



Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

2 Cor. 7:10 (NIV)

Bitterness is a knife we use to stab ourselves over and over again, writes Ken Sande in his blog on unforgiveness. I know that feeling... watching yourself bleed out, plunging the blade in one more time. Alongside unforgiveness, I have another weapon I use just as effectively for the same purpose: **regret**. "If only." "Should have." "Stupid."

I recently made a remark to a friend which, at the time, seemed a harmless – even a helpful – thing to say. However, it ended up hurting a third party in a way that I completely failed to foresee. I called that person and apologized, but for several days I was haunted by regret. I replayed the scenario over and over in my head. I worried about other people who might find out what I had done. I thought about different ways I wished I had handled it all. I stabbed myself until the blood ran.

Regret is a near-cousin to bitterness but its object is less definite. When we are angry with a particular person, there is someone to blame. With regret, blame is a shape-shifter that slides around the corners of our consciousness. At one moment we are angry at ourselves. At another, we are angry "at the situation." Sometimes, if we can admit it, we are angry with God. But always, we are really, really sorry. And regret brings along its twin sister, **shame**. Regret laments the exposure of our ineptitude or sin. It covers us with a slimy, red film which returns after every washing. It names us worthless, senseless and bad. It stands us in the corner with the admonition to "think about what we have done."

Regret cries out for a cosmic re-do; it's our attempt to reorder the universe, to punish ourselves, to atone for our failure or justify our actions. Regret pleads for the control which has been denied to us. It calls for an outcome more suited to our own happiness, an end more in line with our own plans, an occurrence more complimentary to our character. Regret demands personal sovereignty and denies the goodness of God.

When bad things happen in the world around us, we like to remember that God promises to work all things together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). Why does that promise seem less real when I am the instrument of chaos? We love to be the agents of God's *sweet* goodness in the world. Are we willing to be the instruments of His *hard* goodness? Once we have done what He requires in terms of repentance, restitution or apology, are we willing to trust Him with the past, to leave it in His hands, to offer our failures as well as our successes for His purposes? It is a greater sacrifice to give Him our regrets than to give Him our achievements. Perhaps it is also a greater honor, a greater worship. It is certainly evidence of a richer faith. Give me that faith, Lord.

God of the Ages, time is no obstacle to You. Walk ahead of us and guard our way. Walk with us and help us love well. Walk behind us and clean up our messes. And let us leave them in Your good hands as an offering of faith. All to your glory.