this chapter: Repentance.

Verse 2. *"Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man."* The fact that he's mentioning that, here in this particular context, suggests that someone had corrupted and defrauded others. *"I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that you are in our hearts to die and live with you. Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation."* Keep in mind, this is in response to correction that he had sent to them earlier. *"For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears."* In other words, they encountered external opposition, and, on the part of the people, internal apprehensions. It's not that different today.

Verse 6. *"Nevertheless God, that comforts those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus."* Titus was a key player in this particular narrative. We'll see why in a minute. *"And not just by his coming, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more."* Titus is relating to Paul what took place in that congregation. Paul wasn't sure originally what to expect. He sent a letter of correction and he afterward regretted sending it. But then, when he realized its effect, he was glad that he sent it, and he goes on to say that.

Verse 8. *"For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle has made you sorry, though it was but for a season."*

A Profitable Sorrow

Verse 9. *"Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that you sorrowed to repentance."* Repentance is the key issue here. *"For you were made sorry after a godly manner, that you might receive damage by us in nothing."* In other words, there was no further correction needed. *"For*

godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of."

There's a kind of repentance that is valuable, as opposed to those kinds that aren't, for example: "*The sorrow of the world works death.*" There are two different kinds of sorrow. There are two different kinds of responses to a need to repent, whether generated of God or whether it's self-generated. There are people that may want to repent, yet they're clueless as to how to do it. It matters if that repentance is God-induced or not. Do we understand the difference?

Verse 11 is the key verse in this chapter. "*For behold this selfsame thing, that you sorrowed after a godly sort.*" In that sorrow or in that response, they went through several successive emotional stages. You have to ask when we read this, "How did he know that?" Titus must have had some very detailed conversations with these people. Wouldn't we like to know what they said to one another for him to know this much?

Seven Emotional Responses

Notice what he says here. "*For behold this selfsame thing, that you 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!**" Seven things he mentions. "*In all things you have approved yourselves to be clear on this matter.*"*

Which of those seven things involve any physical deeds? None of them! These are all emotional responses. These all play out in our minds. There's a progression there. If we think back to the time when we first began to repent, when we first came to know the truth, when we came to know the Commandments of God and their application in our lives, when we began to understand what the full dimension of sin is and made a commitment to repent, if you think about it carefully (and I know it might be a long time ago – it was with me) but if you think carefully you should recall that you experienced many if not all of these emotional responses. I'll go through them one by one shortly, but first I want to continue reading a little further.

Verse 12. "*Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did not for this cause that had done the wrong,*" He wasn't writing in favor of the person who committed the wrong, "*nor for this cause that suffered wrong,*" he wasn't favoring either party, it wasn't the point, "*but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you.*"

Apparently, the congregation became involved in some matter between members that wasn't appropriate, and the congregation may have made some improper accommodations for one party or the other. Paul recognized the need for them to repent as a congregation, which is in itself unusual. But they did see their fault and they repented. Their repentance was remarkable.

Paul, whether he was intending to do it or not, in writing to them afterward, laid out for our benefit each of the steps or each of the aspects of repentance as they affect us emotionally.

When we repent, whether presently or in the future, keep these things in mind, because they teach us something about the complete picture. When we repent, do these factor into our responses emotionally? If our repentance is genuine, if our repentance is of God, wouldn't these represent our responses? I find it remarkable what the Apostle Paul gave us here.

Verse 13. "*Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceeding the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all.*" The outcome of Paul's original correction was perhaps something he didn't anticipate, especially to this complete degree. The whole congregation saw what they were doing wrong and repented of it – actively repented of it – and it affected them to their core.

It wasn't just a surface act, it was something that they were deeply into, a Godly sorrow, and Godly sorrow produces the repentance process, if we can call it that. These seven steps, are the seven aspects of Godly sorrow unto repentance. Verse 14. "*For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth.*"

Paul's positive comments toward these people were proven to be correct. There might have been some doubt about that originally. *"And his inward affection is more abundant toward you, while he remembered the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things."* The Corinthian congregation at this stage exhibited an extraordinary maturity! How many congregations would respond like that today? How many congregations would respond to a letter of correction and not become divided over the issue? It can happen.

