

Two Kinds of Regret, One Kind of Hope

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What do you regret? That question can trigger some vivid memories. I don't like to think about them. I wince as I remember things I wish I had never done—terrible, wounding words I spoke, confidences I betrayed, dark lusts I indulged.

We're supposed to feel regret (feel sorry) for evil things we do. But not all regret is godly.

Judas and Peter both committed heinous sins on the same night. Judas led the guard to Jesus in Gethsemane. Peter publicly disowned Jesus in the courtyard. Both were betrayals. Both men regretted what they had done.

Peter was forgiven and went on to preach at Pentecost and lead the church. Judas was not forgiven and ended up committing suicide.

Why?

What Is Godly Grief?

A clue is in the nature of each man's regret. Paul helps us in [2 Corinthians 7:10](#):

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

The context is that the Corinthians had sinned grievously and Paul had rebuked them in a previous letter (probably 1 Corinthians).

- The rebuke produced “grief”—a kind of regret;
- their sad regret over their sin produced repentance;

- repentance brought about forgiveness and removal of their guilt through Jesus' atoning death;
- forgiveness brought about salvation;
- salvation meant they did not have to live (or die) in regret.

This meant no condemnation! [1 John 1:9](#) was applied to them: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

When Grief Is Godless

But a person who has *godless*, worldly regret grieves over the terrible thing he has done without believing that Jesus's death will atone for him. A person who has godless grief believes he is either beyond forgiveness or that he must atone for his own sin in order to please God. His regret leads to death—a living death of condemnation (sometimes suicide) and eventually spiritual death.

This was Judas. His guilt was real and terrible. But he did not believe in Jesus and was condemned.

Turn Toward God in Faith

A person who has *godly* regret grieves over the terrible thing he has done and *believes* that only God can help him. God is his only hope. So he turns toward God in faith, confesses his sin, and looks to the cross where the penalty of that sin was placed on the Son of God.

He *believes* in God's promise to forgive those who trust in his Son, and receives God's free grace of forgiveness. Then he leaves his sin and lives in the freedom of the forgiven and not in the regret of the unforgiven.

This was Peter. His guilt was real and terrible. But he believed in Jesus and was forgiven. And the same can be true for you and me.