

# God and Forgiveness



**MEMORY VERSE:** “But God has shown us how much he loves us—it was while we were still sinners that Christ [Jesus] died for us” (Romans 5:8, TEV).

**SAB  
PM**

**HE WAS ONE OF THE** worst murderers in American history. Jeffrey Dahmer had sexually abused and then murdered and actually ate 17 young men. How could any person sink so low? Dahmer, in his own horrible way, was a perfect example of the words of Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, who wrote: “Man is more frightening than his skeleton.”

But Jeffrey Dahmer had, in the last months of his life (he was murdered by fellow prisoners) repented<sup>1</sup> of his sin. He had been baptized in the prison whirlpool. He had openly confessed<sup>2</sup> faith in Jesus. There was no chance of Mr. Dahmer being freed. For this reason, his confession<sup>3</sup> of faith appeared to be sincere. God alone knows Mr. Dahmer’s heart. God alone is the Judge of his soul. But the story of Jeffrey Dahmer brings to light one of the greatest and most wonderful of all Bible truths: God’s willingness to forgive even the worst of sinners.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** When did God start loving us? Did the Cross create God’s love for humanity?<sup>4</sup> What part does confession have in the plan of salvation? Why is confession necessary? Is God’s love and willingness to forgive sin greater than sin?

\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 5.

<sup>1</sup>repented—having said you are sorry for your sins and that you want to stop sinning.

<sup>2</sup>confessed—said that you believe in Jesus.

<sup>3</sup>confession—to say you believe in Jesus.

<sup>4</sup>humanity—all the people of the world.

**SUN AN ETERNAL<sup>5</sup> LOVE.**

The salvation of the human race is not an accident. Our salvation has not arisen from a last-minute act because God did not expect sin. God's love for sinners appeared even before there were sinners, even before the foundation (beginning) of this world. We are saved by a God who loves us throughout eternity.<sup>6</sup> This is difficult for us to understand for several reasons. One of the reasons is that we as humans cannot even begin to understand eternity. But being loved by an eternal love is a comforting thought.

**Write down in your own words the important message of each verse below.**

1 Corinthians 2:7 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Ephesians 1:3, 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Revelation 13:8 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



**God loved us even before He made the world.**

Perhaps the most important point to remember is that God loved us from before we began. Jesus' death on the cross did not change the way God feels about us. God does not love us because Jesus died for us. Instead, Jesus died for us because God already loved us.

What Jesus' death really did was open the way for God to save us from the terrible results of our sins. God did this in such a way that He did not break the moral order<sup>7</sup> of the universe. God decided to limit Himself in some way. He had to forgive sinners in a way that would meet His own character as a righteous (holy) and merciful<sup>8</sup> God. If all He had to do was "forgive," there would have been no need for the Cross. The Cross solved

<sup>5</sup>eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

<sup>6</sup>eternity—life without end; forever.

<sup>7</sup>moral order—the system of maintaining God's law and justice (fairness) throughout the universe.

<sup>8</sup>merciful—full of mercy; mercy is kindness we do not deserve.

the problem of how God could be both righteous and merciful at the same time (Romans 3:26).

**Imagine living in a universe with only one of the following choices: (1) There is no God; (2) There is some kind of God who does not care about us; (3) There is a God, but He hates us and likes to see us suffer; (4) There is a God who loves us more than we think He can. Take some time to go through each choice. How does each choice change your understanding of what your life means? Why is our understanding of God's attitude<sup>9</sup> toward us important?**

### **MON** CONFESSION.

**“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just [fair] to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”<sup>10</sup> (1 John 1:9).**

God's attitude toward us is an attitude of acceptance and forgiveness. So why must we confess our sins? Does confession make us righteous (holy) before God? Does confession tell God something about us He does not already know? Does confession make God less angry with our actions? Does confession change God's attitude toward us?

<sup>9</sup>attitude—how God feels and thinks about us.

<sup>10</sup>unrighteousness—not being holy.

<sup>11</sup>compare—show how things are the same.

<sup>12</sup>sanctification—becoming like Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit; Jesus living in us so we develop His character; Jesus' work of making us holy.

**If your answers to the above questions were all “No,” then write in the space below your reasons for believing we need to confess our sins to God. Then compare<sup>11</sup> your reasons with what is written after your reasons.**

Confession changes us. Confession does not change God. We confess because God has announced that we are not His enemies any more. Confession is a way of showing that we know how terrible sin is to God. It helps us understand the problems sin causes. It also helps us realize how much it cost God to save us from sin. Confession is admitting that we are sinful and need a Savior. Confession makes our personal faith in Jesus stronger. Confessing our sin to God is one part of the sanctification<sup>12</sup> process Paul talked about in Philippians 2:12, 13.

Confession does not make God forgive us. Confession is a method God chose to help us understand how painful sin is to God and to ourselves. It also is a method of helping us heal spiritually from the results of sin. This healing principle can be seen in everyday affairs. See how much better we feel after we confess to a person we have wronged. So how much better we should feel after we confess to God!

**Why would it be foolish to talk about receiving forgiveness for our**

sin if we were not required to admit what sin needs to be forgiven?

**TUE** “FRIEND, YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN.”

“Some men came carrying a paralytic.<sup>13</sup> . . . When Jesus saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend your sins are forgiven’ ” (Luke 5:18-20, NIV).



None of us would want to be in the paralytic’s shoes. But he did experience something that none of us ever have. He heard Jesus say to him, “ ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’ ” Wouldn’t you love to actually hear Jesus call you His friend?

Talk about hope of salvation! Today, we cannot hear Jesus speak to us. But we have His words in the Bible. The Bible gives us the same hope of salvation the paralytic had.

