

The Old Paths

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“How Forgetful We Are!”

Jarrod Jacobs

Humans are quite forgetful! What once we thought would be forever etched in our memories has now faded away. I am sure we're all familiar with the old joke which goes: "I was always told that when you get old, the first thing to go is your memory. And, the second thing to go is ... is ... is ...". I am certain that oftentimes it is "selective" memory that is our problem, rather than true "forgetfulness." I say this because often it is those who tell me that their mind is "too old" to remember Scriptures or even Scripture references that amazingly have the ability to recall sport scores, recipes, shoe sizes, birth/death dates, "who"-did-"what"-to-"whom" and "when," etc. We can remember what we want to remember, and we can retain what we think is most important.

When one reads the Old Testament, we see that Israel also had the problem of "selective memory." It wasn't but a little over two months after leaving Egypt that the people began to complain about not having food to eat (Ex. 16:2-3). One wonders how it could be that a people who had been: delivered by God; protected from their enemies by God; brought out of Egypt safely and were being lead toward the Promised Land by God; could then complain and "murmur" against this same God because they thought they would starve! How

forgetful were these people!!

Yet, doesn't the same thing happen today with spiritual Israel? Are there not times in our lives when our faith wavered and we strayed from the Lord, thinking He was either not there, or that He wasn't listening or caring for us? How forgetful we are that He: Created us (Rev. 4:11), sent His Son to die for us (Jn. 3:16), has given us a plan of salvation by which we can be saved (Mk. 16:16), has provided a way of escape when we are tempted (I Cor. 10:13), and wants us to be with Him in Heaven (II Pet. 3:9; Jn. 14:1-3). How tragic that Christians push these facts to the side when things do not seem to go "their" way. Let us repent of our "selective memory" and ask God to forgive us today!

Knowing that humans are forgetful, our Lord established a memorial through which we "*shew the Lord's death til he come*" (I Cor. 11:26). As we prepare our hearts to partake of the Lord's Supper today, let us truly take our minds back to our Lord who was suspended between Heaven and earth, and became that sin offering for us that we might be free from sin!

May we never become complacent or have "selective memory" about this memorial. By focusing our minds on the Lord during this memorial, may it then help us to focus our minds on the Lord when we leave this place and pursue our daily activities. May we remember to "*do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Col. 3:17). May we remember that because He died for us, we need to live for Him (II Cor. 5:14-15). Friends, read and re-read Romans 12:1-2!!

They Went Out From Us

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A comment I find interesting in the writings of the apostle John is that which he says in 1 John 2:19, "*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*" Even though he did not name specifically who left (from the church he was writing to), the disciples obviously knew who he was talking about. And it was also abundantly clear what John thought of those who left, "they were not of us"!

If you think about it, that was mighty strong language for the apostle who was known as "the disciple whom" Jesus loved (Jn. 19:26). How could John write so extensively on love (1 Jn. 3:18; 4:8; 4:20), while making statements like that about departing brethren? They still claimed to love God (2:4, 6, 9), so why was he giving them grief for going their own way?

Was he insecure in his own faith? He even went so far as to imply they were liars (2:4, 22; 4:20) and children of Satan (3:8,10) in departing from God. Wow! That was harsh language from the apostle of love!

I can only imagine the grief John received for penning those words. "How can you be so cruel toward those who are serving God in the best ways they know how? We all have our faults, so who are you to judge another man, thou son of thunder?" We assume that since an apostle taught it, everyone received it, but that was not the case. There have always been those of "God's people" to criticize and condemn

those who teach things from God's word that contradict their beliefs and lifestyle (1 Kings 18:17; Jer. 26:8, 9; Acts 14:2).

But was John being cruel or insensitive by identifying those who departed from the saints? Was he lacking brotherly love by teaching other saints to avoid those who departed? No. Instead, he pointed out those who departed lest other brethren also follow their path of deception and sin (1 Jn. 2:26; 5:13). These erring brethren were especially harmful to the others because they once "walked among" them as God's people. If the faithful brethren were not careful, they could be persuaded to follow the same deceptive doctrines because of their love and affection for the erring. Those who departed did not feel like an enemy of God, let alone a child of Satan, but that is exactly what they were from God's perspective (3:8, 10). They were like everyone else in the world who were "*under the sway of the wicked one*" (5:19), through the deceit of sin (4:5; 2:15).

What can we learn from all of this?

(1) Christians Sometimes Depart From The Faith.

We must not let our love for one another clog our minds when it comes to truth. Read 2 John 9. Whoever departs from the doctrine of Christ departs from Christ, though they may not see it that way. "We still believe in Christ...we haven't left the Lord." But what they fail to realize is that by departing from Christ's teachings, which includes the apostles' teachings (1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thes. 2:13), they are departing from Christ Himself. Anyone can claim to love Christ; the antichrists of John's day still claimed to love

God. But by failing to keep God's word, they failed to truly love Him (1 John 2:3-6). The same is true of all "believers" today. Believing in Christ is more than lip-service and warm feelings (Lk. 6:46; Jn. 14:15; Matt. 7:21-23). We must also walk in the traditions and doctrines of Christ and the apostles (2 Thess. 2:15), whether on salvation, the work of the church or any other aspect of the gospel (1 Tim. 1:11). Faithful obedience is how we tell God we love, trust and appreciate Him (Gen. 22:12; Jas. 2:19-23).

(2) Acceptance By Men Is Not Reflective Of God's Fellowship.

The disciples who departed were well-received by others of similar beliefs (1 Jn. 4:5). They all thought they were justified in their conclusions as antichrists and gnostics, but they were wrong. Hence, the warnings on being deceived (3:7). We can easily do the same by searching for teachers and brethren who will "see things our way" in doctrinal disputes. But let us not confuse this acceptance from man as acceptance from God; they are not the same (2 Tim. 4:3, 4). His fellowship is with those who keep His word (1 Jn. 1:5-7), not those who define fellowship through man's approval (3 Jn. 9, 10).

(3) Controversy Is Unavoidable.

I hate controversy. I wish I could just "throw in the towel" and no

longer be at odds with people, especially in religion. I wish I could just condone every belief in the world regarding God, salvation, the church, eternity and so on. It would make life a lot easier! But what about God's opinion in all of this? We get so caught up in pleasing one another, even in religion, that we forget God has convictions too. What about His feelings? This is His world, not mine; His religion, not ours. He alone has the right to determine salvation in Christ, baptism for salvation, a limited treasury in the church or the reality of heaven and hell. These are His doctrines not ours (Eph. 4:1-6), so let us not be ashamed of Him and His words "*in this adulterous and sinful generation.*" Yes, it's going to be difficult to defend these, especially against those who once walked with us, but this is the nature of our calling (Rom. 10:1-3; Matt. 23:37). And besides this, we never know who we might be lead to God as a result of our courage (Acts 13:46-48).

God's will be done, brethren. God's will be done. We may have some who go out from us, because they were not of us, but the faithful sheep of God will hear His voice. "*We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*"

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