

Does God Forget Sins – and Should We?

INTRODUCTION

I recently came across a catchy, though-provoking slogan: “The 1st to apologize is the bravest. The 1st to forgive is the strongest. 1st to forget is the happiest.” Something along the same lines is what has frequently been said: “I’ll forgive you, but I won’t forget.”

Is that in the Bible? Some say that true forgiveness means forgetting sins. Have you tried that? What has been your success rate in forgetting?

More importantly, one may ask this question: “Does God forget sins (that is, the sins of those who trust Him)?

I. The problem

Two verses (both in just one Bible book) are often cited as proof that God forgets sins. “Their sins and their iniquities will I **remember** no more” (Heb 8:12; 10:17). On the surface, these verses COULD be taken to mean God forgets believers’ sins. Another verse from the Old Testament (Isa 43:25) says essentially the same thing: “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not **remember** thy sins.”

There is a verse, though, that seems to say the opposite: “The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.” (Amos 8:7) This verse is in a passage that is dealing with the failures (sins) of Israel. Perhaps, some might say, that there are certain **types** of sins – or certain **times** in history or sins of certain **groups** of people – that God can and will not only forgive but also forget sins (and not others). Does the Bible support any of these ideas?

II. The solution

A. The context – The two passages in Hebrews were written to Jews. The context is God’s promises to His chosen earthly people. No such statements are found in any other Epistles to the Church.

B. God’s nature – The Bible clearly teaches the omniscience of God. Being omniscient, He knows **all** – all past, present, and future events – all actual history and even all that could possibly have occurred or could possibly still occur. “God ... knoweth all things.” (1Jn 3:20). God is the only one who is (or, better, has been) “Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times **things** not **yet** done.” (Isa 46:10). “All things **are** naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” (Heb 4:13) Nothing is hidden from Him or catches Him by surprise. The whole of Psalm 139 deals with this marvelous truth. **God cannot forget.**

C. Jesus’ death – Certainly the most important event in all human history can never be forgotten. **God could not forget what Jesus did for us at the Cross.** Jesus was there for believers’ sins. Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that during the commemoration or celebration that is now commonly called “The Lord’s Supper” believers in Jesus Christ “shew [or preach or proclaim] the Lord’s death till He comes.” (1Co 11:26) Even more significantly than that, Scripture teaches **that Jesus’ resurrection body will bear the marks of the Cross into eternity (Jn 20:27; Rev 5:6), so His death CANNOT be forgotten.**

D. Scripture’s silence – Nowhere does the Bible instruct (command, require) people to forget others’ sins (which, in fact, is often impossible). Many of us as we get older have trouble trying to remember things, but trying to forget is something else altogether.

E. The meaning – What the author of Hebrews is saying – and, remember, the real Author behind the human one is God – is that God will not remember (or continue to hold) our sins against us. This is actually expressed clearly in the prayer “O remember not AGAINST US former iniquities.” (Ps 79:8, emphasis added).

Compare that to what is meant when someone says “Forget it.” Whether it’s something good done **for** us (that merits our thanks) or something bad done **by** us (that should prompt our apology), it is not something important or something that the other person will hold against us, so we should try to put it out of our minds. In that sense **our forgiving is like God’s** – that is, forgetting (or not recalling) the offence means not dwelling on it or holding it against the other person. Instead, in essence, **it’s acting as if we didn’t remember it.**

Thus, applying these verses in Hebrews to all who are trusting solely in Jesus for salvation, what they mean is that God will not remember their sins “against” them either now or in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

We humans sometimes TRY to forget certain unpleasant or dangerous people and tragic and terrifying events – but

also unintentionally forget many things worth remembering (especially later in life). On the other hand, some people seem to have a knack for recalling bad things. As one man put it in complaining to his friend, “Whenever my wife and I have an argument, she gets historical.” “You mean hysterical?” the friend asked. “No,” the man said, “I mean historical—she remembers everything I ever did wrong!”

Perhaps – to preserve the perfect joy of heaven – God will marvelously erase believers’ memory of others’ sins (presumably our own sins too) – and also all earthly unpleasanties. Would heaven be heaven if we were able to keep thinking about all those who have gone to hell?