

Good Memories or Bad?

There are many thoughts about memory, or the loss of memory, in modern society. On the other hand memory has become one of the great factors in computers and computer design. Hard drives, 'clouds', SD cards, flash drives and so on are defined by how much information they can store. It was all about megabytes and gigabytes but now we have terabytes, as the programmes get more and more sophisticated and more memory is required. Human minds too are amazing with the amount of information they can store and process all at the same time. Memory is one of the great factors which sets human beings apart from all other creatures; while we are told 'an elephant never forgets', that memory is limited, and many animals have even more basic abilities to remember. The problem with many humans is what they remember, and lives are so often severely damaged by memories of bad things with what are called 'flashbacks'. Perversely it is the bad things which people remember the most and these seem to far outweigh the good memories. It would not be even possible to write this article without a memory, remembering the words of the English language and how to spell them. Spell checkers of course help these days with modern computers but even they have to have a memory of the words and a method of recall to mark when a word is spelled wrongly. It is all so fascinating and in many ways quite amazing.

For the Christian, God is the God of creation and made human beings in His own likeness, so for humans to have memories it must mean God has one too. The Bible helps us with this and reminds us with phrases like "I have remembered my Covenant" and so on. So we find God has a memory and so do human beings, of course God's came first, and the effectiveness of that memory determines, to some extent, how well we can live in the world. We learn to do things automatically too, like driving a car. These are learned things, just like typing, when our bodies are trained to do things without thinking, and yet the patterns are learned within our memories so they function automatically, just when we need them. People sometimes talk about being 'a bit rusty', if for example they have not driven for a while; but 'it soon all comes back' when they get going, It is very quick, much more than the time we first learned, the memory is just stored away, it comes back and off we go.

On the other hand there are great fears about forgetfulness, about senile dementia,. Alzheimer's disease is the best known diagnosis, but dementia can take many forms. There is a great deal of research going on in modern times to find a cure or at least a way of delaying the onset of dementia. Medicine can help people to live longer and cure many diseases and repair many physical problems, but if that longer life means we have dementia and can't remember many things in our latter years, it is all a little pointless. Quality of life is reduced and there is real fear, even among the rich and famous, that dementia and memory loss will come and there is nothing which can be done about it. Earlier we mentioned God's memory and it is interesting to look briefly at how that works. It could be studied in great detail but this is how our Bible helps us. "*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me*". This is historically about Jerusalem but applies to all God's people. Can a woman forget the child she has just given birth to and is breastfeeding? It is possible, but unusual to say the least, given the deep love of a woman for her own child. This is used to portray the strongest example of a human bond on the earth. Yes it is possible, but God says. "I cannot forget you. I have engraved you on the palms of my hands and you are always before me. You are always in my thoughts and my memory".

So God cannot forget, and yet the Bible says this to us, "*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more*". So the one thing God does forget is our wrongdoing. "*If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*". So from God's view, forgiveness means forgetting, and a total

removal of those bad things from our lives. That leaves no reason for God or us to remember them in the future. Many people are dogged by bad memories and guilt for their own wrongdoing and sadly sometimes of those things done against them. God says "I remember no more"; so here is our freedom. We come into God's remembering, into His forgiveness and His forgetting, and let Him take away all our bad memories. There is no need, as many try, to delve into all the past, but to trust God and let Him take the bad memories away. They then no longer have any power. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

The Bible also helps us with God's memory of us and what we are like. *"Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust"*. Very realistic; God never forgets how weak human beings are. He remembers we came from dust, and to dust we shall return. He therefore has pity and mercy on us, as His children, if we come to Him and receive His salvation. He will not allow us to be tried or tested above what we can cope with and will always provide help for us when we need it. The quote above is from Psalm 103 which tells us about our memories and what we should remember of the things which God has done and does for us. *"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgives all thine iniquities; who heals all thy diseases; who redeems thy life from destruction; who crowns thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfies thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle"*

It is first about thanksgiving, which is what 'Bless the Lord' means. Have this thanksgiving in your heart and soul, indeed do it with all your soul. Let all of your life be taken up with this attitude of heart and forget not all God's benefits and be thankful for them. "Keep them in your heart" is the exhortation. Keep them in the way of faith, so it is not just a mental exercise but something which outworks in a constant asking of the Lord Jesus for His mercy. This will be with the expectation that He will answer the prayers of our hearts and meet all our needs. What should we remember? Remember, or do not forget, He forgives all our sins. Hallelujah. As we have seen already, God forgives and forgets and washes them away; they are there no more. They are gone from our hearts and lives; no more guilt, no more shame; whatever anyone else may think about you, this is how God sees you and thinks about you. He loves you! God heals all our diseases. That is what the psalm says and God promised the people of Israel, if they obeyed Him, that none of the sicknesses of the Egyptians would come on them. Jesus healed everyone, so it is possible. How much better than the world's alternatives, but how readily people take the ways the world provides. It is sad how much the church of Jesus Christ, at least in Western Society, has forgotten these things and no longer has faith in their hearts for God's healing. The command is "Forget not".

Psalm 103 then goes on to show us the grace of God available in our lives, and what God works towards us. "He redeems our lives from destruction". In Jesus Christ we have redemption from eternal destruction. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"*. Simple truth, but the most valuable thing we can ever have is eternal life; it saves us from eternal destruction. We read on: our lives are 'crowned with loving kindness and tender mercies.' That is God's love; His kindness and tenderness is towards us and is upon our lives. There is no roughness, no brutality, Jesus took all that, but God works for His people in a way which is caring and kind and understanding. Remember He knows our frame that we are just dust, just weak human beings, and He the great and mighty eternal God. However, 'God satisfies our mouths with good things'. For the Christian, our spiritual food is the body and blood of our Lord Jesus, who offered Himself for us through the eternal Spirit. If eat of Him we shall live by Him. Such remembrance moves us to the answer for living to serve the Lord. 'He renews our strength'. God works His ability in us, *"No longer I but Christ"*. 'Our strength is renewed even like the eagles'. Eagles fly away and soar above the earth, and so for the Christian when strength is renewed he/she soars above all the needs and problems of this life. To quote Paul the

apostle, "We reign in life by Christ Jesus". Habakkuk talks of God "*making his feet like the feet of a hind/deer/ibex*", which would enable him to walk in the mountains with all the steep places, and be able to live above the difficulties of life, looking to God. For the Christian, we look unto Jesus who has already overcome in this life, and is the author and finisher of our faith and sustains us all the time. So we remember, "Forget not all His benefits". It is a 'remembering', as we have said, of faith in our hearts, causing us to look to Jesus and believe in Him and expect Him to crown our lives with His loving kindness and tender mercies. Such faith inspires expectancy, it produces a receiving where all God's wonderful benefits flow into lives.

So memory is an amazing thing. We need a good memory to succeed in this natural life. We need it of course in our modern day computer equipment , phones, tablets and so on, but most of all we need 'a remembering' of all God's benefits to us. We need a God blessed and good memory, of that which is wholesome, without any dark lurking and soul destroying bad memories which can haunt and ruin our lives. The joy is that God knows our frame, knows our needs and has met them in Jesus Christ. He no longer remembers our sins and wrongdoing. All our past, whatever has happened, can be washed away. We remember His loving kindness and tender mercies whatever our problems are or have been; Jesus is the answer. Our 'remembering' assures us that God provides good things for us both in this life and that which is to come, with the deep joy of knowing that He just cannot forget us. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits".