



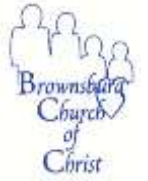
We Need Forgiveness

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

Do you want forgiveness? Are you sure? I know this sounds like a no-brainer, duh, kind of question. But I have a shameful and frightening confession to make. Recently, I discovered a problem in my own life that has led to all kinds of spiritual stagnation and struggles. I have discovered that I don't really want forgiveness. I thought I did. Intellectually, I realize I need it. But on the gut level where I act, react, and live my days, I don't really want forgiveness. Oh, I've asked for it. That is, I've used the word "forgiveness." "God, please forgive me for..." However, I now realize that while I have used the biblical word, because I know I'm supposed to, I haven't actually been asking for forgiveness. And, I am convinced I am not the only one.

Please, allow me to explain this shocking confession. The definition of the word "forgiveness" is a release or a letting go. It is a pardon of sins, Thayer adds, "as if they had not been committed."ⁱ But this academic definition doesn't get to the heart of why I, and so many others, struggle with forgiveness. For a great picture of forgiveness, look at **Psalm 103:3, 10, 11-12**. Forgiveness means not dealing with us according to our sins or repaying us according to our iniquities. It means casting our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. But the troublesome part is this forgiveness is wholly and completely by God's love and grace. This forgiveness comes because God is love, not because I am lovable (cf. **I John 4:8**). This forgiveness has absolutely nothing to do with my merits, loveliness, righteousness. In fact, if my life is brought into the basis for this forgiveness, the forgiveness is lost. My life, righteousness, holiness, accomplishments, obedience have to be taken off the table in order to have this forgiveness, because all my life will say is that I'm a sinner and don't deserve forgiveness. And therein lies my struggle. The fact is I haven't wanted this. Oh, sure, I don't want to go to hell. I don't want punishment. I'd like God to forget about my sins. But I haven't wanted His basis of forgiveness.

When I have asked for God's forgiveness, what I was really asking for was God's patience. I said, "God, please forgive me for..." But what I really meant was, "God, please be patient with me while I make this up to You." "God, please give me more time to prove to You that I'm not as bad as all that." "God, please don't take me now; let me live long enough to show you how good I really can be." And then I conducted my religion as a means to prove that God really is allowed to forget my sins because of how good I've been at "going to church" and "keeping the rules." True, as the psalmist said, I don't want God to deal with me according to my sins. But, I have wanted Him to deal with me according to my righteousness. And then I set about trying to prove how righteous I can be. "Look at how often I go to church. Look at how often I pray. Look at how often I read my Bible. Look at the blogs that I write. Look at how well I keep Your pattern for the local church. Look at how well I do this or that. Look at all the sins I haven't committed. Look at all the people who are worse than me." But I can't really have it both ways. In the most strict sense, if I ask God to deal with me according to my righteousness, He will have to deal with me according to my sins. Because that is what searching for my righteousness is going to reveal. I'm a sinner. No amount of patience from God waiting on me to fix it is going to change that.

I've been asking for patience. But patience won't help. What I need is forgiveness. And while I'm guessing this isn't a problem for everyone here, I imagine it is a problem for more than just me. **Hebrews 10:18** says, "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin" (ESV). That verse has profoundly impacted my understanding of forgiveness over the past few weeks. I'd like to examine the context surrounding that verse to help us understand what forgiveness really is so we can see how much we need it and so we can seek it properly.

Discussion:

I. We must face our sinfulness.

- A. **Hebrews 10:1-3** had to be a great shock to the Jews who read it for the first time. They had grown up sacrificing their best animals. But this passage says that, by themselves, those sacrifices didn't work. They didn't take away sins. What did they accomplish? They were a reminder of sin. Those sacrifices were not actually about getting rid of sin, they were about facing sin. They were about seeing what sin is, what it does, what we are because of it. And it was a gruesome picture.

