**Questions on 2 Corinthians 7vv2-16 – ‘Good grief’**

*Note – When I preached on this passage on Remembrance Sunday, I had only a short amount of time, so I concentrated on vv8 to 13, since these verses contain the main thrust of Paul’s argument. It would be good for you to read the whole passage, since you’ll get the bigger picture of why Paul writes as he does about intentionally causing to Christian friends. It’s not something that Paul did lightly, and he agonised over his rebuke, but sometimes it is necessary – and loving – for us to receive and give rebukes to people in the name of the Lord. This is a neglected emphasis in the Church of today, since we care what people think of us, and hate to cause offence, but sometimes it’s important for us to be prepared to do it…*

**Getting going**

1. How do you normally respond to people if they rebuke you for something you’ve done? Do you tend to be meek, or ‘fight your corner’?
2. How do you tend to respond to rebukes from God? Can you think of any time when (maybe through a sermon, or a friend’s comment, or something you’ve read from the Bible) your conscience was pricked, and you knew that you’d ‘mucked up’ in God’s sight? Share examples

*Today, we’re going to study an example where a mature Christian rebuked severely a whole Christian community, calling for repentance. Read 2 Corinthians 7vv2-16*

**Into the text**

1. How did Paul feel about the Corinthian Church, and how did he want them to feel and treat him? (vv2-4)
2. What has been the emotional impact on Paul of having to rebuke the Corinthians (v5)? How has God encouraged him? (v5-7)
3. Why does Paul now no longer regret the severity of his rebuke? (vv8-9) What did it lead them to do? (v9)
4. Paul rejoices when a well based rebuke causes godly sorrow rather than worldly sorrow. Can you think examples of **both** these types of sorrow (Time permitting, look at say Esau in Genesis 27vv33-38, Pharoah in Exodus 10v16-20 and Judas in Matthew 27vv15 and then contrast these with King David in his prayer of confession in Psalm 51)?
5. What was it about the Corinthians response that convinced Paul that his rebuke had brought ‘godly sorrow that leads to salvation and leaves no regret’? (See vv11 – 12)
6. What has this rather painful incident led to for Titus (v13) and Paul (v13 and 16)?

**Thinking it through**

1. Think back to some of those times when you felt God’s finger of rebuke upon you. Looking back, do you think you responded with godly or worldly sorrow?
2. When you next feel God’s rebuke, how does David’s response in Psalm 51 and the Corinthians response here encourage you to respond?
3. Do you cultivate Christian friends around you who you encourage to be honest with you, about your strengths and failings in the Christian life?
4. How willing are you to be a loving friend to another- gently pointing out things they may have got wrong, and may need to change? There are of course risks here (see Matthew 7vv1-5), and it calls for great sensitivity, but is ultimately a sign of loving concern…

‘Good grief’

2 Corinthians 7vv8-13a

* How do you normally respond to someone telling you off? (image of someone pointing a finger)

~ Do you meekly apologise, admitting your fault, and promising to do better next time?

~ OR - do you tend to fight your corner, defending yourself, and pass the blame to another?

We’ll all be different, I guess, and much will depend upon our temperament…..

* But today, we’re going to think about how we respond to the finger of **God** upon us, rebuking us for some words, or behaviour, or thought- pattern that we’ve got ourselves into.

~ This rebuke MAY have come to us in through a powerful sermon OR the rebuke of a godly friend; OR from our personal reading of the Bible. We hear it and it pricks our conscience.

* ‘How **SHOULD** we respond to God’s rebukes?’ is our theme today, and to answer it, we’re going to think about just one verse from our passage and it’s there on the screen

‘**10Godly** sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret,

but **worldly** sorrow brings death.

Our verse draws a contrast between **2** sorts of **sorrow** that we can feel when we are ticked off by God:-

* One that is very common – it is ‘**worldly**’, but is ultimately destructive;
* The other which is less common- it is ‘**godly’**- but leads to salvation, and brings comfort and joy.

‘*Pray that you might respond with godly and not worldly sorrow to God’s rebukes’* is the Apostle Paul’s main point to us today.

