

# Forgiveness in Christ

## Ephesians 1:7

About 30 years ago, there was a man who was arrested named Jeffrey Dahmer. And Jeffrey Dahmer had been identified as a serial killer. And as a result of his crimes, he was incarcerated and sometime later bludgeoned to death while in prison. But during his short stay in prison, Jeffrey Dahmer came to hear the gospel, believe it and obey it.

Now, bear in mind that Jeffrey Dahmer was charged with about 16 or 17 very gruesome murders. As I went back and read about the murders that Jeffrey Dahmer had committed, I mean, there's just no way to describe the atrocities that he committed. I mean, just unbelievable. It's hard for me to imagine someone who was willing to take advantage or took advantage of so many individuals and put them to death.

And then some of the things that he did with their bodies just absolutely gruesome. But I say all that to simply say that he was charged and incarcerated and while in prison, came to an understanding about the gospel of Christ. And based upon what I know, he obeyed the gospel. Now, what did that entail? Well, he came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God.

You know, the Bible tells us without faith it's impossible to be well pleasing to him. Paul would say in Romans chapter ten, verse 17. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. In Second Corinthians chapter five, in verse seven, Paul said, we walk by faith and not by sight. But it's not just faith only, but rather it is an obedient faith.

Read Hebrews chapter 11 and read about those individuals whose lives were adorned with faith and obedience to God. So Jeffrey Dahmer came to understand something about Jesus, that he was the Son of God and then repented of sin. The Bible says that God commands all men everywhere to repent. Pentecost day. The Bible tells us that those who were present on that day in the city of Jerusalem, they were commanded by Peter to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.

So Jeffrey Dahmer believed Jesus to be the Son of God, repented of sin, confessed his name, and then, based upon my understanding, was buried with Christ in baptism in a watery grave for baptism, for what reason well, to be saved. Mark 16:16 to be forgiven. Acts two, verse 38. Now there are a lot of people in the world today that if we were to say that God in heaven would willingly forgive someone who met the terms set forth in Scripture to be forgiven, they would have a hard time believing that God in heaven would forgive someone who committed such evil atrocities.

In this world. Look, I get it, I understand. We're human beings. And have that been a family member of mine, killed by someone like Mr. Dahmer? Well, that would no doubt have been very difficult for me to accept that this man put my loved one to death. And then I think about, from the world's vantage point, to hear that somebody like Jeffrey Dahmer obeyed the gospel.

You mean to tell me that God would really forgive him of sin? Listen to what the Hebrew writer said. And the Hebrew writer is talking about this new covenant under which we now live. He quoted Jeremiah in Hebrews chapter eight, and he talked about the days in which God would establish a new covenant with the house of Israel, the house of Judah.

But he said, concerning that covenant I will be merciful to their sins or their unrighteousness, their sins, and their iniquities. He said, I will remember no more. So if I understand what the Hebrew writer saying, God is willing to forgive any sin and all sin if

we meet the criterion set forth in the scriptures. I had a friend of mine, Brother Garland Elkins.

Brother Elkins is deceased now, but Brother Elkins was a fine, fine man, a good gospel preacher, and, well, the Elkins and I had the opportunity to tape a lot of programs together, spend a lot of time together. And we talked about Jeffrey Dahmer because, interestingly, Brother Elkins corresponded with Jeffrey Dahmer. And I remember Brother Elkins told me that he was in Chattanooga back in 1994 when Jeffrey Dahmer was bludgeoned to death in prison.

And apparently, while in Chattanooga, some somebody on one of the news stations learned that Brother Elkins had corresponded with him. And so they wanted to interview him. And they ask a question that many people would ask today, and they wanted to know, do you believe that Jeffrey Dahmer went to heaven or will go to heaven? I thought Brother Elkins answered their question about as well as anyone could ever answer someone.

He said, I believe if Jeffrey Dahmer did what the Bible says to do, that he was forgive him. Well said. Look, if we meet the terms of pardon, will God forgive us? Yes or no? Well, I believe the answer is yes, but let me further illustrate it like this. Turn, if you will, to the book of acts in chapter two.

You remember in acts chapter two, we have the birth of the church. Really the book of acts points us to the establishment of the Lord's church. And Isaiah had said that all nations would flow into this exalted mountain, identified by the prophet as the church of the Kingdom of God. And so in acts chapter two, we have the apostles and Peter preaching the gospel for the very first time in all of its fullness.