- B. **Numbers 28-29** lists the proscribed sacrifices. They were to offer 2 sacrifices every day, 2 more every Sabbath, 11 more at the beginning of each new month. All the families were to offer a sacrifice on the Passover. Then there were 77 more offered during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 50 days later, at the Feast of First Fruits (Weeks) also known as Pentecost, they were to offer 11 more sacrifices. At the Feast of Trumpets they were to offer 10 more sacrifices. There were 13 sacrifices to be offered on the Day of Atonement. Then 199 sacrifices offered during the Feast of Booths (Harvest). If we just count 1 sacrifice for Passover, this is a total of 1251 sacrifices offered every year, not counting the free will sacrifices, the burnt offerings, the sin offerings given by the people for their individual sacrifices. Three times a year the men of Israel were to present themselves before the Lord in the Temple at Jerusalem. Three times a year they came to this place of sacrifice. Three times a year they saw the beauty and wonder of the Temple of God. And three times a year they came face to face with sacrifice. Think about it for a moment—the smells, the sounds, the sights. Blood. Raw meat. Cooking meat. Burning meat. Squealing animals. Flies. Stench. Death. For some of the sacrifices, the Israelites themselves had to kill their own animals.
- C. What was this? This wasn't a taking away of sins. This was a reminder of sin. This was facing sin. And it is exactly what we need to do before we can be forgiven. We are sinners. **Romans 3:23** says we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. **Ephesians 2:1-3** explains we are all dead in our transgressions. **Titus 3:3** says we were all led astray and slaves to various passions. But I don't want to face my sin. I want to hide it. I want to cover it up. I want to justify it, excuse it, minimize it. I don't want to face it because I might learn how truly awfully I have behaved. I want to maintain some measure of self-worth. I want to maintain some amount of pride and self-respect. But if I look at the yawning blackness of sin in my life, I may lose all of that. So, I don't want forgiveness. What I want is time to cover up some of my sins with good works so that when I look at myself, I don't have to be so ashamed and even disgusted. And, from that point of view I want God to give me some time before He starts looking at me because I don't want Him to see all the sin. I want Him to see how good I can be. And right there is the problem. I cannot seek or accept forgiveness until I'm willing to look my sin squarely in the face and accept that's what I've done. That's who I am.

II. Nothing we do can take away our sins.

- A. **Hebrews 10:4** doesn't make things any better. 1251 sacrifices a year and not a single one of them took away sin. The first seven chapters of **Leviticus** describe all kinds of sacrifices—free will offerings, burnt offerings, sin offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, guilt offerings. But not a single one of them could take away sins. The Hebrew writer wanted us to get this point so strongly that he made it twice (**Hebrews 10:11**). But there is something implied by this about the rest of the Law. If the sacrifices couldn't take away sin, no other legal ritual could take away sin either.
- B. Here is what is really scary. That's not just true of the Old Law. That is true of the New Law. That is true of any law. We cannot be justified by keeping law. As **Galatians 3:21** explains, if we could have been justified by keeping a law, that Old Law would have been the one. **1 Timothy 1:8-11** explains that law is not written for the just. That is, it is not written to make people just or prove that they are just. It can't. All law can do is demonstrate sinfulness (**Romans 3:20**). Thus, if we try to be justified by law, we will be severed from Christ and fall from grace (**Galatians 5:4**). We all face the condemnation found in **James 2:10**. Keeping the law in one point does not take away the violation in another point.
- C. Certainly, there are things God wants us to do. But no amount of us doing them will take away our sins. And that is the very wall against which I have so often beaten my own head. Too often, I don't want forgiveness; instead, I want to prove that I don't need that much forgiveness. "Let me fix this," I cry. "Let me make it up to You." I want to prove to God and everyone else that I'm really a good guy. Just give me time. I'm like that foolish servant in **Matthew 18:23-35**. I actually think that I can make up for all the wrong I've done. I have the crazy idea that if God would just be patient with me, I could pay off this debt. But it just doesn't work that way. No amount of going to church, no amount of baptism, no amount of putting money in the plate, no amount of avoiding certain sins, no amount of avoiding the sins that got me in this mess, no amount of any of my works can take away my sins. I can sacrifice my own bulls and goats all day long and it will not take away a single one of my sins. Patience won't help me. I need forgiveness.

III. Forgiveness is not God overlooking or ignoring our sins; it is God doing what we can't do about our sins.

- A. My confession has to go further. As I realized that I haven't really been asking for forgiveness, but for patience, I realized that even worse I wasn't asking God to forgive my sins, but to overlook and ignore my sins. Let's face it. That's what the common idea of forgiveness is—ignoring and overlooking sin.

