



## No mere Memory

Half of all our pleasures and our pains come to us through the memory. The memory is a mental camera which receives and stores the experiences of life and then later provides us with an album of recollections, the opening of which can move us to tears of either sorrow or joy. The memory enables us to relive our past life in the present, to compare the present with the past and to compile a private manual of collected wisdom for the future.

The longer we live the larger the manual of experience becomes. A fool learns nothing from his past life; but a wise man has learnt the art of continually checking and cross-checking his own behaviour. His aim is to avoid repeating his painful past mistakes. Memory is his constant reference book. His ambition is to become perfect in all his ways. In this labour his memory is a most faithful secretary and accountant, now knocking on the door of conscience and now turning up the ledger of former failures. Without the aid of memory how could we ever make progress in holiness?

So helpful a thing is memory that we must count it as one of life's truly great blessings from God our Maker. It is given to us, not merely for the benefit of our life as students at school or in college, but, much more, to equip us to be good scholars in Christ's kingdom. It is a choice part of the image of God in our soul and, if used aright, will enrich and ennoble our whole life, more or less to the end. Conscience is the policeman of the soul; but memory is the soul's librarian.

The sweetest part of memory is the recollection of God's gracious dealings with us in the past. The believer's life is etched with memories of the good things which God has done for him over the years: here a merciful provision, there a timely intervention, everywhere a constant supply of grace, mercy and peace. Huge landmarks stand above the horizon of a believer's life as he looks back: the experience of conversion, the entrance of the soul into full assurance (often after a struggle), victory over a score of fiery temptations, comfort in loss, material provision in poverty, escape from snares, and amazing answers to prayer in times of need.

Memory has written these experiences down forever on the table of the heart. We have but to touch the keys of thought and a cluster of emotions crowds into the mind of a Christian. No wonder God has said, *'Thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee'* (Deut. 8:2)!

In this life it is to be expected that many a painful and humbling event will force itself back upon our memory. There have been times in which we sinned grievously against God. On such occasions we forget ourselves and put a lifelong memory-blot on our livery, or else we failed to mortify both tongue and temper. Such memories must abase us in the dust before the God whom we love and serve. But even our sad lapses must not be allowed to crush us. The guilt of our worst sins is covered with the atoning blood. We weep over our past failures, but not as those who have no gracious Saviour to comfort us.

Before we sink ever into self-pity at the remembrance of our past sorrows and miseries we might do well to remember how much sadder and darker must have been the memory of others before us. Adam, who in his first estate had a more perfect memory than all of us, lived almost a thousand years with the bitter recollection of the one sin which ruined the world and brought death upon all his posterity. How often must our forefather have gone over in his mind those few guilty moments of his life when he ate from the tree and disobeyed God. How many thousand times must he have wept to recall his guilty act and bemoan the shame that made him stitch together his worthless suit of fig-leaves! How often must Eve, our first mother, have wept hot tears of regret when she

remembered over a long life-time how, as Adam's helpmeet, she so unhelpfully acted the part of his seducer to sin!

Their comfort in repentance was the One who should come to crush Satan underfoot in the course of time. The same Christ is our comfort today as we also blush with shame at our many falls and foolish failings in the past.

Did Christ himself have painful memories? The question forces itself upon us. Unquestionably our blessed Saviour, perfect in memory as in all else, had a full book of sad recollections in this life. His sensitivity was that of a perfect man, wholly alive to the requirement of God's law to love our neighbour as ourself. How full a cup must he have had of bitter memories of the cruel hatred of those who ought to have recognised, loved and worshipped him! If we desire a model of how to go on to the end of our life's vocation in spite of man's unkindness, we need look nowhere else than at this Man of Sorrows who was everywhere contradicted and misrepresented.

Not the least of this world's ungenerous acts in its treatment of Jesus Christ was the way in which men sent him to his death with a memory veritably plastered with ten thousand insults and cruelties which he had suffered at their hands. No doubt, as our Lord hung on the cross he could refer to those sorrows in the words of the prophet: *'Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul bath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me'* (Lam. 3:19-20). Our Lord, however, looked over the head of all his miseries to *'the joy that was set before him'* (Heb. 12:2), a joy now completed in the Father's presence, free from all pain of past suffering. To this same joy his people will come who overcome as he overcame. There are no painful memories in heaven. Whatever memories we shall have in that blessed place, they will all be sugared over and honeyed through and through with the love of Christ.

The bad news for Christless sinners is that God has an infallible memory and cannot forget their sins. Before his all-knowing eye the evil deeds of godless men are *'written with a pen of iron and with the point of a diamond'* (Jer. 17:1). The sins of evil men cannot be covered by anything but the blood of Christ. They are not concealed or cloaked by priestly absolution or by masses, by holy water or by many prayers, by knowledge of Reformation creeds or by the reading of many Puritan books. If men hope to conceal their guiltiness from God's eye by anything other than by the merits of a crucified Christ alone, they are feeding on the ashes of self-deception. A sinner's forgotten sins will rise up to meet him in the day of death like a swarm of locusts. They will feed on his flesh like fire.

Memory will play a large and important part in the eternal punishment of those who die out of Christ. So much is clear from the words spoken to the Rich Man in hell:

*'Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.'*

(Luke 16:25)

Could any message be more doleful for one whose good things were now all in the past and who had no more experience of those good things beyond the bare recollection of them and the heat of an eternal fire to tell him that these good things were now gone forever?

So memory, like the 'worm that dieth not', will gnaw at the soul of the damned to all eternity. Once let the unsaved, unwashed soul pass over the threshold of death and it must be faced forever with a host of memories of good things now eventually lost! Oh that the sinner would stop now, in this life, to remember that his present blessings will mock him in hell-fire if he loves them more than God! Ten million blessings of time and sense are worth throwing away to get Christ and to arrive at last in glory with him.

Our God, most thankfully, remembers other things too besides men's sins. The very first reference to memory in the Bible is not of man's remembering but of God's: *'And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark'* (Gen. 8:1). The reference here to 'cattle' is the more poignant in the light of our recent national plague on domestic animals. Once the wicked were swept away by the great flood, so we are here instructed, God called to his own

mind his promise to believing Noah. A new world must now appear, as if from the ashes of the old. Noah and his family must be fed, clothed and cared for because so God had faithfully promised.

God cannot lie, die or deny himself. And he cannot forget his own promises to those who believe in him: *'I will remember my covenant which is between me and you'* (Gen. 9:15). The various promises of God are like so many mansions in a great house for believers to live and rest in all the days of their life here in this world. So Peter speaks of God's *'exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust'* (2 Pet. 1:4).

God's promises to us must be the furniture of our minds and memories so long as we are in this life. To live by faith is to live by the promises of God. Just as the promise held good for Noah when the rain fell and the floods arose, while the old world became submerged and all visible objects became engulfed in the waters of the flood, so God's promise of eternal life and salvation will survive the collapse of all earthly things. The promises of God will outlive the universe. They will hold good when at last *'the elements shall melt with fervent heat', and the world as we now know it is 'burned up'* (2 Pet. 3:10). God will remember his promises to those who have been in covenant with him here below:

*'For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.'*

(Isa. 54:9-10)

The one thing which God will not remember is that which he wills to forget: the sin of those who believe in Jesus Christ his Son: *'I will remember their sin no more'* (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 10:17).

But will believers not remember their sins forever in glory? No doubt they will since their new song has reference to Christ's cross and they sing to him in redemptive language: *'Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation'* (Rev. 5:9). But their remembrance of past sin in glory will bring no grief to them because it no longer offends a propitiated God, who sees the blood and passes over their guilt.

The remembrance of sins by the redeemed in glory will but lift still higher their notes of praise to their Redeemer.

Maurice Roberts

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