

Sermon – real relationships – part 5

Acts 17:22-31; 2 Corinthians 7:8-12

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“Sorry seems to be the hardest word...”

It's sad, so sad

Why can't we talk it over?

Oh it seems to me

That sorry seems to be the hardest word.

Do you find it hard to say “sorry”?

What do we actually **mean** when we say “sorry”?

For example: “Sorry I was late.”

There's probably no sorrow there. It's just recognising that you're late.

“Sorry you feel that way”

Probably means: “I feel bad that you feel bad. It's not my fault, but I just feel bad seeing you upset.”

“I'm sorry for your loss”

There's sorrow there. You're not apologizing. Just expressing sorrow.

How about this one: On Wednesday February 13th 2008, the Australian Parliament passed a motion of apology to our Indigenous people for the way they have been treated. Let me read a little of it to you:

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country... To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. ...this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

This is not just “sorry”. This is an apology that says: “There is a problem in our **relationship**.” I have caused that problem. This is what I've done. And something needs to be done so it doesn't happen again. This is actually what the Bible calls “repentance”. Repentance is when we're not just feeling sorrow, but we **admit fault, ask for forgiveness and make changes** so it doesn't happen again.

Paul says in Acts 17 that the first word we need to know to even BEGIN a relationship with God is “repentance”.

In Acts 17, Paul is walking through Athens and looking at all the different statues to different gods the people worshipped. And so Paul tells them about the one TRUE God. He says God is the creator of all things, that he wants to be in a relationship with us, but for that to happen, we need to repent:

***30** In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.*

This is more than just saying “sorry” to God.

Repentance is a word that means “turning around” – it’s a decision to completely change direction. In the original Greek language of the Bible, the word is “metanoia” which means: “Change of mind” – meta = change. Noia = mind.

Repentance means that our mind was going in one direction, and we have CHANGED that direction.

Repentance is not just sorrow. It’s sorrow that brings a desire to change.

III – A little girl was watching her mum cook fish. She watched her cut off the head, and cut off the tail, put it in a pan, and put it in the oven. And she asked her mum: “Why do you cut the head and tail off?” And the mum said: “I don’t know. It’s just what my mum did.

So they both went to see grandma and said: “When you cook fish, why do you cut the head and tail off?” And Grandma said: “I don’t know. It’s just what my mother did.”

So they all went to see Great Grandma, and asked: “Why do you cut the head and tail off a fish before you cook it?” And great grandma replied: “Oh, that’s because my pan was too small to fit a whole fish in. So I had to cut the head and tail off.”

Sometimes we do things just because they’ve always been done that way. And it’s hard to see any other way of doing things.

And sometimes when we sin, it’s hard to change, because we’ve done it for so long. And maybe we’ve learned it from other people and made it acceptable. Gossip. Slander. Revenge. Spite. Cheating on our tax. Speeding. Sexual sin.

Sometimes sin is so entrenched in our lives, that it’s hard to change, because we’ve always done it. Or maybe society just accepts it so easily. Say horrible things about your boss. That’s OK. Everyone does it. Drink too much. That’s OK, everyone does it. Steal software, download illegal movies from the internet – that’s OK – everyone does it.

Repentance isn’t just about saying: “Hey God, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have done that.” Repentance is when our mind is changed. Our whole heart is turned around. Godly sorrow, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7, leads to repentance. Godly sorrow leads to a

change of mind, a change of heart. A new desire not to sin in that way anymore. A desire to see things in a new light – to say: “Actually, it’s really wrong to speak about people like that. I just can’t do that anymore!”

REPENTANCE IS ABOUT A CHANGE UP HERE(HEAD) AND IN HERE (HEART).

And repentance is also a challenge we face every day. Our mind is constantly challenged by the world we live in. And this is what Paul is talking with the Corinthians about in 2 Corinthians 7.

In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul had already written to the Corinthian church about some issues of sin in their church, and he says in these verses that he knows that his letter had caused them **sorrow**. Because it hurts to talk about struggles in relationships.

But Paul says “I’m glad I did it! Because even though you were sad for a little while, it brought a change in you.

III – Over 10 years ago, I sent an email to someone. I was angry with them. But I chose to be very vindictive and hurtful in the way I wrote to them. The next time he saw me he said to me: “Bruce, what was that email about?! That was mean and hurtful! You can’t write things like that to people!”

Boy did I feel bad! Sorrow. Deep sorrow. I was very sorry I’d written that email. But I had two options. Either I could take that sorrow and just try to get over it. Or I could let that sorrow lead to repentance/change. And what does that involve? Three things:

1. I had to admit to God, and to the other person, that I had done the wrong thing. That what I had done was just wrong. Other people could have looked at that email and said “No, you were totally fair! That was a fair thing to say! He deserved it. You don’t have to apologise.” But I had to look at it as a disciple of Jesus. It was simply wrong to write those things.
2. I had to ask for forgiveness. This is what allows relationships to be repaired.
3. I had to repent. Change. I had to allow my godly sorrow to lead me to change – to change my mind, to change my thinking. And I did. I have never written an email like that since.

Paul is happy with the Corinthians because, verse 10, he sees the result of their sorrow: **10** *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

Godly sorrow leads to repentance. Repentance leads to salvation with no regret.

Worldly sorrow leads to death. Worldly sorrow is when we simply say: “I feel bad”. Worldly sorrow brings no change in our life. No self awareness. No repentance. And worst of all, worldly sorrow doesn’t lead us to want to repair a relationship. If we only

feel worldly sorrow, we can easily just WALK AWAY from a relationship and not care about it.

Like when you might eat a massive block of chocolate one night. And you feel really sick. And really bad. And then you do the same thing next week. Worldly sorrow brings no change in us, and leaves us with regret time after time.

The Corinthians experienced **godly** sorrow – a desire to change, a desire for forgiveness to repair their relationship with Paul and each other, and a desire to repent. For Paul, this was important because it was about their faith. Verse 12:

12 So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are.

It's not so much about the sin, as it is about the way we DEAL with the sin. Whether you've lied or cheated, coveted or sworn, given false witness, murdered, worshipped other gods... whatever the sin is, the question is: how have you dealt with it? Have you acknowledged the sin in your life and has your sorrow brought you to repentance before God? Has your sorrow brought you to the point of change? Has your relationship with God, and with others, been healed?

There are times we will not like to admit we're wrong. Or even consider it! There are times we will not want to repair a relationship. We just want to abandon it. And there are times we just don't want to repent or make changes.

But this is who we are to be: Listen to how Paul describes the character of the Corinthians – from verse 11: Earnestness, indignation, alarm, longing, concern... this is the character of a follower of Jesus.

Acts 17:22-31

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. **23** For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

24 “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. **25** And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. **26** From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. **27** God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. **28** ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ **[b]** As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ **[c]** **29** “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. **30** In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. **31** For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

2 Corinthians 7:8-12

8 Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— **9** yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. **10** Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. **11** 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 yourselves to be innocent in this matter. **12** So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are.