- B. Have you ever heard anyone say about a deceased person, "If anyone is going to make it to heaven, so and so is"? Why? Because we think forgiveness is God seeing so many good works in a person that He decides to just ignore the sins. That is what I'm looking for. "God, just give me time and I'll do so much good work you'll be happy to ignore the bad things I've done." "Can't we just sweep some of this under the rug? I was younger then. I'm doing so much better now."
- C. That's a problem I have. I don't want forgiveness, I just want God to ignore my sins long enough for me to fix them. That way when I stand before Him in judgment, I don't look so bad. I look like someone worth saving. I mean sure, I know I made the mess, but look at how good I am for cleaning it up by myself. But that just isn't forgiveness. And, as we've already seen, I can't actually do it.
- D. According to **Hebrews 10:10**, we are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 10:12-14** explains that Jesus offered the single sacrifice that takes away sin. Not only that but through that sacrifice those who are being sanctified are perfected. We need to understand that forgiveness is not God sweeping our sins under the rug. Forgiveness is not God overlooking our sins. Forgiveness is not God turning His head the other way and ignoring our sins. Forgiveness is God pulling our sins out from wherever we have hidden them, looking them full on in their disgusting face, and paying for them with the blood of His Son. If God ignored our sins, we'd be in big trouble. But He didn't ignore them. He pays for them. He washes them. He cleanses them. He forgives them. And why did He do this? Not because of us, but because of His love. He looked at us in all our dirty sinfulness and sent Jesus to die for us anyway (**Romans 5:6-8**).
- E. And I don't want that. I don't want to be the one who put Jesus on the cross. I don't want to be the one who shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" I don't want to be the one who brought the scourge across His back. I don't want to be the one who drove the nails through His hands and feet. I don't want to be the one who mocked Him from the foot of the cross. I don't want to be the one who betrayed Him with a kiss. I don't want to be the one who followed far behind and denied Him when I was seen. To be honest, I want that to be you. I want to be able to say, "God, it wasn't me. It was that wife you gave me. It was those kids you gave me. It was those church members. It was those elders. It was those worldly bosses. It was those friends at school. It was those co-workers. It was those awful sinners. They did that to Your Son. Not me."
- F. But it was me. There is only one way to pay for my sins and that was Jesus' death. And when I sinned, it was me that put Him up on that cross. And I don't want that. I don't want forgiveness, I want patience. I want God to ignore them. Sweep them under the rug. Give me time. I'll pay for it. But it won't work. If God ignores my sins, I'll die in them. I don't need God's patience and ignorance. I need God's forgiveness.

IV. We must quit trying to make offerings for our sins.

- A. Now we come finally to the central verse, the verse that exemplifies where I have been missing it for years. **Hebrews 10:18** says, "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin" (ESV). Because I have been asking for patience instead of forgiveness, I have been doing the exact same thing the Jewish priests were doing between 30 and 70 A.D. Jesus had died to take away their sins. Jesus had offered the one sacrifice that would perfect them. But they were still in Jerusalem making offerings. They were still slaughtering animals. They were still trying to fix themselves. How ridiculous? At this point in the lesson, don't we see how silly that is? Don't we want to yell at those priests, "It won't work! Quit offering! You'll never make it! Turn to Jesus!"?
- B. And yet, have I been conducting my religion the exact same way? Why do I attend the assemblies, read my Bible, pray, avoid certain sins, demand we follow the pattern? All too often, these are my offerings for sin. How crazy is that? I'm like that Pharisee in **Luke 18:11-12**. I wear my "righteousness" like a badge, and sometimes wield it as a club. I come to church as if this is a gift I'm offering to God. I read my Bible, say my prayers, write my blogs as if I'm doing something great for God, paying off my debt, making it all up to Him. And if I can only have enough time, I'll show Him that I'm worth forgiving. But, there's the rub. If I'm worth it, then it isn't really forgiveness is it. It just won't work.
- C. Where there is forgiveness, there is no more offering for sin. Those who have truly accepted the forgiveness of God quit spinning their wheels to make these offerings to God. They no longer try to impress God with their righteousness. They no longer try to prove anything to God (or anyone else for that matter). They are like the tax collector in **Luke 18:13**. They don't come to God trying to give Him anything. They know their hands are empty; they have nothing they can offer in exchange for what they are asking. "God, be merciful to me a sinner." "God, forgive me, but I don't have any good reason to give You for why You should do that."
- D. And I don't want that. I want to pay. I want to sacrifice. When I mess up, I want to berate myself, beat myself, punish myself. Because then I can feel a little better about myself. Sometimes I want people to know how bad I've been so they can hate and punish me. Then maybe I'll have paid off a little of my debt. Look, I

don't even like to let someone pay for my meal without offering to leave the tip, how much less do I want God to pay for my sins and me not make any offering back. But where there is forgiveness, there is no longer any offering for sin. And, therefore, where there is continued offering for sin, there is no forgiveness.

