

QUESTION: My question is about forgiveness. Since we are to repent and turn away from our sins in order to be forgiven, why then am I expected to forgive someone who doesn't ask for my forgiveness? Isn't that like God expecting me to do something He Himself doesn't do?

PASTOR GREG'S ANSWER: To answer your question we must look at two ways in which the word 'repent', or 'repentance' is used in the New Testament Scriptures. We find both ways presented in the following passage:

"...repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20).

1) CHANGE OF ONE'S MIND

When most people hear the word 'repent', they instinctively think of repenting from, or giving up sin. While that is certainly true and plainly taught in the Scriptures (including the verse printed above), the primary/root Biblical definition for repentance is *'a change of one's mind in relationship to Jesus Christ and His saving grace upon the cross.'* This we find in the first half of the verse *"... repent and turn to God ..."*

Paul is standing before King Agrippa and arguing that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah come in the flesh, and that turning to Him in faith will bring forgiveness and salvation. Salvation has always been through 'turning to God' via faith. Even in the Old Testament the Bible says that *"Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*

To change one's mind in relation to Christ is to 'turn to', or 'repent' toward the Savior – to recognize Him for who He is, the Messiah in the flesh, the sacrificial offering for the sins of mankind.

Now we turn our attention to the second way in which 'repentance' is used in Scripture:

2) CHANGE OF ONES WAYS

"... and do works meet for repentance"

This part of the verse explains the actions of a person once they 'turn to God' for salvation via faith. Only after we receive Christ as our Savior are we given the ability by God to repent from a life of sin – *"... and do works (deeds and actions) meet (or fitting) for repentance"*. It is absolutely impossible for a person to totally give up sin apart from the grace given to them by God after they are born-again. We are born sinners and will remain so until we are 'born-again' and transformed from a servant of Satan and sin, to a servant of Christ and His righteousness.

Have you heard people say to the effect, 'I am going to turn over a new leaf'? The problem with that philosophy, is once they do they find out the other side is even dirtier. The only way to make a permanent change for righteousness in one's life is to have the 'Righteous One' imparted into your heart – *"Christ in us, the hope of glory"*.

Having established the two ways in which 'repentance' is used in the New Testament Scriptures – 1) Turning to God, and 2) Turning away from sin; let's turn our attention back to the original question:

"Since we are to repent and turn away from our sins in order to be forgiven, why then am I expected to forgive someone who doesn't ask for my forgiveness? Isn't that like God expecting me to do something He Himself doesn't do? (I know the spiritual and health benefits of forgiveness, like drinking poison and expecting the other to die...), any biblical insight will help me tremendously."

We are never taught to 'turn away from our sins in order to be born-again.' As we pointed out above, that is utterly impossible – to do that would be to 'work' our way toward becoming saved. We must first turn to God for the forgiveness of our 'SIN DEBT' – then we are given the power and ability by the Holy Spirit to turn from a 'LIFE OF SIN AND INIQUITY'. This, by the way, doesn't happen all at one time. Turning from sin and cleansing one's life requires a life-time of filling our minds with the Word of God and obediently applying it to our lives – *"the renewing of our minds"* by the Word of God. Another name for this process is 'progressive sanctification' – we progress, or grow over time forsaking our sinful habits and ways and clothe ourselves with the righteousness of Christ.

So God forgives us based on 'changing our minds about His Son' and turning to Him by faith in His sacrificial work on the cross. God would never ask you to do something that He does not give you the ability to do so.

Why should we forgive others? . . . simply because God forgave us – not because we repented or turned from our sins, but because we turned to God for the cancelation of our 'sin debt'. He has forgiven us because of His Son, so should we forgive others for the same reason.