

Have You Ever Really Asked for Forgiveness?

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin” (Hebrews 10:17-18, ESV).

I still recall the time I realized I had never really asked for forgiveness. I’m not talking about years ago as a teenager when I was baptized into Christ. I’m talking about just a couple of years ago when I had been a Christian for 25 years and had been preaching for more than 15. Don’t get me wrong, I had said the words, “God, please forgive me of my sins,” but I hadn’t actually asked for forgiveness.

I remember reading Hebrews 10:17-18 in my office, and it hitting me like a nail driven between my eyes what forgiveness actually is. Forgiveness is God casting my sin away from me. Forgiveness is God actively choosing not to call my sin to His mind. Forgiveness is having my sin removed based completely on God’s mercy and grace and not at all based on my deserving it. Forgiveness is having my sin taken away so I don’t have to make any offerings for them ever again. But that is exactly what I had been doing; I had been “going to church,” reading my Bible, saying prayers, avoiding certain sins, giving money in the collection, and other acts of obedience all as offerings for my sins. I wasn’t doing those things because I was amazed that I had been forgiven. I wasn’t doing those things to show my thanks, love, and devotion to the One who had already forgiven me. I was doing those things in hopes to someday get forgiveness.

So what had I been asking for? I had said, “Please, forgive me,” but I meant, “Please, be patient with me.” “Please, Lord, give me time and I’ll prove to you I’m not as bad as that sin I committed yesterday.” “Please, Lord, hang on and I’ll show you that I really am worthy.” “Please, Lord, don’t send Your Son back yet, I need time to prove I’m good enough to go to heaven.” And then I spent my time making offerings I hoped would make up or atone for my sins. I hoped I would “go to church” enough, read my Bible enough, pray enough, avoid enough sins to prove I wasn’t so bad and really should get to go to heaven.

But there it was in plain black and white in Hebrews 10:17-18. God wasn’t offering me patience. He was offering me forgiveness. What is amazing is a large part of me rebelled against it. I didn’t really want forgiveness, I wanted to prove myself worthy. I wanted God to wait and see that I really was better than my sins. I didn’t want Him to remember my sins no more by His mercy and grace; I wanted Him to know them, but then know that my righteousness and good deeds were better than my sins.

However, I came face to face with a problem. I realized it just wasn’t true. It couldn’t work. I couldn’t prove myself better than my sins. I finally had to admit it. I don’t need God’s patience; I need His forgiveness. So now, I’m writing this article not to prove myself worthy, but because I’m amazed and thankful. I’m forgiven. I don’t have to offer any offerings to get forgiveness. I just need to live in the forgiveness He has given.

How about you? Have you ever actually asked for forgiveness?