

"I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

A guilty conscience is a terrible companion whose voice cannot be silenced. Its owner may try to quiet the nagging accusations, but from beginning to end the effort is useless. Sleep becomes elusive, and nights appear to be endless when a troubled soul wrestles with problems of guilt.

I knew a Christian lady who suffered mental anguish because of her inability to forget what she had done in her youth. She believed in the Savior and rejoiced in the greatness of His salvation, but each time she remembered deeds performed in earlier years, she was overwhelmed by remorse. One day another lady said' "There is no need to worry about those sins. God has blotted them out." Her reply was instantaneous, "Oh no, those sins will never be forgiven, nor forgotten-never!" Unfortunately, that troubled woman never intended to forgive herself.

Nevertheless, the promise made by God to His people will never change. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." When God forgives, He forgets! If the Lord has buried our sins, we should never dig them up again.

The Greatness of His Promise

This promise was given to the Hebrew nation, and it supplied an insight into the nature of the Almighty. The prophet Micah wrote, "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" (Mic. 7:18). Israel had committed many abominable errors, but there were no restrictive limits to the mercy of the Lord. There were no strings attached when He said' "I will remember their sin no more."

Since God has promised to forget our mistakes, we should use our failures as stepping stones to greater heights of efficiency. Simon Peter turned the nightmare of an agonizing defeat into the glorious triumph of a personal Pentecost.

The Guarantee of His Promise

Jeremiah wrote, "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for

a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; . . . if those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever" (Jer. 31:35-37). God holds the firmament in His hands, and the same sun and moon which shone upon Adam and Eve continue to shine upon us. These features have remained from the beginning of time and will continue to do so. The promises of God are equally reliable. They cannot fail, and that means our sins can never be resurrected.

The Gladness of His Promise

Perhaps David had similar thoughts when he wrote the fourth psalm, "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me and hear my prayer... Thou hast put gladness in my heart . . . I will both lay me down in peace and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (vv. 1, 7,8). The sweet singer of Israel often disappointed God, but the compassion of the Lord never failed.

When David repented of his sins, he was graciously forgiven, and this realization thrilled his soul. He had gladness in his heart,

WHEN YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR PAST, REMEMBER JEREMIAH 31
peace in his mind, and restful sleep throughout his nights. His writings reveal the peace of a contented soul. He did not lie awake at night worrying about what might have been. The God who held the universe held him. He was safe.

Christians should never be tormented by troublesome memories. John said' "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). And in the same chapter he wrote, "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4). It is impossible for a Christian to be filled with gladness when he is haunted by memories of former indiscretions. In Horatio Spafford's well-known words:

My sin - O) the bliss of this glorious thought-
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more:
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

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WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE QUITTING, REMEMBER
PAUL, DEMAS, AND REVELATION 2:10

"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."

This is an age of "drop-outs," that has brought nothing new to our world. Viewers of television programs are accustomed to commercials that warn students against dropping out of school, stating that better jobs and brighter futures await graduates from institutions of learning. The Bible also warns people against similar dangers that await those who forget and forsake their religious commitments. Initial enthusiasm for Christ and His kingdom is of little value if a person forsakes the cause he or she once championed. If the Christian life is compared with a race, then the athlete must remember the finish line is not halfway down the course. A runner who desires a trophy must continue-to the end!

Paul probably considered these facts when, sitting in his prison at Rome, he thought of his former companion, Demas. Regretfully, the apostle wrote to Timothy, saying, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). It is not known what became of the young backslider, but there is reason to believe that later he wished he had been a wiser man. It is challenging to read the words of the Lord spoken to the church at Smyrna, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). The Christian experience may be summarized under three words: commencing, continuing, and conquering. Unless the first is followed by the second, something precious is lost.