Now the Bible says that the focal point of the sermon was Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him in their midst. As Peter said, as you yourselves also know him being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God. Peter said, you have taken and by lawless hands have crucified and slain.

Now when Jesus Christ was put to death on Calvary, just outside the walls of Jerusalem, you remember there were two thieves crucified with him on that occasion. One on the right hand and the other on the left. One of the things that Jesus said while on the cross, one of the seven statements made by the Lord. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Now can you imagine having been present on the day that Jesus was put to death? And let's just imagine that you stood at the foot of the cross, and maybe you had been one of those who railed insults into the very face of the Son of God. Maybe you would have taken part in the blasphemy and said, you know, if you're the Son of God, come down from the cross and we'll believe you.

You know, you trusted in God. Let him save you. Feel now, have you? Maybe you had been one of those people, and maybe you had stood and cheered and jeered at the very Son of God. And now you're in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day, and you're numbered among that great host of people, and you're listening as Peter indicts you as having taken part in the crucifixion of Jesus, the Son of God.

Now the Bible says down in verse 36 that Peter. And summing up that great lesson, settling all the let all the house of Israel know assuredly that this same Jesus whom you crucified, God, has made both Lord and Christ. God placed his stamp of approval on his Anointed One. The fact of the matter is that Jesus was raised from the dead.

He ascended to heaven, took a seat at the father's right hand, where he wields all authority, and he is seated upon the throne of David. Not a physical throne, but a spiritual throne. Now note, if you would, what the text says, the text says in verse 36, when they heard this, that is when they heard that great gospel sermon in all of its fullness for the very first time, Luke said, they were convicted.

You see, God's Word has convicting power. Back in John chapter 16, when Jesus was talking to the apostles, he told them that they would be the recipients of the comforter or the Holy Spirit, that he would send him after he left. And so he said, when he comes, here's what he's going to do. He's going to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

So on Pentecost day and city of Jerusalem, first century, Peter and the apostles preached the gospel. And that message did exactly what the Lord Jesus said it would do. It convicted it pierced the hearts and lives of some of those people who were present on that day. Their heart was touched, and because their heart was pricked, or because they were convicted by that divine message.

And you remember the Hebrew writer said, the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword. The Word of God will not return to him void. That's what Isaiah said in Isaiah 55. The Word of God has power. It has convicting power. And those folks on that day, they were cut to the heart.

And you can just imagine here were people that had taken part in the death of Jesus. They had put God's only son to death, and now they realize, look, I took part in putting this man to death. And so they were cut to the heart. And because of that, they wanted to know men and brethren, what shall we do?

So the word of God, it convicted them. But God's Word not only has convicting power, but it also has converting power because they wanted to know men and brethren, what shall we do? Now, just imagine if you can. You're in you're in Jerusalem on Pentecost day, and you've heard this wonderful narration of the life of Jesus and the fact that you had been guilty of putting him to death.

And you are cut to the heart. Your heart is hurting. Maybe tears are streaming down your face and you're thinking, you know what? I put Jesus to death. I had a part in that. And so you want to know what shall we do now? Imagine Peter and the apostles turning to those who took part in the death of Jesus and saying, let me just tell you what, friend.

You don't have one chance. You might as well pack it up and go home. Because I can tell you right now, God in heaven, there is no way, no way he would forgive you now had he said that, had the apostles said that, would you have been crushed? Would you have left there in despair? Now we talk about being hopeless.

I mean, had had those who inspired me and said, let me tell you what. If you think you can be forgiven, I got news for you, friend. You can't be forgiven. Now, is that what they said? Let me tell you what they said. Those people said, what shall we do? And Peter said, number one, you need to repent.

That is, you need to turn away from the life you've been living. You put the Son of God to death. I understand that you're guilty of that. You need to repent of that. Now, Peanut's penitence is a result of godly sorrow. Godly sorrow leads to repentance. So you've been cut to the heart, and you are more than happy to repent, to say, you know what?

I'm not going to ever do anything like that again in terms of I'm not going to ever. I'm not

going to ever take part in sinful activities like that again. That old person that once lived, that old person is dead now and then Peter said, do you need to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins?

And the idea is when you repent and you are baptized, then your sins are washed away. They are remitted. They're forgiven. Now in Ephesians one at verse seven, Paul said in him that's in Christ. He's the person that has the ability to save us. Luke records the apostles in acts chapter four, verse 12 as saying, neither is there salvation in any other.

