

The Cancellation of Our Sin Debt

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

God is love, and love “keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Cor. 13:5b). So, if God is not keeping score, why do we ask Him for forgiveness, each time we sin? Actually, I believe that many of us ask God for forgiveness for all the wrong reasons. Many of us don’t fully understand what forgiveness and the love of God are really all about.

Have you ever asked yourself these questions: If our sins were covered by the blood of Christ on Calvary, why do we need to continually ask for forgiveness? Are Christians forgiven by God only for those past sins which are confessed? When we sin again, do we fall into an unforgiven state? Many Christians would argue that this is true and that it is possible to lose our salvation if we do not continually ask for forgiveness and if we do not persevere in the faith until the day we die.

The reason for this mistaken view of Christian salvation has to do with an incorrect definition of the word “forgiveness.” Many would incorrectly define forgiveness as “a cessation of animosity towards the offender.” Under this definition, the person seeking forgiveness would say that he/she is sorry and ask the offended party to no longer be angry at them. If the offended party accepts the request for forgiveness, then he/she would no longer harbor feelings of anger or hostility toward the offender. Under this scenario, the process of forgiveness is initiated by the offender. The problem with applying this definition to our relationship with God is that God has initiated the process, not us. God is not angry at sinners. He demonstrated this on Calvary. Jesus did not come into the world to condemn us; He came to save us.

The correct definition of forgiveness is letting someone know that you love them and are not mad at them and that you hold no animosity towards them. Under this scenario, the offender does not even have to ask for forgiveness. There is no need to ask.

Forgiveness can also be correctly defined as “cancelling a debt.” However, in the case of our sin debt, we don’t owe the debt to God. The sin debt might best be defined as an accumulation of necessary corrective chastisements that would be required to right the wrong or bring about a necessary reformation of character.

Why are we asked in 1 John 1:9 to confess our sins? We do it so that we might be “*purified from all unrighteousness.*” If we don’t confess and repent of our sins, we do suffer the chastisements of God, which mostly take the form of the natural earthy consequences of our actions. God does not chastise us because He is mad at us. He doesn’t do it because He is offended by our actions. He doesn’t do it to even the score. He does it because He loves us. He has always loved us.

In light of the above, I would offer this paraphrase of 1 John 1:9:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to remove the chastisement and help us to overcome the sin in our lives.”

Christian salvation, I believe, is a process of experiencing in our human awareness something that has already happened from God's perspective. Asking God to forgive us does not change God in any way. We are the ones who are changed.