

You sinned... AGAIN?

Jesus spoke of the inevitability of “offenses,” pronouncing a woe against those who commit such offenses (Luke 17:1-2). As serious as the consequence of sinning against others, Jesus warned the disciples about the awesome responsibility of men to forgive sins committed against them (Luke 17:3-4).

“Take heed to yourselves,” He cautioned them, “If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him” (Luke 17:3-4).

Seven times in a day?? Has someone really repented if they are sinning seven times in a day? Of course, the passage in Luke doesn't say that the sinner was committing the same sin seven times in a day, but the passage raises questions about repetitious sin and the implications of repentance.

Repentance is literally “a change of mind” (Thayer/Vine). Thayer adds, “especially the change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life...” The Scriptures distinguishes between sorrow for sin, repentance and the fruits which repentance produces (2 Corinthians 7:10; Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20).

In a perfect world, the sinner who repents of a particular sin, i.e., decides that he will not commit that sin, would not ever commit that sin again. However, God recognizes that man does not carry out his intentions in a perfect way (“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” – Matthew 26:41b). In Romans 7:13-24, Paul pictured the struggle that man faces to do what he knows to be right.

The apostle John conceded that Christians would continue to sin occasionally (1 John 1:8-10), even though they have repented of sin when they obeyed the gospel (e.g., Acts 2:38). He also affirms, however, that Christians may not live in sin, i.e., “walk” in darkness (1 John 1:6-7; 3:6-9). The Christian who continues to sin without sorrow for sin and repentance is not “dead to sin” (see Romans 6:1-4).

Clearly God intends for Christians to grow spiritually (2 Peter 1:5-8; 3:18). We are provided divine help in resisting temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13) and expected to resist temptation (1 Peter 5:9; James 4:7-8).

Conquering sin entirely is a lifetime project and even determined Christians will falter at times. As our desire to please God becomes stronger and our ability to discern between right and wrong grows, our repentance will become more perfect and we will sin less.