

FORGETTING WHAT LIES BEHIND

Memories can be such precious blessings. Figuratively speaking, they can indeed be unseen angels that comfort us when we mourn, inspire us when we are discouraged, and teach us when we desperately need knowledge and wisdom.

But, memories can also be loathsome curses. Figuratively speaking, they can be unseen demons that bring us down when we ought to be on top of the world, wet blankets that extinguish our zeal when we should be full of enthusiasm and hope, and faulty guides that doom us to repeat the mistakes of the past when we desperately need to be raising the bar for the next generation.

Philippians 3:13-14

We must selectively forget some things that lie behind us, that are a part of our past, otherwise they will distract us from some things that lie before us that should be part of our future and would be if we gave them our undivided attention and best possible effort.

But how can we just forget certain things that lie behind us?

As much as we'd love to be able to selectively erase certain things from our memory banks, we just can't do it.

But that's not what scripture means by forgetting. Though Paul forgot what he left behind (Philippians 3:13), he could still call them to mind (Philippians 3:5-6).

In scripture forgetting means thinking about the past in a way that does not hinder the future. The forgetting of forgiving does "not erase the bitter past. A healed memory is not a deleted memory. Instead, forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future" (Louis B. Smedes).

This is the way Lot's wife should have forgotten what was behind her when she left Sodom. Gen 19:15-17A, 26

This is the way some disciples should have forgotten what was behind them when Jesus told them to follow Him. Luke 9:59-62.

This is the way God—who knows everything past, present, and future—forgets when He forgives. Yes, He remembers our sins no more, but in the sense that He no longer holds them against us. He still knows what we did wrong, but He never again allows them to negatively effect our standing with Him or His attitude toward us. He only calls our forgiven sins to mind to help us learn from them or to impart some other spiritual blessing.

Brethren, as we begin our journey together, I am convinced that one of the most important things we must do in the present is forget certain things of the past so we can fully and effectively focus on the future.

HERE ARE SEVEN THINGS IN OUR PAST THAT WE ABSOLUTELY MUST FORGET AND LEAVE BEHIND.

- 1. We must forget about doing things we did in the past that are not authorized by God.** Proverbs 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Proverbs 3:5-8.
- 2. We must leave behind looking fondly at sin's passing pleasures.** Col 3:5; Num 11:4-6, 10; Php 3:7-8.
- 3. We must forget about making excuses for doing less than we can and should be doing.** Matthew 25:24-27, 30.
- 4. We must leave behind self-righteously focusing first and foremost on the sins of other people instead of humbly on our own.** Matthew 7:1-5.
- 5. We must forget doing things that are no longer expedient.** We must adapt to one another and do what is best given our new circumstances. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.
- 6. We must leave behind brooding and being angry over the sins people have committed against us and confront them as we ought.** There are two types of forgiveness in scripture.

- A. The first type of forgiveness is unconditional. Jesus refers to this type of forgiveness in Mark 11:25 and Luke 23:34A.
- 1) Regardless of what anyone has done against us, no matter how deeply someone has hurt us, we cannot brood over it. 1 Corinthians 13:5. “The verb is *logizomai*, which means ‘to calculate.’ William Barclay says that the word ‘is an accountant’s word. It is the word that is used for entering up an item in a ledger so that it will not be forgotten’” (Leon Morris). “Love will always keep a record of the many kindnesses it receives, but never a record of wrongs done to it. Love does not nurse grudges” (Paul Butler). *Agape* “love does not allow its mind to dwell on the offenses which it has incurred. To do this would be to allow bitterness and resentment to fill one’s life. Love will not allow that to happen” (Mike Willis).
 - 2) Rather, we must let our anger go. Ephesians 4:26. Otherwise, we hurt God (James 1:19-20), other people (Hebrews 12:15), and ourselves (Mark 11:25-26). When Nelson Mandela was asked why he was not bitter about his imprisonment, he echoed what God has long taught us, “Resentment is like a glass of poison that a man drinks; then he sits down and waits for his enemy to die.” An unknown author said it well, “To forgive is to set the prisoner free—and then discover the prisoner was you” (author unknown).
- B. The second type of forgiveness is conditional. Jesus refers to this type of forgiveness in Luke 17:3. Just because we quit brooding and let our anger go does not mean we can ignore that someone has sinned against us. We must confront the sinner in hopes of moving him to repentance and full reconciliation with God and man.
- C. We unconditionally forget certain things with the first type of forgiveness to best help sinners obtain the second type of forgiveness so everyone forgets the whole thing ever happened—something we desperately need to do. “Again and again it is the experience of life that, if a quarrel, or a difference, or a dispute is not healed immediately, it can go on breeding worse and worse trouble as time goes on. Bitterness breeds bitterness. It has often happened that a quarrel between two people has descended to their families, and has been inherited by future generations, and has in the end succeeded in splitting a church or society in two. If at the very beginning one of the parties had had the grace to apologize or to admit fault, a grievous situation need never have arisen. If ever we are at variance with someone else, we must get the situation put right straight away. It may mean that we must be humble enough to confess that we were wrong and to make apology; it may mean that, even if we were in the right, we have to take the first step towards healing the breach. When personal relations go wrong, in nine cases out of ten immediate action will mend them; but if that immediate action is not taken, they will continue to deteriorate, and the bitterness will spread in an ever-widening circle” (William Barclay).

7. **We must forget about being content with what we’ve already done for God.** Php 3:12-15; 2 Tim 4:6-8

BUT HOW DO WE FORGET THESE THINGS AND LEAVE THEM BEHIND? *We must ...*

1. **Focus on how we curse God, other people, and ourselves if we do not forget these things and how we bless God, other people, and ourselves if we leave them behind.** “Remember Lot’s wife” (Lk 17:32).
2. **Examine ourselves and be honest with ourselves about ourselves.**
3. **Believe it is possible to forget these things and that the pain is worth the gain.** If Esau and Joseph could forget, we can forget and like them we will be amply blessed for doing so.
4. **Whole-heartedly repent.** “One thing I do” (Philippians 3:13).
5. **Rely on the power of God.** Genesis 41:51A; Philippians 4:13; Ephesians 3:20.
6. **Grow-up.** 1 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 3:15.

Compiled by Tim Norman, 03/24/19