
Complete Remission

A number of decades ago I attended a youth service where the pastor spoke of his fight against cancer when he himself was a teenager. Sid (the pastor's name) talked about his battle against cancer, about the treatments, and about the follow up visits. After some years, the oncologist, finding no trace of the cancer in his body, said to him, "Sid, your cancer is in complete remission." What that meant is that there was no sign of the cancer and, as far as the doctor could tell, the cancer would never come back. Sid was pastoring his first church when he told that story, and today he is nearing retirement. The cancer has never returned.

As he told that story, he spoke also of communion. The older forms for communion used that word, "remission," and the pastor would say, "Jesus died for us for the complete remission of all of our sins." Sid told us that he fully understood what that meant. When we put our faith in Jesus, all of our sins are gone, and they will never come back to haunt us. God will never hold any of our sins against us.

I don't think that there is anything quite like that in our world today. True, Sid was told that his cancer was in complete remission, but, as we well know, when someone has cancer, there is always the chance that there may be just a few cancer cells left in the body, and there is the possibility, however remote, that they might become active again, and the cancer returns. Perhaps the doctor overstated the case to Sid when he told Sid that his cancer was in complete remission.

When we forgive others who have harmed us, we might tell them we have forgiven them completely, that the harm they did to us will no longer affect our relationship with them. We might say it, but it won't be entirely true. If the harm was great, we will always remember, even if it is a little bit, and the memory might affect our attitudes or actions toward that person. It is impossible for us to completely forgive someone. We cannot say to someone truthfully, "What you did to me, it's as if I have completely forgotten it." Our memories are far too good for that.

Social media does not allow complete remission either. When we publish something on Facebook or Instagram, they tell us that it remains there. Maybe there is a way to get rid of it completely, but I don't think so. The picture or words we post could come back to haunt us. We all have heard of incidents where someone, especially a public figure, is reminded of past offenses because someone managed to dig up something from years ago. Complete remission, complete forgetfulness, complete forgiveness is unheard of these days. We find ourselves having to be careful about what we say or do because it may be forever on record.

But not so with God. When God forgives, he forgives completely and entirely, and he will never remind us of our sins. Once Jesus has taken them on himself, they are no longer ours. We are set free from the sin for eternity.

I don't know what eternal life will be like, but I am looking forward to it. I do not live a perfect life, and we are all in the same boat. In fact, the longer I live, the more offense I cause to others. It's a simple fact. Now, I know that time does tend to heal wounds, and time does make us forget some things, but the

longer we live, the greater the number of negative actions or words that may be remembered by others. We can continue to live and enjoy life, and we can be blessed with good relationships, but we do have memories, and those memories do not allow us to do as God does and never allow something bad that happened to ever affect us again.

I don't know what eternal life will be like. I hope that I will know the many people I have met and enjoyed friendships with over the years. If that does happen, and if we do know others from this world, then we can also be assured of something else: we won't remember everything. All the offenses and all the problems and all the discord will be gone. There will be nothing that divides us from others. We will be like God, perhaps, not letting those bad things affect us. We will forget them.

Now, of course, God doesn't forget our sins. God doesn't forget things. But, unlike us, God can act as if he completely forgets. He doesn't let the past affect our relationship with him, for when we are in Jesus Christ, all that stands between us and him is gone. It's as if he forgets.

Experiencing the complete remission of all our sins, then, is freeing. If we stand forgiven in Jesus Christ, God will never hold our sins against us, not in the smallest way. Sid experienced complete remission from his cancer. He was able to live without the fear of its return hanging over him. In Jesus Christ we experience the complete remission of all our sins, and we do not need ever let the fear of our sins hang over our heads. They are gone, and, in God's eyes, they will be gone forever. We are free from sin which, in mind, while being free of cancer is great, being free of sin is even greater.

Pastor Gary