



Forgiven Often Does Not Equal Forgotten

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As a pastor, I sometimes counsel persons who say, *"I have tried to forgive but I just can't forget. How can I forget?"*

The answer is, *"You probably can't and you often shouldn't even if you could."*

If a person borrows money and never repays it, the Bible teaches that we must forgive and go on. However, it would probably be wise to remember and not loan that person any more money.

If a person betrays a trust or divulges confidential information, we must forgive and go on. But it would be wise not to share sensitive information with that person in the future.

Timothy was a young protégé of the Apostle Paul. In Paul's last known communication before his death, he warned Timothy, *"Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message."* (2 Timothy 4:14-15)

Paul had clearly forgiven Alexander. He was not seeking revenge. Paul lived by Psalm 37: *"Do not fret because of evil men. Trust in the Lord and do good. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it leads only to evil."*

Nevertheless, Paul warns Timothy that just as Alexander has opposed the Church in the past, he is likely to do so in the future. Paul is saying, *"Don't forget what he did. Be prepared in case it happens again. Do not trust Alexander."*

If forgiveness requires forgetfulness, we are in a hopeless trap. Some things – like the death of a child at the hands of a drunk driver or a spouse who walks out – cannot be forgotten here on earth.

And yet such things can be forgiven. Forgiveness is setting ourselves free from the perpetrator and his actions against us. Setting ourselves free requires that we leave judgment and retribution in God's hands. It means allowing ourselves to begin to heal from our pain and to refuse to use injustices as an excuse for our attitudes and actions.

Healing begins with forgiveness. Those who forgive a person or a situation stop using it as a crutch to get what they want out of others. They quit trying to hold a pity party for themselves and move on. Instead of nursing their hurts and making the world a gloomier place, they choose to brighten the world in spite of their hurts.

Everyone who has been wronged is faced with a choice. They can try to bring the rest of the world down to their level of pain, or they can try to lift the rest of the world up so that others do not have to walk through their level of pain.

As Christians we are called to *"rejoice in the Lord always"* (Philippians 4:4). But that does not always mean we should forget. Eventually, the event may be wrapped in time and slowly fade from memory. However, in other cases it may remain an indelible scar in our minds, waiting to be healed in heaven. It is in heaven and not on earth that God promises that *"the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."* (Isaiah 65:17)

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