What do the following verses all have in common? Romans 4:7; Ephesians 4:32; 1 John 1:9; 1 John

2:12; Colossians 1:14; Colossians 2:13. What do these verses do for your faith and your life?

Many people knowingly accept the idea that God loves and forgives them. But they do not seem to realize that God’s love and forgiveness can make a difference in their life. They are afraid of eternal destruction. They are bothered by guilt. And they suffer from spiritual loneliness and emotional depression. Their religious experience tells them they are not safe with God.

Some of these people say they really cannot *believe* they are forgiven because they do not *feel* they are forgiven. Other people say they have emotional blocks that go as far as their childhood. These blocks keep them from experiencing God’s forgiveness. But if we let Jesus pull us closer to Him as He did the paralytic, nothing can stop us from being forgiven.

**What other things keep people from believing God forgives them? What would you do about each one of these?**

**WED** FORGIVENESS GREATER THAN SIN.

“The law was added so that the trespass [lawbreaking] might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Romans 5:20, NIV).

<sup>13</sup>paralytic—a person who cannot walk.

God's love is a gift. A gift is something we cannot earn. It is the same way with His forgiveness. God's forgiveness is one of the greatest examples of His love. To receive forgiveness for even the most terrible sin (such as Jeffrey Dahmer's sin) requires a love that we as humans cannot fully understand. The same as beggars, we can only accept what God has offered us.

The New Testament writers say that God's grace is much greater than sin. We can see how terrible sin is by looking around the world. But the New Testament teaches that the power of God's love and forgiveness is much greater than all the evil we see. The power of God's love for us and His willingness to forgive our sin go way above all the evil in the world. This is because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our sins.

In Romans 5, Paul uses such words as *overflowing* and *much more* when he contrasts<sup>14</sup> God's grace with sin. All of Romans 5 sets up a series of differences between grace and sin.

**In order to understand Romans 5, read verses 9, 10, 15, 17, 20. How is God's grace, love, and forgiveness contrasted<sup>15</sup> in each of these verses?**

**What is Paul's message in Romans 5:1-5? How could you use Paul's words to help someone who is struggling with faith because of sin in their life? Write a small note to that person that could uplift her or him.**

<sup>14</sup>contrasts—shows how things are different.

<sup>15</sup>contrasted—shown to be different.

## **THU** GOD'S FORGIVENESS AS AN EXAMPLE.

**“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?’ ‘No, not seven times,’ answered Jesus, ‘but seventy times seven’ ” (Matthew 18:21, 22, TEV).**

**Is there some point at which God's forgiveness can be used up? Write your answer with your reasons in the space below. What examples from the Bible can you find to support your reasons?**

The Jewish teachers taught that the law required God's people to forgive someone three times. Peter knew that Jesus usually went “beyond” the law. So Peter suggested doubling the requirement of the law and adding one more. In addition, the number seven symbolized completeness in the Jewish culture. (Read Ellen G. White, *Christ's [Jesus'] Object Lessons*, p. 243.)

Jesus' answer to Peter must have surprised Peter and the rest of the people who heard Him. It challenged Peter's belief that forgiveness was an action that could be counted, like money in the bank. Each time someone forgives, he or she keeps a record until the limit is reached. Then that person can fight back. Talk about living according “to the letter of the law.” (This

thinking is almost the same as one of the rules of war: Soldiers are not supposed to shoot paratroopers<sup>16</sup> while they are coming down from the air. But once they hit the ground, then the soldiers can shoot them.)



We are not to count the number of times we forgive someone the way we count our money.

What was Jesus saying in Matthew 18:21? Is there something magic about the number “seventy times seven”? (The Greek can be read 490 or 77.) Did Jesus really want people to count up to 490 or 77 and then stop forgiving?

**FRI** **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** *Steps to Christ* [Jesus], “God’s Love for Man,” pp. 9–15; *Christ’s* [Jesus’]

*Object Lessons*, “The Measure of Forgiveness,” pp. 243–251.

“The heart that has once tasted Jesus’ love cries out continually for more. . . . Every example of God to the soul increases our ability to know and to love Him more. The continual cry of the heart is, ‘More of Jesus,’ and ever the Holy Spirit’s answer is, ‘Much more.’ Romans 5:9,10. For God delights to do ‘so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of.’ Ephesians 3:20, TEV. Jesus gave so much for the salvation of lost people. The Holy Spirit was given to Jesus in full. In the same way, the Holy Spirit will be given to every one of Jesus’ followers when they surrender their hearts to Him.”—Adapted from *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 20, 21.



<sup>16</sup>paratroopers—soldiers who use parachutes to jump out of planes.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. “ ‘You have heard that it was said, “Love your friends, hate your enemies.” But now I [Jesus] tell you: love your enemies and pray for those [people] who persecute [attack] you’ ”(Matthew 5:43, 44, TEV). If God commands us to love our enemies, does He not love His enemies? If God loves His enemies, does He love His chief enemy, Satan? Would God have been willing to forgive even Satan if Satan had truly repented? If God loves even His worst enemies, then it is so sad that they will be destroyed because they could have been forgiven. Why do you agree or not agree with these thoughts?
2. Why do some people feel it is necessary to “earn” a forgiveness that is freely given?
3. How does knowing there is no way we can destroy God’s love or willingness to forgive make it possible for you to be more honest with God than you can be with even your spouse,<sup>17</sup> parents, children, friends, coworkers, and fellow church members?
4. What do you say to someone who says, “If I confess and am forgiven, why do I not feel forgiven? Why does the burden (load) of guilt still sit heavily upon me?” Or what do you say to the person who says, “Look, I confessed my sins, and God has forgiven them. Now I do not want to hear any more about them, or deal with the problems they have caused. I am forgiven. That is all that is important to me”?

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<sup>17</sup>spouse—husband or wife.