

Living *Without* or *With* Regrets

This is not the first piece I've written on this subject. Perhaps as a man of many regrets, it is a subject to which I am drawn. I've heard others say that they live with life "with no regrets." I presume they deliberately chose to do so, opting to not burden themselves with guilt. I do not know how to do this. There are too many things I've thought, felt, said, or done- or conversely, not thought, not felt, not said, or not done, that I deeply regret. In fact, I've often said (and written), in one way or another, that "Someone with no regrets is either perfect or a fool." Choosing to ignore our inward faults doesn't mean they aren't there. Tearing away and tossing aside the rearview mirror from our conscience and merely and merrily "moving on" from our outward deeds of commission or omission doesn't mean that they weren't wrong and didn't hurt others. Cavalierly denying culpability does not remove it. Obviously, God sees all, hears all, and knows all, cf. Psalm 139:1-4,7-8. I understand that we *cannot* change the things we've done and left undone, but we *can*:

- At least regret them;
- Acknowledge and confess our remorse to those we've wronged (both God and fellow humans);
- Apologize to those we've wronged (both God and fellow humans) and for their forgiveness; and,
- Learn, grow, and be and do better (both for God and to our fellow humans).

But regret alone- without the subsequent and incumbent actions, is a shallow and hollow emotion that does little more than to make us momentarily remorseful. Indeed, even if we combine it with confession, apologies, and pleas for forgiveness, without learning, growing, and becoming better by doing better, we're just heaping up more to regret later when the pangs of conscience kick in again.

Without the commitment to stop "piling up regrets," we'll do one of two things: 1) become a calloused fool who decides to "live life without regrets" because the burden of life with them is too great; or, 2) become so aware of our mountainous "pile of regrets" that remorse overwhelms us to disastrous effect, cf. Matthew 27:3-5.

However, there is a *third* option. We can admit we've been wrong, feel the right way(s) about it, make our wrong(s) right as best we can, and then allow regret for our past sins to motivate us to live differently in the future. Isn't that what Saul/Paul of Tarsus did?

He testified to the Sanhedrin Council that he had lived his life "*with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this very day*," Acts 23:1. He isn't saying he had never done anything wrong. At other times he also confessed to being "*the foremost of all*" sinners (1Timothy 1:15) because he "*persecuted the church of God*" (1Corinthians 15:9). Paul didn't **live without regret**; he **lived with regret** by allowing it to motivate him to live differently in the future. In fact, he went from being a *persecutor* of the gospel and its adherents to being a *preacher* of it to make of them, cf. Ephesians 3:8-10 and 1Corinthians 15:10.

The only way to truly live *without regret* is to make no mistakes- in mind, in heart, or in body. Though I can't speak for you personally, the rest of us are way past that, Romans 3:10-18,23. So, we had better learn to live *with regrets* by doing something constructive with them... rather than to just keep piling them up. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)