There is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. You remember Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, the life. No man comes unto the father but by me. John 14 verse six. So Paul said, it's in him that we have redemption. Well, what's the basis of our redemption? Well, he tells us in him we have redemption through his blood.

Now the Hebrew writer said in Hebrews chapter nine and verse 22, without the shedding of blood, there's no remission. When Jesus celebrated the Passover feast with his apostles, as recorded by Matthew in chapter 26, you remember Jesus put in motion what we call the Lord's Supper, that he would establish a kingdom, and that those who became a part of the kingdom would remember his death every first day of the week.

And so on. Matthew 26:28, Jesus said, this is the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Now let's just talk for a moment or two about sin. Sin separates us from God, and there is no one who can claim he or she is not a sinner. No pulse at all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Now, since the transgression of the law in first John three four, sin separates us from God, and the wages of sin is death. And yet Jesus came to redeem us, to reconcile us in the one body. Remember in Ephesians two, in verse 16, Paul said that Jesus reconciled both you and Gentile in one, in one body, under God through the cross.

Paul said, he's our peace. The Lord Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He brings peace to people whose lives have been turned upside down by sin. And so again in Ephesians one verse seven, Paul said, it's in him that we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. So what then, did it cost God to redeem me or buy me back?

Well, it cost Jesus his life. You see, the Lord Jesus was willing to shed his blood, innocent blood, to atone for my sins. Now, do I fully understand that? I don't think I do. I mean, I can read about it, and I have gratitude in my heart that God in heaven was willing to send His Son to die for my sins.

I can read where Paul said God spared not his own son freely gave him up for us all. I can read about it in Second Corinthians chapter eight, where Paul said, the grace of our Lord. You've heard of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he were rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be made rich.

I read where John said unto him, who loved us, and washed us in our sins by his own blood. So it cost Jesus his blood. Peter said, he redeemed us not with corruptible things. Now the exchange that is the medium of exchange for sin wasn't silver and gold, but rather Peter said it was the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot and without blemish.

So the price of redemption it cost Jesus his blood. Now Jesus died on Calvary. He took his blood, and with that blood he bought the church. Acts 20 at verse 28. So now let's go back to acts chapter two again. We said that those people on that day, they were cut to the heart. They had been convicted of sin.

God's word has convicting power. No doubt about that. It has converting power. They wanted to know men and brethren, what shall we do? It also has cleansing power because Peter said, you need to repent and be baptized so that your sins might be remitted, or so that you might have your sins washed away. Acts 22:16 but look at verse 41, in verse 41.

Here's what the record says, that those who gladly received his word were baptized. And that day about 3000 souls were added to them. Well, that's significant because you just imagine some of the people that were pressing on that day, some of whom had part had a part in putting Jesus to death. Well, what if some of those very people that had put Jesus to death?

Let's just say that there were people that were present on that occasion. They had taken part blaspheming the Lord, yelling and jeering at him, mocking him. And then maybe they've now heard the gospel, and they believe it with all their heart, and they have been crushed by what they've heard. And so they've been baptized into Christ. And they can walk away that day knowing without any hesitation that God's forgiven them.

But then in verse 47, the Bible says, the Lord added to the church daily those who are being saved. So now we find they became members of the body of Christ or the church that Isaiah talked about. The Bible tells us that Daniel foretold of that eternal kingdom. John the Baptist preached about it, said, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Jesus himself said it. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew chapter four in verse 17. Now having said all of that, let's just move forward in time for a moment. Let's come to the book of acts. You remember in chapter six, the Bible tells us that the Grecian widows were being neglected, and so the apostles instructed the people to look out among them and find seven men of good report full of the Holy Spirit, to appoint to take care of those Grecian widows, because they needed to accentuate and their lives preaching the word and prayer.

Well, two of the men that were appointed by those in the first century, one was Philip the Evangelist, and the other was Stephen. Well, in acts chapters, in acts chapter seven, we have an account of Stephen preaching the gospel as you, as as we well know, Stephen is giving a narration of the history in many ways of the Israelite nation.

He identified those people on that occasion who were present as being stiff necked, hard hearted. And the Bible tells us that they stoned him, and they laid their garments at the feet of a young man by the name of Saul. In acts chapter eight, verse one, the Bible says that Saul was consenting to his death, that Saul made havoc of the church.

