

Forgive and Forget

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness does not seem like a principle that would be difficult to apply. For many Christians, however, the forgetting part is what plagues them.

Somewhere along the way, some believers have come to think that they can exercise forgiveness and continue to remember what was done to them. Yet, throughout the Bible, the principle of forgiveness is expressed together with the principle of forgetting.

As this booklet will show, these two principles—forgiving that includes forgetting—are forever linked in God's way of dealing with us. The Holy Spirit longs to gain control of our hearts so that we can really forgive and forget and continue to walk in love.

Chapter One

WHY WE MUST FORGET WHAT WE FORGIVE

“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

“But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, *neither* will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15).

“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

“Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness” (Colossians 1:9-11).

There is a problem in the Church today. It is a problem with a certain area of sin. Scores of very respectable Christians commit this, and to some degree they are established in this sin. It is hidden in the heart. It is covered up, but it exists. I am talking about the importance of giving to God what belongs to Him.

The First of Everything Belongs to God

From the very beginning in the Garden of Eden, God instituted the principle of giving back to Him of all that He has given us (Genesis 2, Genesis 14, Exodus 13, Leviticus 27, Deuteronomy 26). The purpose was to cover us from self-consciousness and keep us conscious of Him as the source of our provision.

When we are walking according to God's plan, we can sense His presence; and instead of being self-conscious, we are God-conscious. Whatever we give, we are to give freely and with thanksgiving because of all we have received. So whether it is in giving our tithe, giving our time, or giving forgiveness to someone who has done something against us, we are to do it without holding a grudge. And the only way we can do that is to first be occupied with the pre-eminent Giver, Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, even among faithful believers, our problems with forgetting what we forgive stem from self-occupation—considering the severity of what was done to us instead of considering that God completely blotted out our own sin. But when we are occupied with Christ and make His purpose our priority from moment to moment, we will have more than enough grace to give and forgive and even forget the worst offence we could imagine.

The Possibility of Forgetting

Forgiveness for the believer is not an option; it is a commandment with a blessing (Matthew 6:14). Still, we often overlook the principle of divine forgiveness in the Word of God—forgiveness that also forgets the offense.

We have been forgiven of everything because Jesus Christ satisfied the requirements of justice by paying the price for our sin with His Blood. Now, God's justice has been satisfied, and we can only respond one way. That means, when I hear that someone has maligned or gossiped about me, I mentally forgive that person and forget the offense right on the spot.

On the subject of forgiving, the passive participle contained in the Greek text of Matthew

6:14 is a gnomic aorist tense, which speaks of timelessness. It implies that my reaction to what someone does to me could happen in an instant. In no time at all and with no deliberation as to whether I should or should not, I can forgive. But, the quality of divine forgiveness is preceded by a conscience that has received and believed the Finished Work of Calvary.

When God's thoughts have first priority in my thought life, I am neither self-conscious nor people-conscious. When the forgiveness that comes with the Finished Work is established in my mind, I am not sin-conscious concerning my own or anyone else's failure. Instead, I am conscious of the Finished Work that Jesus accomplished on Calvary, nearly two thousand years ago.

The moment that someone does something to me, I forgive him and I forget it. In cases where I am led to help someone who has a deep-rooted problem, then I go to him alone and handle the situation. Still, I always forgive instantly with the Finished Work. God's forgiveness is complete. Therefore, I must not hold on to the knowledge of anyone's failure. I must turn that knowledge over to the Lord. It belongs to Him.

Transgressions Blotted Out

“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).

“I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isaiah 43:25).

“I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isaiah 44:22).

God’s declaration when it comes to our sin is this: “I will forgive, and I will not remember.” And for us, forgiveness can never be a reality apart from the complete thought of God on the subject.

Isaiah 43:25 shows us that God’s forgiveness is never divorced from forgetting. This is the vital part of forgiveness. Forgiveness really isn’t forgiveness if it involves remembering the sin that Christ already paid for in the Finished Work atonement.

In Isaiah 44:22, God says that He blotted out

the sins and transgressions of His people as He dissolves a cloud or the mist—so the sins could not be seen, nor could they hide the glory of the Son. He bid His people to return to Him, because they had been redeemed.

Is this true, in relationship to your life and my life? Absolutely! When God forgives us of a sin, He once and for all forgets it in the same instant. Hebrews 8:12 and 10:17 tell us that He will be merciful to our unrighteousness; our sins and our iniquities He will remember no more. *Never* will He remember them! That is His promise. He will not bring up a sin next month or next year. He forgives and forgets.

Chapter Two

THE ATTITUDE OF LOVE

“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:13)

“Forgiving” in the above verse is a present middle participle of *charizomai* in the Greek text. The word refers to forgetting, without penalizing the guilty party by inflicting their emotions with bad memories. God’s terms always mean that we are to forget instantly what we have forgiven because of the eternal life in us. Before the other person changes or says he is sorry, according to God’s standard he is forgiven and the matter has been forgotten.

Under the grace system, what has been done can never be remembered. God does not remember what sin we have done. He doesn’t put a “but” in His statements about forgiveness. He never remembers what we have done. He blots

out our sins and totally erases them from His memory and buries them in His sea of forgetfulness.

The Holy Spirit's Mindset

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

“He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:18-19).

“But what if someone repents and doesn't really mean it?” you ask.

That is none of my business. Once I forgive, I switch into a 1 Corinthians 13 attitude of love that thinks no evil. I can express a love that will not fail. I become a 1 Corinthians 13 advocate of the Holy Spirit's mindset, which is the mind of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is forgetting; forgetting is more than erasing someone's sins, it is blotting them out forever.