Let’s look first at the **wrong** sort of sorrow- the worldly one.

Here the person exhibits **remorse**- sometimes quite dramatic remorse- but it is ultimately superficial, skin deep, and doesn’t lead to **real change** in that person.

Let me give you some examples of characters in the Bible who display this sort of remorse…

* First **Esau**- who sold his birthright to his cunning brother Jacob for a mere bowl of stew. He burst out in a loud and bitter cry and wept aloud not because he’d treated God’s blessing so lightly, but simply because he felt so sorry for himself!
* Or think of **Pharoah** – Egypt’s king- who oppressed God’s people brutally. God sent upon Pharoah plagues, and after a number of them, Pharoah repented, but it was a hollow repentance since Pharoah continued to rebel against God once God had lifted the plague.
* Or think of **Judas** – the man who betrayed Jesus for 30 silver coins. He was seized with remorse at his terrible actions, and in the depth of his despair he went and hanged himself. His worldly sorrow led quite literally to his death.

Listen to how **worldly sorrow** has been described*. It is ‘Shallow remorse consumed by bitterness and self pity’*

‘***Don’t*** *go* ***THAT*** *way’*, warns Paul*. ‘It will do you NO good at all. Indeed, it will lead ultimately to death, that is separation from God.’*

Rather, we should be full of *‘godly sorrow that leads to salvation, and leaves no regret’.* And Paul holds before our eyes the Church at Corinth as excellent examples of such a response. Paul had had to rebuke them quite severely for the way they **HADN’T** dealt with a person in their community who’d committed a particularly serious sin. They had ‘*sat on their hands’* and refused to deal with it.

So, Paul wrote them a severe letter, warning them in blunt terms as to the seriousness of the sin, and of their responsibility before God to deal with it. It was the sort of letter that is described in the Harry Potter novels as a ‘*Howler’*, for you can picture Paul howling or yelling at them to take action….

And the good news is that they **DID**. God’s rebuke produced in them (v11) an earnestness and eagerness to sort this out once and for all, an indignation at the sinful behaviour, a godly alarm, a longing, a readiness to see justice done once and for all.

This was **not** the shallow remorse of a Pharoah, the bitterness of an Esau, the self pity of a Judas.

This was a **godly sorrow** that **went deep** and **recoiled** against the sin of the individual, and their own negligence to deal with it adequately!

It was a ‘*godly sorrow that brought repentance and leads to salvation’*

These Corinthian Christians - like King David a millennium before them- had begged God to cleanse them and restore them to the joy of their salvation, and that’s exactly what God had done. He brought them comfort and joy, and Paul now is full of joy as he hears about what has happened in them.

And this passage is included in the Bible to encourage us to be **open** to rebukes from God. Let’s not ignore God’s voice. It is the voice of a **loving parent** who sees a precious child taking a wrong turn, and intervenes to warn him or her about it before it is too late. God warns us- maybe through a sermon, a friend, a scripture, maybe in other ways because he **loves** us and wants us to be full of a godly sorrow that leads to salvation and leaves no regret. **Praise God** that he is willing to do this, for our good. Let’s be open to his kind rebukes…..

This passage also encourages us to look out in loving concern for ourselves and our Christian brothers and sisters….

* If we see someone going wrong, we ought to be prepared to **warn them** as urgently as I saw someone in Israel last week stop a person walking out in front of an oncoming car!
* Of course, we need to be aware of our own weakness. We’re not to be like that person seeking to remove a speck of dirt from another’s eye whilst still having a plank of wood in their own!
* We’re to be aware that warnings and rebukes call for great wisdom and prayer since people can so easily get offended. I’ve found that a question can be more effective than a frontal criticism in stimulating another’s conscience…

But let’s not **shy away** from our role as brothers and sisters in the same Christian family to look out for one another- **encouraging** what is good and **warning** about what is wrong or just unwise. Let’s love each other enough to do this for others, and let’s be open to loving warnings from those who care about us…..

[Prayer]