In chapter nine, the Bible tells us that Saul had was still breathing threats and murders against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, asked of him letter, saw that he might go to the Macias band, those who were followers of the way, and bring them back to Jerusalem. Well, as he made his way to Damascus, the Bible says that the Lord appeared to him.

And the Lord asked this question. He said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Saul responded by saying, who are you, Lord? And you remember? Jesus then told him to go into the city, called straight, and he said, it will be told you what you must do. So here's a guy that has been a trauma, a great opponent of Christianity.

I mean, he is wrecking, ransacking the church. In acts chapter 26. He would say, I thought within myself to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus, of Nazareth. Persecuted them to strange cities, foreign cities. He said, when they were put to death, he said, I cast my vote against them. We know for a fact that when Stephen was stoned that Saul of Tarsus was the ringleader.

He was the one in charge of that terrible situation. So he's instructed to go into the city. It's going to be told him what he must do to be saved. The Bible says that for three days Saul of Tarsus is praying and fasting. And the meantime the Lord speaks to a man by the name of and Elias instructs him to go and to meet with Saul of Tarsus.

So here's one and a nice. And I said, Lord, I've heard by many about this man how this man has been a one man wrecking crew on the Lord's church. He's heard the Lord's church. And you want me to go talk to him? The Lord said he's chosen vessel of man. Well, in acts chapter 26, when analyze. When he said to Saul.

And now what tarry style. Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins. Now let's just pause there for a minute. Let's suppose that you had a family member that had been imprisoned by Saul of Tarsus. Or maybe, just maybe, you were related to Stephen. Or maybe you were a friend of Stephen, like Philip the Evangelist. Well, how would you have felt about that?

You think that there would have been some people in the first century? You know what was said about Paul? That he now preaches the faith that he wants destroyed his reputation was far and wide. People knew all about him. So here's a guy that had been doing everything within his power to destroy and undermine the church, to destroy those who were followers of the way.

And now he's a believer. He's obey the gospel. And guess what? God's forgiven him because and and I said, I want you to arise and be baptized and wash away your sins. Now let's move forward in time very quickly. On Paul's third missionary journey. The Bible tells us that he had been to Ptolemy's and then on down to tire and from tire to Sisera.

Coastal cities, all located on the Mediterranean. When Paul made his way to Caesarea, the Bible says that he met up with Philip the Evangelist, who had four virgin daughters. And Luke, in recording this, Esther said that they stayed with Philip for many days. Now wait a minute. You're telling me that Saul, now known as Paul, the guy that had a part in putting Stephen to death, an associate of Philip, somebody that was trying to preach the gospel and help people in the first.

You're telling me that he received him into his house, that he welcomed him and showed hospitality to him? That's what I'm saying. Well, why would he do that? Because God forgave him. And listen, as a member of the body of Christ, I'm a part of a forgiven body. And if I understand the scriptures, right. If somebody wrongs me as a child of God, I have the obligation to forgive them.

Now there are steps to take in that process. You can read Matthew 18, Luke 17, and so on. But here's what Paul said in Ephesians four be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you. So are there people who have been living in the muck and the mire of sin? And when I look at their lives, I'm repulsed at what they've done.

But let's just suppose they obey the gospel. Should I welcome them into the body of Christ? Should I rejoice that I've been saved if I understand the scriptures or I should? You see, Jesus said himself that he came not to the righteous, but he didn't come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners. Jesus said, those that are well, they don't have need of a physician, but those who are sick.

So I'm going to be saved not because of my own goodness, but because of the blood of Christ. I believe the blood of Christ will do exactly what God said it will do. And what's that? It

will forgive me. And as a part of the body of Christ, as a part of a family of believers that have been forgiven, I understand that there are other people out in the world, and let's just say they've been rapists and murderers and serial killers.

And let's just suppose that maybe they have been out drinking and driving and crossed the center line and killed somebody, and then they obey the gospel. Well, what's my attitude? Well, my attitude is they need the gospel. They need to be saved. And then once they're saved, I need to be great. Now, look, that's not to say that there aren't consequences to sin.

There are. And that's not to say if somebody violates the law that once they become a Christian, they shouldn't have to suffer the consequences of what they've done because they should. But what I'm saying is that no one is beyond the reach of redemption. Paul said, where sin abounded, grace did abound. Much more. I'm thankful to God that we can hear, believe and obey the gospel, be saved, our sins washed away, be a member of the church and be faithful.

And one day be with him in heaven. I'll see you back here next week. Until then, God bless.