

# Godly Grief and Worldly Grief

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



**On August 12th we read II Corinthians 7: 1-10, in which Saint Paul expresses his joy at being reconciled with the believers who belong to the church in Corinth.**

There had been a serious breach between Paul and the Corinthian Christians. When a member of the church leveled false accusations against him, some of the other members sided with the accuser, causing Paul great pain not only personally but also because of his concern for the salvation of anyone who would take part in slander.

Now, however, the accuser has repented and has been punished by the majority of the church's members in some way that isn't described. It was apparently not the most serious punishment they could have meted out, since other members wanted to impose a more severe penalty on him. But Paul has shown his loving and generous heart by advising the Corinthians now to "turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2:6).

It has been an unpleasant period for Paul. He writes of being "afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within" (7:5). The "fighting" probably refers to difficult confrontations not only with pagans but with some in the Macedonian churches. The inner "fear" refers to his uncertainty about the Corinthians. He had written them a "stern letter" about the accusations against him, and is not sure how they have taken it. We see that, like many of us, Paul is not always sure he has done the right thing. He says, "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it), for I see that that letter grieved you..." (7: 8).

Paul's momentary regret at having written the letter is overcome by his love and care for the Corinthians. He is relieved and glad that the church members want reconciliation, but rejoices even more that the letter did what he hoped it would: it "grieved" them in a way that led to repentance. Here Paul writes about the distinction between godly grief and worldly grief.

Godly grief leads us to realize we have sinned not just against other people, but against God. We put ourselves under judgment, we repent, and then we can turn from the sin we now hate and trust God to guide us and forgive us. This grief enables us, like the Corinthians, to be reconciled with everyone.

Worldly grief makes us regret our sin because it pains us—it brings us punishment, or upsets our life. We don't recognize that in sinning we are opposing and rejecting God, and so we work to escape the pain, but not to turn toward God.

Paul could hardly be more blunt about the difference between the two kinds of grief. Worldly grief leads, quite simply, to death. But godly grief, the kind he was so happy to see in the Corinthians, "produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret" (7: 10).