

Isaiah 43:25

Dear Friends in Christ,

William Barclay was a Scottish Minister who died in 1978. Years ago, he wrote:

Forgiveness is never a case of saying: "It's all right; it doesn't matter."... There is nothing which brings a man to his senses with such arresting violence as to see the effect of his sin on someone who loves him in this world, or on God who loves him forever, and to say to himself: "It cost **that** to forgive my sin." Where there is forgiveness someone must be crucified on a cross. (Albert M. Wells, Jr., Inspiring Quotations, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988, pp. 73-74)

I can't tell you how many times I've thought of that statement so many are willing to make when justifying their anger against those who sin against them: "I'll forgive. But I won't (or can't) forget." A Christian man by the name of M. B. Webb wrote:

I was assisting another pastor...when we visited a man who had been active in the church, but due to a dispute with a fellow member, he had quit attending. We reasoned with him at length about the need for forgiveness and returning to church. Reluctantly, he agreed, and we had prayer together. When we were leaving, he followed us to the car and said, "Now, I'll forgive him, but all I want is for him to stay on his side of the road, and I'll stay on mine."

The business of forgiveness is not easy. The cry of "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" and a bloody Cross testify to that. We pray the Holy Spirit lift us to . . .

## WHEN GOD FORGETS

### I. The Issue Deep Inside.

Through these past twelve to fifteen years I have had occasional conversations with a certain man regarding God's love in Christ. Invariably, when I get to the part about Christ paying for all our sins tears well up in his eyes. He'll look down, or, with a grimace on his face, look to the side a little. And, *invariably*, I ask him if he understands what I'm saying. He always answers "yes". I have always said, "I want to help you make sure you know God loves and forgives you of your sin; that this is the reason Jesus came into the world." And, **invariably**, he'll start crying and blurt out, "I hope so."

You must understand that his **I hope so** is not a statement of confidence. It's a statement of uncertainty. Or, to be more precise, it's a statement of doubt. I've asked repeatedly if there is anything he'd like to talk about - something on his mind. With tears in his eyes, he shakes his head and cries out, "No!" Our conversation comes to an end. We have a prayer and then part company.

I think about him rather frequently. I pray for him. I'm convinced that his predicament is not uncommon. "I'm a sinner. I've sinned so much. Some of my sin is a horror. Will God really forgive me? How can he forgive me when I persist battling with and falling prey to the same sin?" Aren't those the questions people ask? Have you ever asked them? Do you have other questions which tear at your soul?

I want to repeat that first question: "Will God really forgive me?" I'm always drawn to those words of Paul:

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:21-24)

## II. No Condemnation.

And what makes that text so significant for us is what follows. Paul writes, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1) And you must remember - must keep it straight - He says that (*there is...no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*) - he says that after he had confessed, "For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." (Rom 7:18,19) He isn't saying "It's okay to sin." He's saying, "I've got a war going on inside of me. Sin is still there."

And here's another point: The Law of God reminds us of that sin constantly. And do you know why? Not just so we don't forget. The Law reminds us that we need help and it will never allow us to become self-righteous, as many are. It will not allow us to think that we're better than others. But it will draw us to God's love in Christ - the One Who kept the Law for us! It is the constant reminder of the truth and need of God's Word "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23)

And get this: Paul writes, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh..." (Rom. 8:3) The sin of our flesh was condemned in Christ's flesh, thus the reason is true Man. And that sinless flesh of Jesus which took on our condemnation was able to pay for every sin of every human because Jesus is true God.

I am absolutely compelled, here, to run with those wonderful, strengthening and life giving words of John: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." "Propitiation" - the one who would turn aside God's wrath that stood against us. The Lamb of God who **takes away** the guilt of your sin and my sin - forever.

## III. The Forgetting Part.

That brings us to the forgetting part. Our text: "'I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.'" (Is. 43:25) Our transgressions are blotted out. He doesn't see them. And God impresses upon us, "I will not remember your sins."

The writer of the New Testament Book of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah when discussing the work of Christ. These are the words: "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." (Heb. 8:12) And if you ask, "How can God forget?" I would say, "Why ask?" It has been observed, "We forget because we cannot remember. He forgets because **He will not** remember." And this observation: "God remembers everything about you - except your forgiven sins."

A number of years ago, my son passed on to me an excerpt from Martin Luther's lectures on the Book of Galatians. Specifically, the excerpt is Luther's commentary on these words from Galatians 1:4: "(the Lord Jesus Christ) who gave himself for our sins." I can't remember if I've ever put them in front of you in the past, but it really makes no difference. The truth is, I have a copy of the excerpt in my office and will read through it at least several times in the course of a year. I beg you to listen very carefully to a portion of the excerpt:

“The main knowledge and true wisdom of Christians, then, is this: to regard as very serious and true these words of Paul, that Christ was given over to death, not for our righteousness or holiness but for our sin, which are real sins - great, many, in fact, infinite and invincible. Therefore you must not think of them as minor or suppose that your own works can remove them. Nor must you despair on account of their gravity if you feel them oppressing you either in life or in death. But you must learn from Paul here to believe that Christ was given, not for sham or counterfeit sins, nor yet for small sins, but for great and huge sins; not for one or two sins but for all sins; not for sins that have been overcome - for neither man nor angel is able to overcome even the tiniest sin - but for invincible sins...

“Therefore you must make thorough preparations not only for the time of temptation but also for the time and struggle of death. Then your conscience will be terrified by the recollection of your past sins. The devil will attack you vigorously and will try to swamp you with piles, floods, and whole oceans of sins in order to frighten you, draw you away from Christ, and plunge you into despair. Then you must be able to say with confident assurance: ‘Christ, the Son of God, was given, not for righteousness and for saints but for unrighteousness and for sinners...’” (Jaroslav Pelikan, Editor, Luther’s Works, Lectures on Galatians, Chapters 1-4, Vol. 26, CPH, St. Louis, p. 35.)

And what Luther says is underscored and stamped with an exclamation mark by the inspired, inerrant and authoritative Word of God; our text: “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”! **Will not!**

I call it: “When God Forgets.”

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

*August 23, 2015*

Isaiah 43:25: ***“When God Forgets”***

*I. The Issue Deep Inside.*

*II. No Condemnation.*

*III. The Forgetting Part.*

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 North Oakland Avenue  
Decatur, Illinois 62526*