Evidently Paul's young companion had made a commitment to Christ; otherwise he would not have been with the apostle in Rome. His subsequent experience may be considered under four words: his delight, distraction, departure, and disappearance. Paul had some knowledge of each of these phases in the life of his young helper. Did Demas quit because of the difficult circumstances that surrounded him? Was he disappointed and disillusioned when things continued to deteriorate? Was he afraid of the future, or fascinated by the night life of Rome? When Demas forsook Paul, he walked into eternal obscurity. If he lived to be an old man, he was probably dismayed with his memories. He lost his contentment and his crown

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and became a drop-out from the greatest enterprise in the world.
Perhaps Paul was thinking of this when he wrote, "I have fought a
good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Hence

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forth there is laid up for me a crown (2 Tim 4:7-8). The apostle
made mistakes, but from the day he met the Lord outside of Damas-
cus until he met Him again in heaven, Paul never faltered. Maybe he
would have appreciated the moral of the little poem:

Two frogs fell into a deep cream bowl;
One was an optimistic soul,
But the other took the gloomy view,
"We shall drown!" he cried without adieu.
So with a last despairing cry,
He flung up his legs and said, "Goodbye!"
Quote the other frog with a merry grin,
"I can't get out, but I won't give in;
I'll swim around 'til my strength is spent,
Then will I die the more content."
Bravely he swam 'til it would seem
His struggles began to chum the cream.
On the top of the butter at last he stopped,
And out of the bowl he gaily hopped.
What is the moral? It's easily found,
If you can't hop out, keep swimming around!
Author Unknown

If diamonds could speak they might complain of harsh treat-
ment received during their preparation to become finished gems.
There is a great difference between the stone found in the mines
and the jewel of exquisite beauty placed in a royal crown. There
is an even greater difference between the rough, unlovely sinner,
and the finished product mentioned by John. The apostle wrote,
"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear
what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we
shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). If a
diamond had the capability of dismissing its polisher, it would
ruin the best plans ever conceived. That is true of any Christian
who quits in the midst of God's redeeming operation. The Bible
says, "Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work
of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Never give up!

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WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE YOUR SHIP
IS SINKING, REMEMBER ACTS 27:24

"Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and,
lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

During the early months of 1941, my wife and I were traveling in
the upper part of the Amazon River. One day, with other tourists, we
visited an Indian village. When we left the elegant cruise ship to step
into the jungle, we entered another world! Some of the local people
were very primitive. Their huts were crude, and the forests reached
the water's edge. The arrival of such a large ship had caused great

WHEN YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR PAST, REMEMBER JEREMIAH 31 excitement It provided the local people with the opportunity to sell their curios. Two of our party saw a homemade boat, and wanted to have their photograph taken sitting in it. They gave their camera to another visitor and asked if he would take their picture. All the people standing near were intent on watching the operation as he said, "Smile," but no one noticed the boat was sinking. Within minutes my friends were sitting in the Amazon River. Everybody laughed except the pair in the boat whose enthusiasm had been dampened!

Paul had a similar experience, but for him the event was not a cause for humor. It was terrifying. His ship had been battered by a great storm, and his prayers had apparently been in vain. The prospect of an early death was very real. Luke, the physician traveling with the apostle, wrote, "And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship. And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away (Acts 27:18-20).

Amid such frightening circumstances, Paul's attitude shone like a beam from a lighthouse. For all who fear their ship is sinking, Luke's account offers help.

An Unfinished Task

God said, "Fear not, thou must be brought before Caesar." As long as a man's life is in alignment with the will of God, it is impossible for him to die until God takes him. If his ship sinks, he can only fall into the everlasting arms of God's tenderness. Many people live as prodigals and only remember God in times of acute adversity. It was not desperation that encouraged Paul to pray. It

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was total dependence upon his Heavenly Father. His perfect love for the Lord cast out the fear of imminent death.

An Unwavering Trust

An elderly lady in the Highlands of Scotland said, "If you thatch your house in the summer, you need not fear the winter." There is a great difference between trust and terror. When confronted by the same storm, the other passengers on Paul's ship became desperately afraid. They had no idea what needed to be done and no Savior from whom to seek help. On the contrary, Paul spent time in the presence of God. He who often visits the mercy seat can find the way there even in the dark! The apostle knew circumstances could never change the compassion of God. Paul believed the Lord held the oceans in His hand. If God permitted the ship to sink, He could make even that catastrophe provide for the welfare of His children.

