Sorrow Versus Repentance

Writing to the Christians in Corinth Paul states, “For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor. 7:8-10). Although some find Paul's wording confusing, what he is saying is that he is happy that the sorrow these Christian's experienced led them to repent of what they had done wrong.

Sorrow and repentance are not the same thing. Whereas sorrow may produce repentance, repentance is not guaranteed because of sorrow. Such is observable in Paul's statement to the Christian's at Corinth. One may feel sorrow for what they have done, but repentance only occurs when one takes the appropriate action necessary to correct the wrong (sinful) situation. One may feel real sorrow for an act they have committed but until one ceases that act (sin), all they are expressing and regretting is the feeling of sorrow itself.

Paul declares to the Christians in Rome, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Romans 6:1-2). According to Google AI, "In the Bible, sorrow is a profound sadness or grief that can result from sin, loss, or the general brokenness of the world." AI pretty much gets it right here by ending with "the brokenness of the world." That is what sin is - brokenness. When we sin we break

ourselves in the eyes of God and we cannot fix what is broken unless one is willing to repent, i.e., stop and/or change out of the sin.

This takes us back to sorrow and repentance being two different things. Sorrow involves an emotional response to recognition of wrong behavior. However, as long as the response remains on the emotional level, with no change taking place, such is nothing more than sorrow. Now consider again, what Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians (above). Why was Paul happy for them? Because they had sorrow that led them to consider their actions and change them - repent. Therefore, we can clearly see the difference between sorrow and repentance. Repentance is a change of behavior, recognizing that the behavior (sin) is in opposition to God.

Let us each purpose to seek God's will above our own and "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).