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Spiritual Dementia

Introduction

For the last six years I noticed a change in my wife Jean. At first it was when I would bring her to the shopping center and suggest we would meet in 30 minutes. I watched as she just stayed in the general area having no idea of time etc. Then as time passed, my health started to decline while at the same time Jean's dementia was getting quite advanced. The poor dear had to have help with everything. I had to make the decision to have others care for my wife of fifty years. Recently when I was visiting her, she did not know who I was and now goes by her maiden name and thinks she is approximately thirteen years of age. She has forgotten our children's names, which room she stays in, and cannot remember having anything to eat. No longer can she use a spoon but only her fingers when eating. It is tragic and a very slow death. As I watched her wander the corridor of the care home not knowing much of anything, the thoughts came to my mind of spiritual dementia. While pondering it I saw it along two avenues. Forgetfulness could be good or bad.

There is a blessed truth in the words concerning the Lord's relationship with us, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). It does not say He will forget them, but refused to remember them. Forgetfulness is a trait of sin within us, but God will never bring up the matter of our sins again. They are cast behind His back (Isa. 38:17) and "wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19).

Bad Dementia

In the Old Testament, the words "remembered not" are mentioned eighteen times. "The children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies" (Jud. 8:34). Israel "remembered not the multitude of Thy mercies" (Psa. 106:7); Edom "remembered not the brotherly covenant" (Amos 1:9). Peter informs us of what happens to a believer when he fails to remember, "that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Pet. 1:9). The writer to the Hebrews informs the readers, "Ye have forgotten the exhortation" (Heb. 12:5).

Israel remembered not the Lord who delivered them:

- a) The children of Israel had known the liberating power of God when they left Egypt and when the Egyptians sought to follow them at the Red Sea. They had been redeemed by blood but at the Red Sea they were delivered by power. When they came into the land God repeatedly delivered them but they kept rebelling against Him and suffering the consequences. The basic problem was they ignored the commands of the Lord and they "forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim" (Jud. 3:6-7). When they "did evil in the sight of the LORD" (v.7) they were repeatedly sold into captivity, and when they cried to the Lord He sent judges to deliver them, but they remembered not, they "forgot the LORD" (Jud. 3:7; 1 Sam. 12:9); they "forgot His works" (Psa. 78:11; 106:13); "they forgot God their saviour" (Psa. 106:21).
- b) When anyone reads the books of the kings after Jeroboam and the judgment of God on he and his family, those who ignored or failed to remember the commands of the Lord suffered the consequences. Read the passages where it says, "did evil in the sight of the LORD" (1 Kgs. 11:6; 14:22; 15:26, 34; 16:30; 22:52; 2 Kgs. 8:18, 27). They failed to remember the ways of the LORD. If only the man of God who pronounced God's judgment on Jeroboam had not failed to remember that which God had spoken to him but was swayed by the old prophet, his life would have been spared (1 Kgs. 13:1-30). It will be noticed that it was not just the nations that forgot God, but individuals. God, through His prophet, told Jeroboam's wife concerning Jeroboam, "But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back" (1 Kgs. 14:9).

Good Dementia

Paul, in writing to the saints at Philippi, wrote, "Forgetting those things which are behind" (Phil. 3:13). I have no doubt that there is scarcely a parent in the world who could honestly say, "I never failed as a parent". There are

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things said or done that, as a father, wish they had never said or done. The same goes for mothers. What of husbands or wives? When there is a consideration of the many years of marriage there could well be situations that burn in the mind that we wish had never happened. The problem is our remembrance of them and that brings such guilt and sorrow. As parents and spouses we did what we thought was best at the time. We may have been too hard or too much slack was given and our hearts ache because of the damage done. Due to our fallen nature and the devil's help, we can get enslaved by the failings of the past. I knew a lady who would oftentimes call me because she had a baby out of wedlock and that, despite the fact she was advanced in years, still burned like a fire within her. Paul says, "Forgetting those things which are behind", and while this is easy to say, it is hard to do. We cannot change them nor their outcome but this is a new day.

By the help of the Lord, when those reminders of past failures come to mind, His help is available to nullify them and set us free. If it was a sin in the past then enter the liberty of God in the promise, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7). If it is a failure, then pray. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly" (Jam. 5:17-18).

Personal Application

What a tragedy and dreadful condition to be in bad spiritual dementia! The reality is, we cannot stand in judgment on others because, while we are in this world and taken up with things which are legitimate, we also can forget God, our Saviour and His works. I understand from the scriptures the Lord commanded us to, "Remember Me" (1 Cor. 11:2). Furthermore, He gave us two emblems by which to aid us in that remembrance. This was not a "dying request" for when a superior makes a statement such as, "Remember Me", it is a command. Furthermore, according to Acts 20:7, they did it on the first day of the week. May the gracious Spirit of God help us to forget those things which are behind and press forward toward Christlikeness.

. . . Rowan Jennings