An Unexpected Thought

The apostle said to his companions, "Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island" (Acts 27:26). He discovered that even in the midst of the terrible storm, God was fulfilling His purpose. The entire tempest was only a part of a greater plan to reach people with the Gospel. As far as Paul was concerned all things were ordered by the Almighty, and since He was directing the operation, the future of the sailors was assured. He did not see the threatening cloud but rather the silver edges around it—sure evidence the sun was still shining.

An Unmistakable Triumph

When Paul said to his shipmates, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me," he

WHEN YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR PAST, REMEMBER JEREMIAH 31 exhibited unlimited faith (Acts 27:25). This explains the remarkable effect upon his companions. "Then were they all of good cheer" (Acts 27:36).

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
'Are big with mercy and will break
In blessing on your heart.

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WHEN YOUR SPIRITUAL ENTHUSIASM
IS WANING, REMEMBER PSALM 39:3

"While I was musing the fire burned."

Solomon was a king to whom God gave great wisdom. He asked, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" (Prov. 6:27). His question was most likely based on personal experience. When he considered the worship of God, fires of devotion burned within his soul, and his outward appearance reflected the glory of God. When he considered the carnal pleasures of self-indulgence, his ideas led to illicit associations with foreign women, and lust destroyed his soul. Modern techniques fight fire with fire. Firemen deliberately light fires ahead of the main blaze so that the dry bush will not supply fuel for the approaching inferno.

Illicit thoughts within the mind, if unchecked, lead to destruction. The only effective preventative is to kindle holy fires which remove potential hazards. David apparently knew this also for he wrote, "While I was musing the fire burned." When his mind was filled with thoughts of God, his soul was delivered from temptation. Perhaps Paul expressed the same truth when he urged the Christians in Ephesus to wear "a helmet of salvation" (Eph. 6:17).

David... Who Compromised

"And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed' and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and . . . saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman" (2 Sam 11:2-3). The night was still and serene, but the king's heart was pounding! The day had been hot and stifling, and vainly seeking rest, David had lain upon his bed. The afternoon seemed endless, but when the evening breezes offered respite from the oppressive conditions, the king walked on the roof of his palace.

Suddenly, he saw a very beautiful lady, and his heart seemed to miss a beat. Within the seclusion of her protected garden, Bathsheba was bathing, She also had suffered from the distressing heat of that eastern day. Believing herself safe from the attention of neighbors, the woman washed her perspiring body, completely unaware of David's watchful eyes. She could not have known at that moment the evil kindling a fire in the king's heart. Had he extinguished the initial spark, an inferno would have been prevented.

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Saul... Who Collapsed

He was mad and determined! Saul was convinced the Christians were undermining the faith of the fathers, and their irresponsibility had to be checked. While "he mused on these things, the fire burned

WHEN YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR PAST, REMEMBER JEREMIAH 31 within him."

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2). It was said of this man that "he made havock of the church" (Acts 8:3).

The word translated "havoc" is "elumaineto" which was often used to describe the work of a wild pig, whose snout literally tore up young plants in a vineyard. Saul of Tarsus, driven mercilessly by a troubled conscience, resembled an animal destroying God's garden. Relentlessly he went from house to house seeking Christians whom he threw into prison. Who would have thought that during this onslaught on the church, God was watching, waiting, and perhaps smiling? Saul was a large fish which the Spirit of God had hooked.

Knowing that something strange was happening, Saul resisted fiercely. He would never surrender! He would fight to the end. Yet God was holding the line, and the end was never in doubt (from the author's commentary, *The Amazing Acts*, page 117. Published by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan). God was lighting another fire to extinguish the first.

Stephen... Who Conquered

Stephen supplied the greatest example of this attractive truth. It has been said that prevention is better than any cure. There were numerous reasons why Stephen might have been filled with animosity, jealousy and frustration. He was one of the greatest preachers in the early church but was relegated to delivering aid to complaining widows. He might have been one of the greatest evangelists but became the first martyr.

He could have detested his persecutors but instead prayed for their forgiveness. It seems the only fire within his soul was kindled by God. While Stephen mused, the fire burned, and in its glow, he saw "the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). When your spiritual enthusiasm is waning-stop, think, and kindle a fire of spiritual passion!

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