Promises of Life and the Holy Spirit

Paul begins the chapter by referring to these promises, *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh ... "* and so on. What were the promises? We find those in the chapters previous. We could go back to 1st Corinthians 6, verses 14 to 20. These things are already in mind when he writes chapter 7. 1st Corinthians, 6:14. *"And God has both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ?"* If we're going to be sanctified as members of Christ, should we not be thoroughly repentant?

Dropping down to verse 19. *"What? know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own?"* When we're sanctified to be a part of the body of Christ, our options become different. Effectively, we don't own ourselves anymore. Verse 20. *"For you are bought with a price, and as a result of that glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* This is part of the previous promise that Paul refers to. 2nd Corinthians 6:1. *"We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he says, I have heard you in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation I succored you: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)"* Verse 3. *"Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed."* The ministry, of course, is partly responsible for the spiritual health of the congregation.

Verse 15. *"And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part has he that believes with an infidel? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? for you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* When God walks in us, would He act differently than he would in Himself? God walking in us is a correlation to partaking of unleavened bread. We can see the connection, we can see the picture here.

Verse 17. *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."* I would consider that as the promises that Paul makes reference to in chapter 7, verse 1. Our calling has a lot more to do than just how we live our lives. It is an inclusion in the very Family of God, and He is in us. The unleavenedness that He is should be within us.

Another Version

I want to read this same passage, the key passage at least, from another version, because I think it words it perhaps a little better. This is 2nd Corinthians 7 again. The key verse was verse 11, but starting in verse 10: This is an alternate version. *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this Godly sorrow has produced in you, what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourself to be innocent, that is, to have been absolved of guilt in the matter."*

First Response

So what do these terms mean? We have seven. The first is **carefulness**. The Greek word is *spoudē*, Strong's #4710. I think in the various definitions it gives could be paraphrased in the modern age, "Taking careful and purposeful attention to a specific matter." We're not to be casual about it. We're careful to focus on what's

important. This is a matter of importance. Our response to it should be appropriate carefulness. Wasn't that our first instinct when we were first being called into the truth? We became so careful about things that we never would have been careful of before. We wouldn't have given certain things a thought. Who cared? But when we begin the process of repentance, we have to take care of what's important, we have to direct our minds to attend to these matters, whatever they might be, giving careful and purposeful attention to specific thoughts and actions.

Carrying On With the Process

The next response he refers to is **self-clearing**. I don't know that that's the best possible English translation. The Greek is *apologia*, # 627, to answer for oneself. Not just answering to someone else for oneself, but we have to answer to ourselves as well. We might give an excuse for something we did to someone else and that other person may say, "Oh, yeah, I guess you were justified ... " We can't do that to ourselves. When we make excuses to ourselves, there's no fooling around. We can't really convince ourselves that we're innocent when we know otherwise. So the next stage is this clearing process. It could be phrased in a more modern way: "Addressing cause and effect with the intent to remedy both." This isn't with respect to other people. This is with respect to clearing oneself.

All Are Personal Responses

And, we should note, all of these are self-focused. They're not blaming or they're not involving anyone else. These are all personal, as it was in the case of the Corinthian church. They didn't fault either the person who committed the offense or the person who was offended. Paul didn't write in support of either one, either. He said so. That wasn't his point.

A Self-Loathing

The third item is **indignation**. Now we're getting a little deeper into the responses. The Greek is *aganaktésis*, #24, translated primarily as indignation: being moved with anger towards ones' self, in this case. Indignant. "Did I do that? Was I

really that way?" Indignation here is expressed toward the self.

Fear of Doing Wrong

The fourth item is **fear**. A simple word. I think we know what fear is. The Greek is *phobos*, #5401. To be put in fear, alarm, or fright. To be afraid; exceedingly terrorized. In other words, the fear is our response to what we know to be a punishable offense. Being apprehensive of committing wrong actions. That fear affects what we think and do. It's not just being afraid of something that we can't do anything about. It's the kind of fear that prompts a response. Do you remember when you first discovered the truth? There were many things that we did routinely without giving it a thought before, then all of a sudden we've become concerned, asking ourselves, "Is it right to continue doing that?"