As simple as this principle is, it is not very often preached this way. If we forgive, but then remember what we forgave, we are gravediggers. The grave stinks, and we need to leave what we

have buried *alone*.

Honey in the Rock

“So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

“He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock” (Deuteronomy 32:12-13).

In counseling sessions, I hear things said such as this, “I forgive him now, just as I forgave him two years ago.” Now, why is something that happened two years before still in the memory? It is because there was not real, godly forgiveness at that time. The forgiveness that was offered was done with regard to human merit. It was not done under the grace system. It was a carnal Christian operating in the flesh, so the matter was never really forgiven.

What about someone who continues in sin? The Bible is very clear that there should be no fellowship with that person until he repents and gets right with God. We do not hold anything against him, but neither do we have fellowship with him, except within our prayers.

I don't have to be a gravedigger, and I don't

have to make my home among the tombs. If I do, I will be associating with evil. There is honey in the Rock for me. It is the Lord Jesus Christ. I leave my sins and the sins of others on the altar of the Mercy Seat, for the Blood to cover. He covers us completely.

Chapter Three
BURY THE PAST

“And Joseph called the name of his firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, had made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house” (Genesis 41:51).

Did God make Joseph forgive the sins of his brothers? No, God made him forget all his toil. God can forgive seven times in a day (Proverbs 24:16) because He simply deals with us as sinners. Forgetting the past, He moves on to the future (see Philippians 3:13-14).

In Exodus, when Pharaoh and his army chased Israel into the Red Sea, the water came up and covered them. They died and were buried in the Red Sea. Every sin that has tried to catch up to us, to overcome us with the stench of the past, has been buried in the Red Sea. So let’s not be gravediggers. Bury your accusations. Bury your reflections on failure. Bury what someone has said about you or someone else.

Bury what your natural viewpoint is trying to bring back to you. Bury it! Why? All of it has been crucified and buried with Christ. Just agree with God that it is out of your life forever.

Life is too precious to dig up graves and unearth dead corpses, trying to find out what you and others have done wrong. Yet, it happens, even among the seemingly spiritual people. There are Christians who cannot forgive other Christians. They carry something against each other. One didn't like something the other one said or did (or what he *thought* the other one said or did). They cannot forget it. Under certain circumstances, one of these people will open up and say what they really feel. It is simply a matter of personal differences, which they have turned into an offense, and neither one wants to yield.

Overcoming Feelings of Indifference

Differences are okay, and they are not necessarily sin. Rarely do people gossip and complain about honest differences. But indifference to the Finished Work is another matter. When something digs at me, it takes first place—the place that belongs to God—and makes me indifferent to others and to the Word of God. I may not feel comfortable around someone, and I feel as

though I have to fake Christian love. But I cannot afford to be indifferent toward anyone, and especially I can't afford to be indifferent to the Word of God.

These are simply sayings, but they are life changing and potentially world changing. When this truth is settled in your heart, you can always get back in the saddle (just as Gene Autry used to sing!).

Some people just stay lost in their memories of what people did to them. But, how can anyone bear to have a spirit that remembers what someone has done to him?

Two of my old neighbors, back where I grew up, used to love to fight. They even went to court over a tiny piece of land. The one that won the case started bragging about it. But God spoke to him, and he went to the other to ask for forgiveness for causing such a mess. The offended party said, "I forgive you. What's more, I am going to bury the ax. But I am always going to leave the handle showing, just to remember what you are really like!"

That is *not* God's heart, and it is not the way God wants us to live.

Increasing in a Worthy Walk

Remember those verses that we read in the beginning of this booklet:

“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9-10).

“Increasing in the knowledge of God” means that we are to continue expanding the areas where we can allow the Holy Spirit to apply the truth we have appropriated. We are to keep expanding so that we automatically respond in the Finished Work no matter what horrific thing may happen to us.

“Walking worthy” refers to the way that we conduct ourselves as believers in the affairs of life. “Being fruitful” speaks of repeating the action of receiving truth about God’s will. As we receive that truth, we experience growth and we enjoy the increase of our progress in doctrine. We begin to develop godly habits, making ad-

vances as we study specific truth: line upon line, precept upon precept, going from grace to grace and from glory to glory.

Doctrine—the mind of God revealed to men specifically and categorically in His Word—is the real instrument of advancement and enlargement as we progress toward maturity. Our priority must be to exercise the Finished Work of Christ in every situation. We must recognize that the first of everything belongs to God. And this must start with a real understanding of forgiveness.

God gave us forgiveness while we were guilty, before we asked, and without our repentance. Therefore, we cannot even presume to withhold forgiveness from anyone—including ourselves. Forgiveness belongs to God. Furthermore, He has forgotten all we have ever done against His will. It is by forgiving just as God has forgiven us that we can forget.

This is what we must learn to experience in the power of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

We cannot sit still as Christians. The challenges to our faith are always expanding and growing in their intensity, therefore we must expand and grow in our capacity to live in truth. The truth is this: To forgive is also to forget. To experience any other reality is to live apart from the truth.

The next thing someone does to you may be the worst thing anyone has ever done. You may be faced with having to forgive someone of something you never before imagined would have happened.

That is why we have to keep expanding in our knowledge of His will, of His provision, and of His plan. We need to be ready to apply God's system of grace in every situation. Then we will automatically be ready for the next big trial we face in the area of forgiving, forgetting, and loving one another.