- V. There is nothing left for us but to draw near to the God who has forgiven us.
 - A. For all of this trouble I have with forgiveness, I want to be God's friend. I want to be close to God. I want to be holy as God is holy. I want God's righteousness. And really, that is at the heart of my problems. You see, I don't want to be a sinner. I don't want to sin. I don't want to live in my sins. I'm ashamed of my sins and want to get as far from them as possible. Everything I've been doing has been to distance myself from my sins. But the problem is no matter what I do, my "sinner," like my shadow, follows me everywhere I go. And as long as I refuse to accept the forgiveness God has offered me and instead keep on trying to make offerings for my sins, I'm just going to be shackled to that sinner.
 - B. But it doesn't have to be that way. When we accept the forgiveness God has offered through Jesus, there is nothing left for us to do but draw near to the God who has forgiven us. As **Hebrews 10:19-25** explains, Jesus has opened the door for us. He has paved the way into the Most Holy Place. He has prepared a place for us in God's house. We can enter that holy place by the blood of Jesus. We can draw near to God in the full assurance of our faith in Jesus Christ. We can live in the fellowship with one another, encouraging one another, provoking one another to love and good works. We can become that person we've wanted to be, not because of us, but because of the grace of God. We can be separate from our sins. Like the woman caught in adultery in **John 8:3-11**, we don't have to be defined by our past sins. We are free to sin no more.
 - C. And here is the great paradox of Christ's grace and death on the cross. As long as we're chasing forgiveness through our religious offerings, we will always fall short of it. Only when we simply accept the forgiveness will we be able to draw near to God and be that person we wanted to be. We don't have to separate ourselves from our sins so that God will love us; because God loves us, He has separated us from our sins. Will we embrace that and draw near to Him, or will we keep trying to make offerings for our sins.
- VI. We must not pervert forgiveness into permission to sin.
 - A. Sadly, as always, we can't simply teach the good news of God's grace. Even the Hebrew writer knew that every good and wholesome doctrine of Jesus Christ will be abused and perverted by those who don't really want what God has to offer.
 - B. You see, there are some people who don't really want forgiveness. However, unlike we have been discussing in this sermon, they don't really want God's patience while they try to fix themselves either. Rather, what they want is God's permission to sin. They don't really want to be close to God. They don't want to draw near to Him. But they don't want to go to hell either. So they hope they can get away with the sins they want to hang on to. They hope God will just look the other way. For them, their religion is not a means to make up their sinfulness to God. Instead, it is a business transaction. "Maybe if I go to church this Sunday, God will overlook the fact that I cheated on my test, lied to my boss, looked at pornography." They spend their time arguing about, "How many times do I really have to attend the assemblies, read my Bible, say my prayers?" They do this as if they are negotiating their salvation with God.
 - C. The Hebrew writer points out there is a frightening side to this point that there is no more offering for sin. In **Hebrew 10:26-31**, he explains that if we go on sinning willfully, ignoring the sacrifice that Jesus offered to pay for our sins, there is nothing else we can do to pay for them. The message of forgiveness is not for those who want permission to sin. It is for those who want the power to overcome sin. For everyone else, there is only one frightening expectation. That expectation is that nothing we do can pay for our sins. There is no amount of going to church, putting money in the plate, dressing nice, sacrificing some sins, etc. that will take your sins away. If you won't accept the forgiveness offered through the sacrifice of Jesus, then you've got nothing but a terrifying expectation of judgment. Forgiveness is not permission to sin. Don't treat it as such.

Conclusion:

And so I ask again, do you want forgiveness? Or do you want to keep trying to make up for your sins? I can tell you which one we need. We need forgiveness.

¹ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G859&t=ESV>