I recall one incident in Concord, New Hampshire in 1971. It was my first stay-over at someone else's house. It was before one of the Holy Days: Pentecost. There were a few of us bachelors sharing another bachelor's apartment. On Sabbath morning, we got up to have breakfast. We were frying eggs, and being brand new, we began to question, "Should we be frying eggs for ourselves on the Sabbath day? Does that break any commandment?" We resolved it in time in our minds, but it's that initial fear that maybe it wasn't right, that we needed to answer. It's that kind of fear, apprehensive of committing a wrong action, whether it is wrong or not. We can many times determine that something is wrong that really isn't, and we can sometimes gloss over something that is wrong. But a person coming to repentance – or for that matter at any point in our spiritual lives – when we are repentant, there should be an element of fear against doing something that's not right.

A Burning Desire

Number five. Vehement desire. The Greek is *epithésis*, # 1972. An earnestness, a vehement desire. It's well-translated. We could call it a genuine and heartfelt commitment to achieve a right end, a vehement desire: The desire to do what's right that's more than a normal response of an unconverted person. When we want to do

God's will, there's a burning desire. I remember a story told by one of the McNair brothers, I forget which one, that when he was coming into the truth as a young man, he learned this thing, he learned that thing, and as time went on, he'd be learning more and more things. He said every time he learned something new, he says, "I just wanted to do that." A reaction he would have never had before. His first reaction to a correction or a point of teaching: he wanted to do it. That I think expresses that vehement desire. Whatever God says, we want to do it. A genuine and heartfelt commitment to achieve a right end.

Response Number Six,

I think we understand this one. It shouldn't be hard to figure out. **Zeal.** We know what zeal is. It's even something beyond vehement desire. The Greek is *zelos*, #2205. Zeal conveying the sense of a kind of jealousy is what the Concordance gives us. Being jealous against something that takes away from what we should be. We could call zeal simply personal motivation: someone who is strongly motivated. There's a scripture that talks about being zealous of good works,³ which of course is the implication here.

Deepest Satisfaction

This last one might not be so obvious. Number seven. Here again I don't know that the English gives us the proper sense, but it's the word **revenge**. When we are fully repentant, there is this emotional response that is a form of revenge.

When we think of revenge, we tend to think of it as being against someone else. That's not the sense here, though. The Greek here is *ekdikésis*, Strong's #1557. Vindication or retribution, applying some kind of punishment. When we get revenge, (keep in mind this is personal), the revenge is that we're satisfied that the detrimental effects of sin are conquered and holiness is vindicated. The revenge is in knowing that we have conquered that element in our lives that is detrimental to our spiritual health. We've gotten revenge against the forces that want to destroy us.

That's the kind of revenge, being confident that the detrimental effects of sin are conquered and holiness is vindicated.

When we think of these seven steps – and perhaps this would be a good message for the spring high day season, but even at any time this is certainly appropriate – Godly repentance takes us through stages of emotional responses that involve some of, or perhaps even all of these, depending on the particular issue. The Apostle Paul understood that, and it's extraordinary to me that he explains these responses all together in one place.

Thankfully, the Corinthian church acted as they did giving him the platform to speak of this matter as he did. It tells us so much about the process that we go through when we genuinely are repenting.

A Basis for Faith

Think about this. What impact would this process of repentance have on a person's faith? What degree of confidence does it allow us in our walk with God?

When we have achieved full Godly repentance, our faith is strengthened, our walk with God is more confident than it could ever be. In Isaiah 66:2, God says, "*But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.*" That's the fear component. We are to take God's word seriously. In Psalms 34:18, we read something similar. "*The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saves such as be of contrite spirit.*"

In all of these seven responses that we've just gone through, which of them expresses arrogance? Which of them express any degree of rebelliousness? Which passes blame onto someone else? Which of them express any kind of disobedience? None of them do. It's not there. That is the contrite heart that God is talking about.

As we continue in this lifetime of continuing to put sin out of our lives, let's appreciate these seven aspects of repentance that affect our calling, our hope and our specialness with God.



³ Titus 2:14