

LCMS

Frequently Asked Questions

Doctrinal Issues - Forgiveness

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Forgiveness

Why do bad things happen?

Q: *Why do bad things happen to good people? Does God cause bad things or does he just let them happen? Does he punish or discipline? And what could be the purpose—such as when you lose your Mom at the age of 11 and she suffered so with cancer?*

A: We live in a world permeated with sin. It's a sinful world. Because of that and since the devil is the prince of this world, as the Bible says, bad things happen to good people. But consider this, a lot more good has happened to people who love God in Jesus than bad. Read Psalm 90 and 91. And consider how God can turn the bad things into good for those who love God (Romans 8:28).

God does no evil. Yes, He can cause and allow bad things to come to us, but always for our good. Scripture also gives witness to God punishing the wicked (Proverbs) and punishing individuals and even whole nations for evil (Egyptians, Israel for their wickedness and idolatry, etc.). But when it comes to sin, we Christians know that God has punished Jesus in our place for our sins, and that we are not punished. God disciplines those whom He loves. Read Hebrews 12.

We know God is Good and Gracious and Loving in giving us the Way, the Truth and the Life for our salvation, our Savior Jesus. We know that He works all things for our good. And that must be the purpose in your and your mother's case, although it may be a bitter pill to swallow. We must always turn to God in His Word and prayer for answers, never away from Him. Sometimes the answers He has are not evident right now, but later. It may even be in heaven that we see and understand His purposes.

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Will God forgive me if I haven't forgiven others?

Q: *Will God forgive me of my sins if I haven't forgiven others?*

A: The question you have raised often arises in connection with the words spoken by Jesus in the context of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:14), "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

In view of Scripture's wider teaching concerning forgiveness, it seems proper to understand Jesus' point in Matthew 6:14 to be that the stubborn, persistent refusal to forgive others is evidence of a blinded and hardened heart which lacks a real understanding of and faith in God's forgiveness in Christ. What Jesus is doing here, therefore, is issuing a strong warning to us to "search our hearts" to see if we really understand and accept the Gospel and its practical implications for our lives. If we say, "I want God to forgive me, but I refuse to forgive those who sin against me," we really don't know what "forgiveness" and "faith in Jesus" are all about. We cannot expect God to "forgive" us if the attitude of our heart reveals that we have no real understanding of or faith in his undeserved grace in Christ Jesus. Anyone who truly understands the true nature God's grace and forgiveness in Christ and puts his or her trust in that forgiveness will desire and seek to extend that forgiveness to others. God's forgiveness is not a "reward" for our forgiving others, but once we receive it in true faith and gratitude it is impossible not to want to share it with others.

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Help me to understand repentance. (2 pages)

Q: *I don't really understand repentance. Is it being sorry for your sins and confessing them to God or does it mean to stop committing a certain sin? Like if you are stealing, does repentance mean to stop stealing, because that would mean we can stop sinning and we know we can never stop sinning. I have sins that I commit over and over again, not like I did before I was saved, but I still commit them. So if I don't stop committing those sins (repentance), does that mean that I am going to hell? And also, when the Bible talks about how worldly sorrow brings death but godly sorrow brings repentance and life, how do I know which one I have?*

A: Repentance means first of all, to acknowledge our sins, to be truly sorry for them. This "godly sorrow" comes from the Holy Spirit convicting us with God's law.

But the Bible also uses the work of repentance in a broader sense to include faith in Jesus our Savior. This faith is produced by the Holy Spirit, who convinces us through the Gospel that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus, who lived, died and rose again for us.

Put those two concepts together and you have repentance in its fullest sense. (Jesus told His disciples in Luke 24:47 that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations.)

According to the Bible, those who are truly sorry for their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior also want to turn away from their sins, intending with the help of the Holy Spirit not to keep on living a life of sin. If we want to keep on sinning, we need to ask ourselves if we have really repented. However, we are weak human beings and although we do not want to commit the same sins again and again, we may sometimes fall into sin out of weakness.

Whenever we sin, we know (as John says) that "if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins" for the sake of Jesus our Savior (1 John 1:9). If repentance becomes a "game" with God and we don't really want or intend to stop committing a certain sin (say stealing), and we go on stealing, living always in that sin of stealing, then we place ourselves in grave spiritual danger. We need to ask that God the Holy Spirit to give us the power to stop committing that sin and trust Him to help us fight against it.

Sad to say, the desire to sin may come back at times, for which we will have to repent again. That's not the same as living in sin. We all commit all kinds of sins daily, for which we have to daily repent. As long as we are sorry for our sins and believe that God forgives our sins for Christ's sake, we will be forgiven and have eternal life.

Worldly sorrow is the kind of sorrow Judas Iscariot had, which caused him to commit suicide. It was a self-centered remorse and despair that wrongly concluded that all was lost in this life, that there was no hope, that there was nothing God could do. Second Cor. 7:10 says that this kind of sorrow brings death. But godly sorrow is true sorrow over sin accompanied by trust in Jesus for forgiveness. This is the kind of sorrow Peter had after he denied Jesus, and King David had after he committed adultery and murder (Psalm 51). Godly sorrow leads to life and salvation, because it includes faith in Jesus Christ.

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